Swansea University E-Theses

_____

Literacy development in foster placement: Taking care with literacy.

O'Grady, Barbara Verna

How to cite:

_____

Use policy:

_____

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN FOSTER PLACEMENT:

TAKING CARE WITH LITERACY.

Barbara Verna O'Grady

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Wales, Swansea

2006

ProQuest Number: 10807517

ProQuest 10807517

SUMMARY OF THESIS

This research is concerned with investigating literacy development in the foster placement and the role and contribution of the foster carer in that development. Historical research shows the family (and that includes the foster family), as providing the literacy foundations for future academic success in school. Many studies have shown that Looked After children fare poorly in mainstream education, so our understanding of the literacy practices within the foster placement needs now to be advanced. This investigation presents the findings of a survey and structured and unstructured interviews, which were identified as the most appropriate methodologies to fulfil the research objectives. The questionnaire design elicited the degree of literacy awareness and activity in the foster placement, followed by interview schedules that allowed deeper meanings to be assigned to the more measured survey results. As the research area is a newly developing field a grounded theory approach was employed.

The results of this research offer indications that literacy development within the foster placement is taking place, and explanations are offered about the way foster carers are instrumental in equipping Looked After children with 'literacy life skills'. Foster carers do feel a responsibility towards developing literacy in the home and provide a range of literacy-based opportunities, yet a more thorough, appropriate training would raise a heightened awareness in foster carers of what more they could do to utilise more fully the materials they provide, and at the same time, develop their own literacy needs and confidence in supporting literacy development in the foster placement. Institutional weaknesses also prevent further development in this area. The implications of this research mean that developing literacy in foster placement will only become common practice when the pivotal role of the foster carers in raising educational achievement (both for themselves and their Looked After children) is acknowledged by all, when resources to make it possible are in place, and when foster carers are suitably trained.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

==

No research pursuit is in isolation and neither is it a solitary activity, because many people have been involved, each contributing to the final outcome. I should therefore like to thank the following people for their support, help and guidance throughout this research and for helping me to make it possible.

- Firstly to my husband and family, for the endless evenings they spent alone without me.
- To Michelle, for her company, and feedback.
- To Jane, for her meticulous proofreading of my work.
- To Janet, for her valuable support and in-depth knowledge of the fostering service.
- To Professor Matthew Colton and Professor Peter Raynor, for their sound advice and guidance.
- To all my respondents, for their generosity in allowing me to share their fostering experiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

References

Appendices

LIST OF TABLES AND DIAGRAMS

ABREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

ABAA: Association of British Adoption Agencies.

ADSS: Association of Directors of Social Services.

AGM: Annual General Meeting.

ALBSU: Adult Basic Skills Unit.

CAMHS: Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

DfES: Department for Education and Skills.

DoH: Department of Health.

EBD: Emotional Behavioural Disorders.

ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council.

FE: Further Education.

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education.

GNVQ: General National Vocational Qualification.

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

IFA: Independent Fostering Agency.

IOD: Institute of Directors.

IQ: Intelligence Quotient.

LA: Local Authority.

LAC: Looked After Children.

LEA: Local Education Authority.

LGA: Local Government Act.

MSc: Master of Science.

NCB: National Children's Bureau.

NFER: National Foundation for Educational Research.

NIACE: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification.

OC1, OC2: Outcome Indicators, {one and two}

OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education.

ONS: Office for National Statistics.

PRAISE: Partnership Reading Activities Involving Social Service and Education.

PSA: Public Service Agreement.

ROWA: Read On Write Away.

SAE: Stamped Addressed Envelope.

SCU: Social Exclusion Unit.

SEN: Special Educational Needs.

SSI: Social Service Inspectorate.

UK: United Kingdom.

UKLA: United Kingdom Literacy Association.

Accommodated: section 20 of the Children Act 1989 refers to accommodated children as a voluntary arrangement between the local authority and parents. Parents are involved in all decisions concerning the child.

Care Order: sections 31 and 38 of the Act refer to children who have a care (or interim care order) that is granted by the court, giving the awarding agency parental responsibility shared with parents, but limiting their influence and responsibilities. Children detained or remanded remain the responsibility of their parents.

Foster Placement: defined as the Looked After child's total environment that is separate from its natural home. It is his or her current living arrangement, which provides the physical, emotional, and educational well-being of the child on a day-to-day basis.

Foster Carer: the principal carer of the child on a day-to-day basis. Foster carers do not acquire parental rights for children placed with them.

Fostering Service: the agency or local authority that carries out fostering functions. Independent fostering agencies or local authorities are charged with the responsibility for placing children, who cannot live at home, with foster carers. A local authority may make arrangements with an independent fostering agency for its fostering duties to be discharged to them.

Key Stages: covers four age groups. During each key stage pupils sit National Assessment tests to monitor their progress.

Literacy: the ability to function at a level commensurate with everyday tasks and activities.

Looked After Child: a child who has a care or interim care order, is remanded/detained or is accommodated on a voluntary basis by a local authority or voluntary agency. They are children who do not live in their natural home of origin and whose welfare is placed with the authority or agency, who thereby assumes the role of corporate parent.

Literacy Development in the Foster Placement: means to provide an environment that promotes the potential to acquire and mature a literacy competence.

INTRODUCTION

==

'Literacy: it's the motherhood and apple-pie of education.'

Lord Puttnam, C.B.E.,

Literacy Today 2000

Kelly (1995) called carers *amateurs*. Bald *et al.* (1995) stated that carers were not fully informed about educational matters. Hill (1999) argued that carers' opinions were not always sought, which under-valued their considerable knowledge. Farmer *et al.* (2004) found that carers varied in the extent they concerned themselves with their foster children's education and progress. Griffiths (1999) asserted that carers were ill equipped and uneducated to deal with children's literacy needs, and many couldn't be bothered. Jackson (1988b) contended that foster carers needed to understand the educational service, encourage homework and oversee it, and must know how to seek support if problems arise.

The considerable educational underachievement of children in public care has been highlighted and well documented in recent years, and much of the focus has been on local educational authorities and social service departments as participants in that underachievement. Very little direct focus has been placed on the contribution made by carers in the development of educational success and whether they should shoulder some of the responsibility for educational failure. There appeared to be some concerns about the ability of carers to support children in their educational endeavours, yet there is little research to ascertain exactly what their contribution is.

Educational underachievement compounds the difficulties of many Looked After children because they often suffer from multiple problems. They are frequently isolated from their own kinship group, may have experienced abuse or neglect, have had many different placements, and have been involved with a multitude of professionals overseeing their care.

Evidence has shown that schools have not been a good educational provider. Many children in public care have not been entered for examinations, and have left school without qualifications; they have played truant or been excluded (Millham *et al.*1986; Biehal 1995). The Social Service Inspectorate/Office for Standards in Education (SSI/OFSTED) Report (1995) claimed that 25% of children at Key Stage 4 were excluded, and Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) found that one third of all children in care were not attending school at all. Looked After children have been bullied and stigmatised, and teachers have had low expectations of them (Morris 2000). Most have not been given career advice, work experience or a record of achievement (Garnett 1992). Too often labelled as untrustworthy and as troublemakers, the school can be seen by these children as a very hostile learning environment (Morris 2000). Jackson (1994:272) also recognises that,

> children looked after by local authorities suffer discrimination
> at every level. This discrimination has a very negative impact on
> their schooling, which is in turn is reflected in their emotional
> adjustment and behaviour.

As a result of The Education Reform Act (1988) and subsequent acts, schools are able to cream off high achievers and exclude others who will not achieve for them. When schools are 'results led,' Looked After children are at greater risk of exclusion (Blyth and Milner 1994). Schools can no longer be trusted to provide the literacy competence needed to survive the care system, or provide the education that will equip these children with life skills. They can no longer be the main literacy provider; nor can local authorities, acting as the corporate parent, be regarded as a suitable provider.

Schools have failed these children, and so have local authorities. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) identifies that underachievement is the result of poor corporate parenting by local authorities, and Morris (2000), asserts that good parenting has not been applied to their relationship with Looked After children. Neither educational needs nor provision of educational resources for Looked After children has been of primary importance in social service departments, and has not, until recently, been reflected in social policy. Compound this evidence with the general poor public attitudes towards Looked After children and it becomes obvious we need to look elsewhere to widen the pool of possible 'educators'.

Research in this field of foster care is still in its infancy, but the educational underachievement of Looked-After children remains in the spotlight, and the considerable evidence of this failure has been brought to attention by a significant number of findings. Some of the facts and history that instigated major childcare reform are listed below:

- Children in care are below peer group in education attainment (DOH 2000: The Children Act Report, 1995-99).
- Children's academic performance drops as they go through the care system (OFSTED/SSI 1995).
- 1 in 10 claimants of severe hardship payments have been in care (Fletcher 1996).
- 1/3 of all children in care do not attend school (I. Sinclair and Gibbs 1998).
- 75% of all children in care leave school with no qualifications (Social Inclusion: Pupil Support 1999).
- 33% of all secondary exclusions and 66% of all primary school exclusions involve children in care (Smith 1998).
- It is claimed that the majority of foster carers have low literacy skills (Griffiths 1999).
- Underachievement is the result of poor corporate parenting (Fletcher-Campbell 1997).
- Between 50% and 80% of care-leavers are unemployed (Biehal 1995).
- 25% of adults in prisons have been in care, and 38% of young prisoners have been in care. At least 1 in 7 girls leave care pregnant. (Garnet 1992).
- Disproportionate numbers of Looked After children, (20%) have high levels of special educational need in the form of a statement, compared to 2.9% of general population (R. Sinclair 1997).
- 43% of Looked After children are not entered for exams. 35% of Looked After children have no career interview. 55% of Looked After children have no work experience. 56% of Looked After children have no record of achievement (Garnett 1992).
- Underachievement is linked to frequent placement movement (Goddard 2000).
- Low expectations hamper change to attitudes (Morris 2000).
- 7.5% of those in year 11 gained 5 GCSE (or equivalent) passes at grade A*-C, compared to 50% of all children (The Children Act Report 2002).

- The traditional ways of delivering foster care do not adequately meet children's needs (Fostering for the Future 2002:3).

- Children in care have poor results in Key Stage tests at age seven, 11 and 14. Only 1 percent goes on to university (OFSTED 2001).

- Carers are not expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement at home for learning and development (SEU Report 2003).

Children and young people in care have got to be the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in society, and the catalogue of neglect identified should make everyone ashamed. It becomes obvious that we need to look elsewhere to raise achievement, for leaving it to the local authorities, and schools in particular, may be too late; yet many of the initiatives and recommendations that have been implemented to raise achievement have been school based. In the Quality Protects Research Briefing Papers (2000) there was no mention of the specific help carers could contribute in their own right to promote the educational development of their foster children, except to make sure they attend school, have the right clothing, have a pencil, and support homework. The Brief did suggest ways of helping by having mentoring schemes, homework clubs and study support centres, but nothing about educational support in the home that the carer might be able to provide. The National Standards for Foster Care (1999): 11.5: 34 states only that,

> the foster home provides an environment in which education
> and learning are valued: the foster carer establishes (with the
> support of the authority) an expectation of regular attendance
> at school and supports the child's full participation through
> provision of necessary uniform and equipment, support
> for completion of homework, and financial and other support
> for attending school trips and after school activities.

The report *Fostering For The Future* (2002) did not fare any better. It identified the lack of strategic planning by councils for assessing educational needs, and the only mention of the carers was in relation to them being good advocates in securing a school placement. The report identified that councils needed to review their policies on fostering arrangements and were ill informed about the true nature of children's needs and the costs involved in delivering such a service. Councils, the report added, were having difficulties finding suitable placements and did not have suitable recruitment packages.

In later reports and guidance literature the theme continues to focus directly on what the school can do and, again, places very little importance on the carer's contribution (Social Exclusion Unit Report 2003). In the OFSTED Report (2000:3.7) *Raising Achievement,* recording how the educational needs of children and young people are to be met, states: '...training is required for key teachers, governors, social workers, LA personnel and elected members.' There is no mention of the carer. Even at the closure of this research I was not to see any initiative for raising achievement move to include the carers' specific contribution.

These reports clearly show that carers are not in the forefront when looking at the broader means of raising achievement of Looked After children and it is highly significant that all major reports and training providers that look at ways carers can help to raise educational achievement are directly related to the support they can give to others. It is essential to widen the perception of what carers can do and the valuable contribution they can make to educational progress. There is plenty of advice for front line workers such as social workers and managers, but nothing specifically about what could be achieved in the home by targeting carers in particular.

The number of children being Looked After at any one time is difficult to assess because of the transient nature of fostering, but at the initial time of writing it was estimated that 36,000 children were in foster placements (Source: DOH 2001). By 2003, this figure had risen to 41,100 children living in approximately 32,000 foster families. There is a shortage of at least 6,100 foster families. (Source: The Fostering Network 04 February 2004)

Foster care is now the most popular provision of alternative care, and, as such, it deserves thorough research attention. Our understanding of the literacy practices and development in the foster placement must now be advanced. Carers are surrogate parents to children Looked After, and they too should have a responsibility in raising achievement, with the same concerns about education as they would with their natural born children. They are in the front line of care. They are the ones dealing with the day-to-day routine care of these children, and they have a pivotal role in being the link person for all the agencies that promote the interests of these children. Should it not be this group that is targeted to help with this endeavour? Jackson (1988) asks whether authorities take account of the potential of carers in helping Looked After children to overcome their educational disadvantage.

A large body of research: (Wade and Moore 1993-6; Toomey 1989-93; Hannon 1995; Topping 1988; Topping and Wolfendale 1985-95; Wells 1985-7; Bus *et al.* 1995) show how critical it is for literacy development to begin in the home and of its importance for subsequent cognitive development. This research was my starting point for recognising the importance of developing literacy in the foster placement. The researchers' concerns have been on literacy development in the family domain and providing evidence that the home is where acquiring literacy begins. The authors found that the skill of listening to stories in the home acts as a basis by which children begin to enjoy formal learning and to understand the functions of reading and writing. This includes evidence that fostering literacy awareness and developing positive attitudes towards learning in the home influences family behaviour patterns, and has a socialisation function. Wade and Moore (1993) found a close correlation between lack of resources in the home and future attainment at school, especially in relation to books.

These studies share common characteristics: that if children are given enriched literacy opportunities in the home and have shared reading experiences with an adult they have a greater chance of success in school. The findings show that children read earlier, are more articulate and better able to express themselves verbally, and are more confident when learning new things.

It was with the accumulating knowledge that home-based literacy opportunities did, in fact, raise achievement, and with the facts now firmly established by research evidence, that I decided that literacy development for Looked After children also had to begin in the home, in the foster placement. Literacy competence had to be developed in the foster placement, not waiting for it to be considered only at the school gate for a group already disadvantaged. I also considered strong literacy skills to be the means by which 'Children of the State' could be lifted from their disadvantaged position. Several researchers and research initiatives have focused on the education of Looked After children, and their contribution has also informed my choice of research area and interest. Therefore, I decided to investigate the literacy practices, events, development and opportunities of children in foster placements and to question how 'literacy' is operationalised within the foster placement. I also wanted to know if carers perceived themselves as 'educators,' and what their actual contribution was.

In an advancing highly technological world there is a greater need than ever before to have adequate literacy skills: that is, the ability to function at a level commensurate with everyday activities (Charnley and Withnall 1989), but research shows that Looked After children are not equipped to deal with an increasingly complex world. Economic changes in the labour market have placed greater stress on acquiring good basic skills to improve occupational chances, and the same factors have meant it is harder to recruit and retain carers. Changes in the family structure also mean that women no longer remain at home to raise children and this again will reflect on carer recruitment and retention. If Looked After children have no educational history to draw on, and cannot be assured of having a stable and permanent home, then these factors will undoubtedly affect their employment opportunities and future life chances. Furthermore, some children may never know the experience of having one consistent, significant person in their life to take a continuing interest in their personal and continuing development. It is surely the right of these children that every other resource should be made available to them to enable them to grow up and live fully independent lives. At present, opportunities for achieving stability seem untenable. Acquiring good literacy skills is one sure way of equipping wounded children with the literacy life skills needed to succeed, not only in mainstream education but also for life in general.

In ordinary homes the development of literacy is vital in order to equip each individual with skills that can be translated into the wider society, and it is equally important in other forms of care. Literacy development and opportunity for Looked After children in the home is even more essential when the acquisition of literacy is made so much more difficult to acquire in school because other difficulties are presenting themselves. Educational performance is one of the first things to be affected when learning is inhibited by other life challenges.

The demands on carers, however, have never been greater. Apart from the heterogeneity of foster care, and children being admitted to care for a variety of reasons - including offending behaviour and special needs - there are now additional demands in negotiating parental contact and maintaining the extended family kinship networks. This expansion of fostering services, with its attendant demands on record keeping, regular reviews and care planning, makes the role of the carer a very significant one.

In order to help children and young people gain increasing independence we need to be equipping them with the tools to help them. Evidence by Goddard (2000), and others, shows

that a foster placement can be a very transient experience, but if the literacy needs of young people and children are met in the foster placement, then the task of meeting their educational needs in the school is made so much easier. Jackson and Martin (1998:578) identify that, 'being able to read well makes them less dependent on adult attention.' If these individuals have adequate literacy skills early on, then the demands made on other areas of development can be met without interruption, since lack of the functional skills for living can inhibit other growth processes. Investigating this unique family setting and gaining vital information of the literacy practices that are taking place is essential if effective action is to be taken to raise standards. It is now time to investigate this area of educational potential to its fullest extent.

Literacy is the bread and butter of education, and without adequate literacy skills life is less manageable in a world that is already fraught with difficulties for vulnerable children. Children have to feel comfortable using the tools of literacy at home before they can feel comfortable using the literacy of the school, and, for children who may have experienced many changes, the need to equip them with 'literacy life skills' becomes even more important. The label 'being in care' automatically confers a status that is unwarranted and unfair, so, in order to strengthen their competence base there has to be opportunities to engender at least an interest in reading and writing in the home. This will help them to deal with the extra demands of the school, when formal learning may be far down the children's' list of priorities. Inadequate skills can give rise to challenging and disturbing behaviour, even before the task of actually learning something new begins.

This investigation is taking place at a time when the literacy needs of Looked After children remain a central concern, for these are the children who are most at risk of having impoverished literacy opportunities and who underachieve in the education system. The measures that are now being implemented through programmes such as Quality Protects and Choice Protects, can only lead to a more fulfilling life for our most marginalized children, and for this to continue we must now target the most powerful institution of all – the family. Much research explores school attainment and school behaviour, but learning to be successful and learning to behave is learnt and taught outside of school hours. There are some children who avoid going to school at all because of past experiences of failure or for some other reason; therefore it is vital literacy development is introduced and encouraged in the home.

Education and learning begin in the home. Literacy is the cornerstone of all learning, and if the home does not value education and knowledge, then no amount of school initiatives will raise achievement, despite intervention. It is not only up to the school to combat underachievement. There is a need to know and understand what contribution the foster placement is making, and what needs to be done to equip this group of children with the skills for successful living by the people who are supposed to be skilled to perform that role. It is imperative that adequate home-grown literacy skills are in place in order for them to deal with the world at large, and give them an opportunity to lift themselves out of a situation that may prove impossible without such skills. Education can be the key to future success and engender a belief in one's ability and worthiness; literacy, the functional tool of education can turn that key, but we can see it is easier said than done.

This thesis is divided into chapters. Chapter one places the research in a context, and charts and discusses current Government initiatives and legislation to raise the educational achievement of Looked After children. Examination of specific home-based literacy schemes follows, and then an exploration of organisations responsible for developing educational initiatives. The chapter draws on supporting research evidence and explores and explains the raft of interventions that were implemented to raise standards as a consequence of the low attainment by young people in public care. *Quality Protects*, introduction of Looked After Children (LAC) materials, projects such as *Care About Education, Equal Chances, Book Buddies* and *A Book of my own,* among others, were all instrumental in challenging underachievement. Researchers and commentators such as Biehal; A. Heath *et al.* and Jackson, also contributed to the debate with their various studies focusing on the poor performance of this group and recommending ways to improve the situation.

Chapter two explores the difficulties of learning to be literate in constantly changing educational and social service systems, and examines current policies or influences that impact on acquisition of literacy in the foster placement. This chapter also outlines and interprets the educational performance of this group through the National Statistics compiled over five years from the first recorded entry in 2000, and comments on the results. Chapter three discusses the process of identifying appropriate methodological instruments and the decisions that were made in selecting the ones chosen. This chapter also assesses ethical considerations, access arrangements and sampling procedures. It also outlines the establishment of a focus group and a pilot study that were conducted to iron out irregularities

and misunderstandings in the development of a questionnaire design. Chapter four analyses the findings and results of the survey questionnaire and identifies key themes. Chapter five describes the interview process and analyses the initial findings from the interview schedules. Chapter six analyses the overall results while chapter seven formulates a discussion, drawing in theories of literacy development, and proposing recommendations for Good Practice and further research in the field. The concluding chapter is chapter eight, and this is concerned with summing up and reflection. It draws together each thread of the research process and provides a summary of the research outcomes. It also assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the research design. My challenges are acknowledged and how they were overcome, and, of course, my successes are acknowledged as well. It also draws on its strength as an original piece of investigative work

Previous research has shown that the educational concerns of children in care have received scant attention by Social Services Departments and Schools (DfES/DoH 1994; SSI/OFSTED 1995) and there is almost no research base that looks at education in the foster placement. We need to be proactive in providing the best educational opportunities for our most deprived children and to look into every corner to find ways of doing it.

> For the sake of the children, it is vital to keep developing
> and reviewing our understanding of foster care in all its
> complexity.

> Hill (1999:374)

I hope this research will go some way in advancing that understanding.

CHAPTER 1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, PREVIOUS RESEARCH, LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

An investigation exploring literacy practices and development of literacy in foster placement has to be situated within a broad context, because researching literacy is a multi-disciplinary activity. Background knowledge embeds the study in a socio-historical perspective that allows the development of the investigation to be charted. The following history and research literature identifies the pathway, how the study evolved, and the setting from which it is drawn. Explanations are given for reasons why a particular research study was included and its relevance to the current investigation. My knowledge base has been built up from a variety of contributors who are diverse in their research objectives, but who are linked because they share a common thread. My choice has been guided by research, which has looked at early literacy development in the home, family book-reading schemes, learning theory, government policy, and includes research from charitable organisations. The research literature review is extensive and broad, because I want a complete picture of literacy development, the initiatives/events/practices that promote it within the home, and because I wish to assess the influences that may inhibit its development. The review also forms part of my data collection and is used in support of claims that I make. The chapter ends by summarising the main contributors.

My first intent was to explore whether there was evidence to support my initial claim that acquiring effective literacy skills begins in the home, and has an important effect on the educational chances of all children. It is essential to establish strong literacy links with the home and principal carer, when the school career may be inconsistent, fleeting or non-existent (Garnett 1992; Biehal 1995). Furthermore, this literature identifies that an awareness and use of literacy in the home does in fact have benefits. This is provided in the introduction to this study.

Next, I had to explore whether acquiring home-grown literacy skills for Looked After children would be instrumental in giving these children a head start when dealing with other areas of difficulty in their lives, and would have far reaching effects for success in school. Therefore, my next area of exploration was to look at specific literacy schemes that were initiated in the home, and, in particular, book-reading schemes that involved Looked After children. The findings from these schemes show that many children and young people have limited access to books and limited opportunities to read with adults. A child who is unable to live with his or her own family places a major responsibility on those who take over that responsibility. J.W.B. Douglas (1964) was one of the first researchers to identify the positive effects of parental interest. This interest becomes even more vital for Looked After children who may never have a long-term consistent relationship with an adult.

The first part of this chapter outlines and embeds the research literature within a context that concerns itself with current Government policy and impetus, drawing in specific initiatives that explore the education of Looked After children. It includes legislative changes to the care system in the United Kingdom, particularly England. Next, there is an exploration of organisations that are involved in developing projects to improve the educational chances of these children and this embeds the current research in a supporting structure. This is followed by the examination of findings of specific book-reading schemes, which then leads me on to explore in a more global way a view of literacy development and practice: examining how literacy is practised in different social class backgrounds, and the different 'ways of taking' from books as shown in diverse family situations. My own investigation and research is informed by the work of all the contributors from which I draw as well as challenge.

Government policy on the education of Looked After children
The rationale for the inception of the following initiatives was a response to look more closely at the unique educational needs of Looked After children. Essen *et al.* (1976) identified that, if children entered care before the age of seven, they could be up to fourteen months below the national average for ability at that age. She found that the longer they remained in care, the lower their educational attainment would be. There would also be a corresponding increase in behavioural difficulties. Fanshel and Shinn (1978) found, in their comparison study of children in residential and foster care, that children in the foster home (which most closely mimics the natural home) did not fare any better than children in

residential care. The family orientation of a foster placement did not compensate for educational disadvantage, and children still underachieved. Rutter (1985) argued that educational achievement for children who had been in care (and were now successful adults) was a major factor in their success as adults, and closely corresponded with the way they behaved and responded in their adult roles. Pilling (1986) and Jackson (1988b) both supported these findings in identifying the link between general well-being in adulthood and educational success as children. They found that, if children left school with qualifications, their chances of leading successful adult lives were increased. One of the protecting qualities was to have an interested adult who encouraged them to do well, and who recognised and praised their abilities and achievements.

Other evidence did not provide proof that any level of support regarding education at any stage was being given, nor was there a clear infrastructure for monitoring the progress of Looked After children (Packman *et al.* 1986; Parker *et al.* 1991; Millham *et al.* 1986 and Rowe and Lambert 1973). Children were drifting through the care system with no forward planning, nor were they equipped to lead independent lives on leaving care. The impact of these research findings and evidence from a major inquiry exploring children's health, commissioned by the Select Committee on Health in 1984 led to the development of the Children Act (1989).

The recommendations of the Act are to strengthen the provision of services for Looked After children and to develop new, effective ways of delivering a quality service. The Act underpins the principle that meeting the needs of the child is paramount, and, as well as including the child in the decision-making process, should enable continuing parental contact for children in long-term placement. In the Guidance and Regulations on family placements, volume 3 and 4, references are made to the important role of foster carers in providing educational support and for their need to become familiar with educational matters. Another important legislative measure was The Education Reform Act (1988), when schools became accountable for their teaching practices. It was these major legislative changes that became a watershed for change, and then led to a restructuring of both education and social service provision.

Attention was now drawn to the low educational achievement of children in public care, and in 1995 Social Services and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) issued a joint

report that criticised local authorities, social services departments and schools for failing to implement the recommendations set by the government in the Act. Inspections of four local authorities were made, both in care and educational settings. This was done to ascertain how needs were being met, and if the authorities were conforming and implementing the regulations set out in both the Education Reform Act (1988) and The Children Act (1989). The inspection consisted of visiting twenty-seven schools, carers, and adults who assumed parental responsibility for Looked After children, and they were all interviewed. Findings revealed that underachievement was greatest in the secondary education sector, but other findings given in the report were also disquieting. Failure to promote the educational achievement of these children meant that standards remained too low, too little had been done to boost achievement, educational needs were not understood or given priority by teachers, educational planning was hardly addressed, and there were delays in implementing any decisions. It could be seen that the educational neglect of these children was still continuing

The report also identified that children did not want attention drawn to them, or to be labelled 'different'. It went on to say that children feared the negative effects of stereotyping that is 'engendered by a lack of understanding of circumstances.' The report recognised, awareness had to be raised but there must be caution about 'fuelling negative and harmful labels.' It asserted that because no one had overall responsibility for the children, oversights could occur with detrimental effects and recommended that all agencies should be active and work collaboratively: they should communicate effectively and they should share and disseminate information. Each organisation was encouraged to gain knowledge of each other.

In response to the report, Sir William Utting was commissioned in 1996 to chair the *Review of the Safeguards for Children Living Away from Home.* The subsequent document, *People Like Us* (1997), recommended to government that a major restructuring of the care service was needed that should also incorporate educational policy. The SSI/OFSTED Report and the Utting Report that followed, led to a complete overhauling of the state provision for childcare, and education now became a major priority. It was recognised that the underachievement of children in care needed urgent attention, and the government now demanded authorities to employ strategies that would improve the life chances of all children, and, in particular, children living away from home. Through the *Public Service*

Agreement (PSA) all authorities now had to raise their childcare standards, and provide a coherent and co-ordinated service across all agencies and service providers.

The Quality Protects (1998) programme was one response, and a five-year government initiative was launched, outlining a programme of reforms to deliver the objectives set out in the *Government's Objectives for Children's Social Service* (1999b). With the collaboration of the Social Exclusion Unit, the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills), the programme set out to raise the educational attainment of children in care as one of its major targets. The programme drew on research to develop policy to help local authorities deliver improvements in services by meeting specific objectives and setting targets that now have to be met. £885 million was allocated for this programme.

One of the Quality Protects sub-objectives was to bring the educational performance of Looked After children in line with the general performance of all children. The initiative required each social service department to have a senior member of management to liaise with other agencies and work together on Management Action Plans and Children's Service Plans. The information was then reported back to elected members of each authority who were expected to act on the recommendations (Fletcher 1996).

Targets were set following the findings of The Department of Health (Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidance) that 75% of children in public care were leaving school with no formal qualification achievement. By the year 2001 there should be an increase of 50% of children in local authority care achieving a GCSE or GNVQ. By 2003 this was to be increased to 75%. These were the pledges made by the Minister for Education in December 1999.

The heat was now turned up, and in May 2000 the Department of Health and the Department of Employment published a document, *Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care* (2000). This document was supported by the *Education Protects* programme whose task was to share and disseminate information, policy and research findings and feed them back to the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Health. The programme also spreads information, and gives practical examples of good working practices to a network of practitioners and policy makers about key issues outlined

in the guidance. The Guidance reaffirmed the very high rate of underachievement of these children. It confirms that one in four children, aged fourteen and over, do not attend school, and only one in three hundred go on into further education. Looked after children are six to eight times more likely to need some form of special education, and they figure prominently among people who had behavioural and emotional difficulties. Measures were now being taken to provide resources to encourage all young people to stay on in education or training until they are at least eighteen years of age. The recommendations place strong emphasis on an education and training scheme, where a multi-skill support system, the Connexions Network, gives priority to underachievers disaffected by school experiences in the 13-19-age range.

This document also recommended that all local authorities produce an action plan of reform: to ensure that educational provision for Looked After children was indeed being given top priority, and to ensure that access to educational opportunity was the same for this group as for all children. It was hoped that personal achievement and educational success would follow. The document highlights the role that schools had to play in raising achievement, and evidence taken from numerous report recommendations produced five statutory requirements.

In co-operation with The School Standards and Frameworks Act (1998), all education departments are now authorised to provide Looked After children with a designated schoolteacher who acts as advocate. They are responsible also for bringing together support services to put practices and policies into place. This includes a Personal Education Plan for every child in public care. These plans cover long-term and short-term goals, and provide behaviour and study support programmes.

Personal Education Plans (PEP) are intended to provide information about a child's educational history, as well as ensuring that appropriate resources are put in place and relevant support given. The plans should enable clear targets to be met, goals to be set, and educational outcomes to be plotted. They are devised collectively, and a protocol is put in place to share and disseminate information. Progress can then be monitored and all parties must review the plan regularly. The plan acts as a Record of Achievement, and should be incorporated within the child's total care planning. The social worker responsible for the child's care initiates the education plan, and is usually the lead person and coordinator, who

collaborates with the young person, school, parents and carers. Other objectives are to ensure that the maximum time spent out of education is twenty days for a looked after child, after which a school place must have been secured. This means that an educational placement has to be found at the same time as a care placement, and a placement can only be secured if educational provision is in place too.

The Children Act (1989) and the Education Act (1996) both recommended that positive collaboration between agencies should occur, but as evidence showed, this was not happening. Now, the Guidance required that effective collaboration between agencies must take place. The Guidance facilitates active interagency co-operation and collaboration, because different agencies now have a statutory duty to record, plan and deliver a comprehensive and constant level of educational support. A protocol is now required for sharing information, because education and care placements should and must be linked, so that early intervention and appropriate action can be taken to safeguard the interests of the child. It also helps to promote positive change in encouraging good practice and effective planning. This sets out the principles of good corporate parenting, and, with respect to education, this means having the expectations of educational success, raising standards, promoting educational opportunities by providing appropriate resources and provision, and taking an interest in the educational progress of each child in public care. It is hoped that this monitoring process and consistent reviewing of progress will enable local authorities to assess and evaluate real need and provision.

Another influential requirement has been an improved system of collecting and recording information about Looked After children. Good record keeping charts children's educational progress and health, and monitors any problems. The LAC materials track a child's care history and provide a running commentary on current and past history of the child in order to inform specific practice in relation to the child and to meet ongoing needs.

In line with all care reform and the Local Government Act, 2000, a Children's Task Force was set up in October 2000 to monitor the modernisation of the Social Services and the National Health Service. The following are to be among their responsibilities: to monitor the Public Service Agreement targets for Looked After children, shape the National Services Framework for Children, and build on the Quality Protects Programme. Authorities must now plan and coordinate community strategies and policies to meet the needs of the

community, as well as maintaining policies that promote the interests of all children in need. This will ensure quality indicators are now in place to safeguard the interests of vulnerable children, but it will also assess efficiency and delivery of services across all agencies and departments delivering a 'joined-up' service. Statistical data will now be collected which will compare quality outcomes across authorities. In line with these reforms, and, as part of the *Best Value* initiative, a coordinated service-planning programme for all at-risk children in England was established in May 2001.

In late 2001 The Care Leaving Act (2000) came into force. This act places specific duties on fostering services to give young people leaving care a care leaving package, including a Pathway Plan. This includes advice, guidance and practical help on issues such as housing, employment and educational opportunities. Each young leaver has a personal adviser who assesses the young person's needs and tries to make the transition to independent living run as smoothly as possible.

The thrust for change continued and it was during 2001 the government announced that the Social Exclusion Unit was to report on the educational achievements of Looked After children. The final report, after a consultation analysis, was published in 2003. The heat was really turned up now, and this fact-finding exercise was to build a body of knowledge about finding ways that worked to raise the attainment levels of children Looked After. Knowledge pools were also developed. These were web-based forums to gather evidence-based information from experts in the field. These were professionals from all disciplines who wished to contribute in building up a body of evidence about what worked in combating exclusion and raising achievement. People involved in research were invited to contribute, as were people on the frontline who may not be involved in policy decision-making, so that ideas, information, resources and knowledge could be shared.

The Care Standards Bill (2000) came into effect in April 2002, and established a National Care Standards Commission to inspect and regulate services across all social care provision, including independent fostering services and agencies, and adoption services. In 2003 it became the National Commission for Social Care Inspection. Their remit is also to monitor and inspect local authorities to ensure they carry out their statutory duties, and to ensure that both private and local authority care services meet the same standards, and to intervene if standards are not met. Local authorities now have a duty to provide information on

provision, and strict protocols are in place to regulate services across authorities to ensure a minimum standard of care. This watchdog will hopefully ensure quality performance and an effective service delivery, as the results from individual inspections will be fed back to one centralised national regulator for dissemination. The Assessment of Children in Need framework also tightens the control for systematic regulation and effective service delivery, as does The Integrated Children's System, which was developed in 2002.

It was during 2001-2002 that every Social Service department underwent an assessment of their performance, and each was given a star rating. Out of 151 social service departments over half achieved only one star; ten had no stars at all, and received greater intervention from the government by closer scrutiny and increased monitoring. The best of the departments, who gained three stars or more, got greater autonomy and freedom to use central funding as they wished; for the future, they will get 'brush stroke' inspections and monitoring only. Jacqui Smith, Health Minister at the time stated, 'The monitoring system will show that excellence is possible – and it will show up poor councils.' By the end of 2002, the Management Action Plans, which councils had submitted to monitor performance in children's services, were mainstreamed and integrated into Performance Monitoring. By 2004 all information on Children's Services was worked into position statements.

In the wake of the *Fostering for the Future Report* (2002), where it was found councils were failing to find alternative school provision for excluded children and failing to plan or assess children's educational needs, the government announced a new review, *Choice Protects* (2003-4). This review of fostering services looked at ways authorities recruited: to identify the support they were getting, to put reward structures in place to encourage increased recruitment and retention, and to look at ways to increase stability and ways of rewarding carers for their skills. £113 million over three years was allocated and for 2003-4 each local authority received £19.7m to improve their fostering service. 'The funding can be used to help foster carers to support children's education and to provide specialist services that help foster carers improve children's health or educational attainment.' (SEU 2003:4)

The Choice Protects commission looked at the dependence of local authorities on independent fostering agencies and the issue of emergency placements. The review also examined ways fostered children could be provided with more placement choices to match more closely child with carer, but this does seem rather ludicrous when recruitment of foster

carers is now in a state of crisis. 'LA's all over the country are being forced to reassess their support for carers in the face of crippling shortages of foster carers'. *(Fostering Network 2003 113:3)*

The Cabinet reshuffle in 2003 saw the creation of a Minister for Children in England, with the creation of a new office: Children's and Families Directorate. This office oversees Children's Social Services, which now recognises children in need as requiring a separate department in their own right, instead of being subsumed within the more generic social services departments. This unit unites the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Home Office. One of the unit's responsibilities is to oversee and encourage co-operation between all agencies: strengthening joined-up services by bringing together a range of specialist services and skills and by working together towards agreed joint outcomes without replicating effort. At local level, children's trusts and boards will integrate all children's services. This will include social services, education, National Health Service, Careers, Police, Probation and Sure Start. The Social Care Inspectorate will collaborate closely with the schools inspectorate watchdog, OFSTED.

National standards

In June 2000, the UK National Standards for Foster Care came into being, and was established to set out good practice goals and targets and to ensure mandatory inspection and regulation. This was another response to the restructuring of the care system. Local authorities are now responsible for establishing training programmes and supporting foster carers in developing their practice; carers should now be equipped to do the highly demanding job of fostering through appropriate training. Ensuring carers are professionally trained is one of the key recommendations towards enabling them to support children's education. Among the recommendations are the following: each authority must ensure that the educational and social development of each pre-school child in foster care is met by attending some pre-school facility; local authorities must now work within a Code of Practice when recruiting carers to ensure that specific criteria are fulfilled, and that standards are upheld; there should be clear conditions of service, clear tasks and training scales.

Literacy initiatives in the research field

To assist local authorities to facilitate improvements and promote change for the better, a number of projects and initiatives have been developed. One project in 1999, which

happened to be the National Literacy Year, saw the launch of a magazine called *Breaking their fall: meeting the literacy needs of looked-after children* (Griffiths, 1999). In collaboration with the Who Cares? Trust, and the National Literacy Association, this magazine was produced to give practical advice to care workers on how they could support the literacy development of children in their care. The magazine acted as a bridge to raise the achievement of Looked After children before the government education policies became common practice. The emphasis was on the importance of reading, but it also questioned why children were failing, and put forward suggestions to improve and develop literacy practices in the home. It was suggested that carers might not be bothered to engender literacy practices because the child was either only passing through the foster placement, or there was an inbuilt assumption they would not benefit. The editor of this publication claimed that it is not only children who must learn literacy skills but the care worker and foster parent also. She argued that carers might not have the desired level of literacy competence to help the children in their care. The two charities suggested that training should be given to them.

This practice-based magazine strongly proposed that foster carers must be proactive in providing literacy opportunities to help children and young people develop their literacy skills. It asked important questions about the type of care that was being provided for the children, and asked who were the people that were failing these children? An article within the magazine identified how books can serve a real purpose by indirectly providing children and young people with an avenue of escape from the harsh realities of life. It explored the magic potential of selecting books that give answers to the problems that are peculiar to children in public care, and it described how books could provide a lifeline and comfort to individuals who may feel isolated.

The author also argues that fostering an enjoyment for reading is one way of improving a child's life chances, and adds that many children in care do not have the same opportunities of being read to by their parents, and often live in homes where there is a lack of literacy provision. It asks how many social workers and carers actually read to the children in their care. The magazine also reports that many children in care suffer a loss of self-esteem because they do not get the same attention as children living with parents and that carers often have low expectations of them. If awareness were raised among care workers and foster parents of their important contribution to literacy development, and, if they actively

participated in that development, the author asserts, then it would improve the literacy skills of their charges.

Carers must be pro-active in the development of literacy by reading to children and engendering an enjoyment of reading. The charity suggests that children in care should have access to a wide range of reading material and own their own books. A video followed the publication of the magazine; it was made in a way that brought the contents of *Breaking their fall* to life. Carers and young people contributed to the making of the tape by participating in live interviews, accompanied by popular, well-known theme tunes. The video is light-hearted, but its underlying message explores the difficulties of acquiring effective literacy skills for Looked-After children. By the use of animation, it brings the message over in a user-friendly way, and provides information on ways carers can support young people in their literacy development.

The educational underachievement of Looked After children continued to be widely debated and, in March 2000, the Rowntree Foundation entered into the debate by publishing a report of their own findings (Morris, 2000). This report identified barriers that could inhibit positive change in the care service. One of their main findings was the negative public attitude that exists in relation to Looked After children. They found a consensus that perceives children in care as troublesome. The report identified that carers in residential units and foster placements are not adequately supported, and that there was a dire need for more resources, including training, payment and moral support. Children were not involved in decision-making and social workers were not supported or helped to build sound relationships with children in their care. The report complained that response to need was often dominated by a service-led approach, and not led by the needs of the child.

> All they are interested in is budgets, bed spaces and how
> many assessments you've done (social worker).

Numerous good works by voluntary independent agencies and charities were beginning to influence practice and policy. The *Equal Chances* project was one such national programme. After its inception in 1997, The Who Cares Trust? and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation launched it in 1999, and it was supported by the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Employment. The main objective of the project was to improve local

authorities' 'corporate parenting' skills and to ensure that all children in care had access to a full range of resources that would improve their educational opportunities and outcomes. The project encouraged organisations to work together to ensure that Looked After children would have the same access to educational resources, and would be given as equal a chance to succeed as children in general.

The project aimed to increase the educational chances for children in care by developing a Whole Authority approach. This involved active collaboration and liaison between departments and organisations with the intention of sharing and disseminating information for the common good. Its aims were also to ensure that the objectives set out by the Government's Quality Protects initiative were complied with and met, and that local authorities were equipped to meet the new demands by providing resource material, offering practical guidelines, and encouraging good practice.

Stage one of the projects: *Finding the Facts* was an audit that assessed the current situation and explored current practices. In consultation with significant people involved with the care of the children, including the children themselves, a questionnaire was sent out to them and their carers. A range of questions was asked about their educational experiences, and the information gathered provided evidence about their educational outcomes. The findings demonstrated that there continued to be poor levels of academic attainment, and that the gap between the test results of Looked After pupils and the national results widened as the young people grew older (Source: Equal Chances Project Summery 1999a). The children also perceived themselves as different from their peers, and felt they lacked peer support and understanding, and many, over 50%, experienced being bullied. In one authority a follow-up meeting was arranged for all those who completed the questionnaire and from it a focus group was established. This group subsequently published a leaflet and encouraged others to attend weekly meetings, focusing on topics concerned with education. The majority of foster carers claimed they had received no training on education issues, and the findings showed that the children in their care were up to sixteen times more likely to be excluded from school and six times more likely to have a statement of special educational need. It was found there was a lack of books in the foster placement, lack of shared reading and writing opportunities, and there were low expectations placed on the children (Source: Practice Guide: Acting on the Facts 1999b:22/37). The information and views that were generated from these discussions and research findings provided a valuable resource on how young

people in care feel about their educational opportunities and experiences, and these were fed into the Quality Protects Initiative.

The second phase of the project provided guidelines and solutions based on the audit findings. This enabled authorities to develop good practice and assess how well their authority was doing in providing the necessary services. *The Practice Guide*, an inclusive model to be used by all departments, was produced as a response to the findings, and it helped authorities to implement services and provide materials and resources to build a comprehensive delivery service. One of the major recommendations of the project was that participating schools had to nominate a teacher who would act as the designated teacher for Looked-After children attending the school. The teacher had to be a senior member of staff and on the management team. The role of this teacher was to ensure that the interests of each child were met and to liaise between the school and other agencies to promote good communication and practice. The project's outcome was to develop corporate policy, enabling a collaborative approach with every department having equal responsibility for effective corporate parenting.

Equal Chances proposed, like the National Literacy Strategy, that all local authorities adopt a strategy whereby all Looked After children would have a range of books (and writing opportunities) that are easily accessible to them and that would include (and incorporate) different genres: fictional and informative, factual and reference books, books that children in care can relate to. Book buying should be a regular activity and all children should be library users. Equal Chances also proposed a baseline assessment for every child entering care with extra resources to be put in place to help with literacy skills in school and in the community, i.e. libraries providing 'catch up' schemes. They also recommended that literacy skills are monitored and that plans put are in place to improve skills, although it is likely this would automatically be included as part of the educational plan. From this we can see how the recommendations of *Equal Chances* helped in the development of the *Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care*.

In 2001, phase three of the Equal Chances Project was introduced, entitled *Literacy, Attainment and Achievement*. This was a two-year programme that ran until 2003, and its aim was to support local authorities in prioritising literacy in their service planning, and promote literacy strategies to improve literacy skills. At the close of the programme, which

also marked the end of the Equal Chances Project, a guide was published, *Education Matters*. This publication explored the educational issues that concern children and young people in care, and suggested ways in which everyone involved with the education of this group can help. It provided information on bullying, early years, literacy, special educational needs, and the transition to secondary school and it informs about the importance and implementation of educational plans.

During the same period the *Write All About it* materials were published. These were a series of booklets, posters and poetry competitions. The *Writing for fun* booklet encouraged Looked After children to write imaginatively and creatively, and gave useful tips on the different writing genres and techniques on how to improve on story writing. *Poetry for fun* was designed to promote poetry in a fun way: to encourage readers to write their own poems and to share them with others. The development of the series further supported local authorities in improving the literacy outcomes of Looked After Children. *Brainwaves* followed on from this series, which extends and develops the ideas of the *Write All About it* series. This new phase now included the development of a website to share ideas and resources.

Another highly significant project was *Care about Education*. This was an initiative that was funded by the Department of Health in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, and was endorsed by the Department of Education and Employment. It ran from 1996-1999. Its focus was to gather information from a range of agencies, explore practical ways and address critical issues involved in raising the educational achievements of Looked After children. From the findings of the project, a training curriculum was produced that could be used for teachers, social workers and carers. The training package includes a range of modules that can be used discretely or as part of in-service development. The modules cover a range of practical and theoretical issues, and include topics such as Achievement and Attainment, Motivation and Behaviour, and Promoting Learning. The aim of the document is also to encourage interagency collaboration and provide practical tools that can be used both for individual agencies or large multidisciplinary organisations. It can act as a point of reference for information, or as a core resource for greater understanding of a particular issue or topic. One outcome from this project saw the development of the Care About Education Network. This is a network that offers professionals a vehicle to disseminate information and to share ideas. Communication via the network is through e-mail, by newsletter, regular meetings and

seminars. The network offers support, advice and opportunity to discuss Good Practice. It is up to the discretion of each local authority whether these initiatives are implemented.

In partnership with The National Literacy Association and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Who Cares? Trust, *Right to Read,* project was launched in June (2000). This project was a response to the Equal Chances Project, but it also built on the work of 'A Book of My Own' (to be discussed in the next section), and was also in response to evidence that generally children do not often have books around them: neither do they have access to them, nor are they given opportunities to read with an adult. The central aim of the project was to put mechanisms in place that show young people how fun reading can be and the importance of it. Another aim of the project was to assess the value of reading and to show its beneficial effects. The findings from this project found that in one local authority only £25 a year was spent on books in each residential unit for recreational reading. Following on from previous research, the Right to Read remit was to address other undisputed findings: that 75% of all young people leaving school who are in care do so with no qualifications, and that there is a need to promote and improve access to books for Looked After children.

The Right to Read project team worked with fifty young people and their carers from five local authorities. There were three main components to the project that were addressed, and one of these was Creative Achievement Days, where a forum was created to acknowledge the achievements of the young people who had been nominated by others as achieving personal educational milestones. This might have included a good school attendance record, passing an examination, or excelling in a sport; the issuing of certificates marked these achievements. Local literary groups were invited, as were the library services, bookshops and storytellers. A Starter Library was set up in every residential unit or children's home in the project. The third component was the establishment of The Right To Read Road Shows, where the emphasis was on encouragement days for carers. On Road Shows, up to fifty carers at a time explored their role in relation to the literacy development of their charges and were given the opportunity to acknowledge their pivotal role and importance in child literacy development. There were other opportunities for carers to evaluate how they perceived themselves in the role of educator and to bring about a raised awareness of literacy development in the home. Carers were also shown the importance of sharing books with their charges. These awareness-raising days looked at the way books could become a part of

family life; the selection of appropriate books was discussed and the best ways to get enjoyment from them. The carers were free to take home a number of books.

The National Literacy Association ran other literacy projects, including a book token scheme where each child participating in a book-reading scheme was given book tokens to select the books of their choice for personal ownership. The schemes were designed to encourage other local authorities to learn from previous success, and to raise awareness that funding must be made available for the purchasing of books. It was hoped that connections could be made between the library service and children in care, so that book reading, library use, and access to a wide range of reading literature becomes a part of good corporate parenting.

The *Looking After Literacy in Kent* scheme was yet another project by the Who Cares? Trust, only this time they worked in partnership with the National Literacy Association and in co-operation with Kent County Council. The project ran from 2001 to 2003 and was evaluated by the University of East London. The initial findings were encouraging, noting a change in reading attitude of both children and carers, and a greater enthusiasm for reading. This was held to be on account of the support and encouragement in reading and in using ICT. Schools, too, even reported a change in behaviour both socially and towards learning.

Seventy children in foster care, and a small group who were living in residential care, were given a selection of books, which they could now own, and, together with the use of information and communication technology (each child was given a Psion 5mx hand-held computer), it was hoped that their literacy skills would improve. And they did, with children becoming more enthusiastic when engaging with learning. Reading Road Shows around the county encouraged carers to participate, and both children and carers were required to keep a record of their reading activities. The project team devised a Reading Adventure Passport that acted as a reading reference guide, and the children contributed towards the production of a regular newsletter. To support the participants, Kent County Council appointed Project Visitors who were able to build close ties with the participants, visiting their homes and offering practical advice and support. I did ask if I could join the fun, but the team did not reply to my letter!

Literacy developments in the care placement

Research into literacy in the care placement follows next, and I was interested in the work of Neuman (2000). This study was an experimental design piece of research with naturalistic methodologies, in which the author examined an interventionist project that targeted economically and socially disadvantaged children in three hundred and thirty children's care centres. She wanted to identify what was done with books: how did social practice change, and what were the long and short-term outcomes of flooding children with books? A network of libraries was involved, and each worked collaboratively with each other to provide a language-enriched environment with many literacy opportunities that included puppet shows and story telling. The aim of the study was to promote storybook reading as a learning aid, as well as an enjoyable activity. The target group of children, aged between 0-5, were each given five books, and ten hours of training in monthly workshops were given to staff, focusing on a model of reading where they read aloud, employing read-aloud strategies and thematic activities. There was an emphasis on extending vocabulary and an exploration of the ways words and sentences were organised. Books were chosen that had a predictable pattern and a regular rhythm, and a 'reading hour' was established that was peaceful and conducive to raising interest and understanding. Repetitive reading of the same books was encouraged to enable children to reinforce language patterns, story structure and functions of language use, since familiarity with the story enhances pleasure. Discussion through questioning concluded the sessions.

The researcher drew from a sampling frame of four hundred three-four-year-old children across ten regions. She had a control group of children who were not involved in the study, but who were drawn from similar day-care centres to the ones in the study. The children were tested prior to the start and again at the closure of the study. The assessment criteria consisted of assessing the literacy skills of writing: the concepts of environmental print, letter -name knowledge, receptive language and narrative competence. To chart the project's longer-term impact, there was an addition of a kindergarten sample, and a post-test sample was also included. The researcher assessed the physical environment by the use of photographs taken over the duration of the project to identify changes, which included literacy practices and events, stories read, and the interaction and communication between children and adults in both the control and treatment settings. Findings identified that the flooding of a range of high quality books did result in greater verbal interaction, and she claims that the children spent more time on activities related to book reading as a result of

the intervention. Children in the treatment sample scored significantly higher on four of the six statistical assessment measures than the control sample. On a follow-up six months later, it was found there were still gains, and the author claims these results show that the physical proximity of books supports early literacy development. She also claims that books provide the psychological support that enables childcare staff to promote the literacy development of the children in their care.

Neuman recognised that there are two principle predictors of future reading success: trained staff to support reading exercises and an effective support structure. As compared with the control group, her findings showed there was significant improvement over one year in understanding the concepts of narrative, writing, print, and letter-sound correspondence. She found no statistical gains in environmental print knowledge, but recognised that environmental print represented visual cue reading and not de-contextualised language. This research interested me, because the findings in an earlier study by the same author had identified that merely flooding an environment with books or literacy *per se* was not enough to raise literacy awareness or promote its acquisition. In this study the trainers had been taught to develop greater inter-subjectivity with their charges, guiding their language use in their interaction with the text and in other literacy events. This showed me that any literacy initiative had to be truly interactive; it was not good enough just to provide the literacy materials or opportunities. The carer had to be deeply involved for any significant gains to be made. The carer had to interact in a meaningful discourse with the child, exploring the language uses of the text and extending the discourse beyond the text.

The author argues that intervention with specific disadvantaged groups may need a long-term commitment that would involve ongoing activities where children were engaged in a whole range of literacy-related activities using all their modalities and incorporating meaningful conversations, and she insists that oral language development must take priority. This study raised my awareness of the importance of carers in literacy development, and how essential it was to be appropriately trained to engage fully with the child and the literacy event.

The work of Menmuir (1994) continues the theme of carer involvement in literacy, but this study centres specifically on children in care. Menmuir's study concerns the *PRAISE* project, (Partnership Reading Activities Involving Social Services and Education), and was a reading project of two years duration, where childcare workers (i.e. residential social workers),

young people in residential units, and foster carers were specially trained to encourage a reading ethic. The carers were taught reading techniques to use with children and young people, aged between five-fourteen years. The project's rationale was to assess reading outcomes from out-of-school reading activities that involved carers in a home situation: previous research tended to evaluate home reading schemes only in natural families. The incentive was to employ reading strategies that would promote the value of reading as one of the most essential skills needed to succeed academically. At the inception of this study, staff in residential units stated that it was very difficult to get children involved in the project, although staff and carers in both foster homes and residential units were eager to participate. Books and magazines were purchased that introduced a range of genres: providing a variety of fiction, non-fiction and reference reading resources, which were also based on interest. It was hoped at the closure of the study that there would be an increase in the frequency of reading activities to show both children and the care workers that reading was an educational activity that had benefits for all.

Care workers were encouraged to participate fully and to be actively involved in the education of their charges. They were made aware of the importance of acting as models for the children, so they could emulate the carers through the positive reinforcement of being seen as readers. The care workers were trained to incorporate the reading strategies of 'pause, prompt and praise' techniques, together with using one of three reading models. A Shared Reading approach was the first of these three, and it involved the carer and child reading aloud to each other, followed by a discussion of the contents afterwards.

Paired reading was another model. It was most used by children who were non-fluent readers, or had other difficulties, or lacked confidence. The approach rested on an interactive relationship between the carer and child that was based on non-verbal cues to lead the carer in their responses. Observation was needed to identify when to read, when to listen, or when to interact with the reading material simultaneously. The third model was the Shared Partnered method. This simulated a more natural approach to reading, a reading approach that was more akin to real-life reading activities. Interaction between participants was more natural here than the other reading methods, and could occur in more naturally occurring situations. On occasions, the pair could read silently, but together; the proximity of the interaction was as important as the reading.

Praise was a significant feature, especially for children with reading difficulties. The nature of the project demanded that major emphasis was on praise. Praise would reinforce positive attitudes. The study was evaluated by recording the reading sessions on a weekly record sheet. This included information on how the exercise went, the method used, reading material and the duration, etc. Different approaches were found to be used in different settings. The staff was aware of the impact of different approaches, but it was seen that foster carers gave more consideration to the particular methods used, and were more likely to change approach if the method proved unsuitable, or the strategies didn't work. They were also more consistent and committed to reading with the children than staff in residential settings. The foster carer showed greater interest in the project and in reading with the children, and they had a greater perception of the way such schemes could bring about an improvement in reading ability. The foster placement averaged a reading session five times a week for approximately 10-15 minutes. The Paired Reading approach was the strategy that was favoured, and the author suggests that it reflects the more natural reading activity in the home setting.

There was a low return rate of record sheets from staff in residential units, and on further investigation it was identified that they saw the recording of the reading exercises as unimportant, or that it was often overlooked on account of their busy schedules rather than lack of interest in project. Menmuir concluded that reading schemes in both settings had been beneficial, but there was a need for closer monitoring by senior managers in residential units and a raising of the expectation of reading as an integral enjoyable activity within the placement. Overall, the care workers were enthusiastic to engage with the project, and were surprised that even their earlier comments about the reluctance of participants, the young people, were proved wrong. In fact, both the care workers and children enjoyed being involved. The author suggests that perhaps the care workers had formed associations with being read to in primary school, and memories had been evoked of books the children had enjoyed in the past. The findings of the project recommended joint-working partnerships involving young people as reading partners, and one scheme that was initiated was the Buddy Reading Scheme.

Menmuir recognised that future success or failure in reading at school rested on the reading climate of the home, and identified that the partnership between child welfare policies and educational policies did not fit comfortably together, suggesting that one of the main

conflicts between the services lay in the nature of educational provision. He argues that a highly prescriptive National Curriculum, with its emphasis on competition between schools and league tables (and accounting for higher truancy and exclusion rates of children in care), results in access to educational entitlement being inhibited when there is a legal right to equal educational opportunity. He further asserts that there is a need to unite the different agencies in a common purpose that would have beneficial educational outcomes for these children. Projects, where there is collaboration between the two services (education and social services), can only result in a learning ethic and the formation of positive attitudes that will help children participate fully in school life and to have access to the full curriculum in the same way other children do.

Bald *et al.* (1995) like Menmuir, identifies that there exists between agencies a tension that needs to be resolved if the real needs of Looked-After children are to be met. He suggests that social service departments and educationalists have different priorities and perspectives that may have an effect on their commitment to any collaborative initiative, but he agrees that effective communication and liaison could be achieved through joint adult support in children's reading. Bald's small-scale research, *A Book of My Own,* is a book-buying and supported-reading scheme that recognises the value of reading in any context, but particularly in the in-care population. The scheme's ethos proceeds from the notion that owning books not only increases confidence, but also creates a reading culture, and promotes the idea that reading is a pleasure that can be shared with other people. Its primary aim was to enhance the status of reading as an enjoyable pastime, and create an ethos where books were seen not only as valuable in their own right, but could be shared and enjoyed with others in a sharing community. It is one such scheme that can help to engender pleasure in reading for Looked After children and. focuses on planned reading exercises between staff and children in a community home. Each member of staff was given a booklet, *Sharing Books with Young children* and each was assigned a child to read with. Twelve children ranging from teenagers to the youngest at three years of age participated, and each was credited with a £10 voucher to select and buy books at a local bookshop.

The aims and driving force behind this scheme is that staff will sit and read with the children, and share the reading experience; since research into paired and shared reading has shown this to be very important in promoting literacy development (Topping and Wolfendale 1995). The findings of the questionnaire sent to young people after the study showed a very

favourable response. 88% of the respondents read books other than schoolbooks. 91 % owned books, and 89% had been encouraged to read by someone else. A massive 98% owned their own books and most were library users.

The reading approach used was the Shared Reading model, and all that was required was a few hours' commitment in an environment that was warm and receptive, where time was made to discuss contents and to share common experiences. Bald came to the same conclusion as Menmuir: that staff in the residential setting did not prioritise their time to make the reading sessions part of their routine. The support given to the project was inconsistent and irregular, and, at the closure of the study, the commitment and consistency to find time to read was still proving difficult when all that was needed was ten minutes shared reading, a few days in each week. In a similar vein to Menmuir's project, the children were keen to be involved in the project, and the reason for the children's enthusiasm was the sharing of an activity with an interested adult.

The sharing of an activity that is enjoyable can act as an effective means of communication between carer and child; it can help in building relationships as well as having positive learning outcomes in the development of reading skills. Bald states that the effects of this activity go beyond the reading act. It may be the only opportunity that a child has of having the undivided attention of an adult. He asserts that vulnerable children need special efforts by carers to enable them to acquire effective and adequate reading skills. Even the act of listening was important if the adult was not able to participate in the shared reading experiences.

Bald recognises that learning to read in the informal natural setting of the home, whether this is a residential unit or foster placement, with regular and predictable support, will be an indicator of whether the child succeeds in reading in the school. He argues that it is always time constraints that will impede the development of regular reading sessions in residential units and foster placements, but asserts that it must be part of the framework of care, and must be accorded the same priority as other established practices. He identifies that reading activities in the home can forge strong links and effective liaison between home and school, and will act as a natural unifier between them. The place of books in placement can provide the opportunities for children to become familiar with bookshops, book clubs and libraries. Reading in placement, if it could be achieved, would be of incalculable benefit to children

and young people, and the author suggests that book-reading initiatives should be introduced onto foster carer training programmes and as part of in-service training packages for residential staff.

For inclusion in this historical review and to embed the current research in an appropriate and relevant research investigation, I should like to include and draw from the work of A. Heath *et al.* (1989) This is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) sponsored longitudinal study of three years duration with a sample of children aged between nine-eleven in middle to long-term foster placement, with an average length of stay of six years in one placement. Forty-nine foster children were compared with a control group consisting of fifty-eight children who had not been fostered, but whose families were known to social services, and were receiving support from them. All were white/European. Both groups were recruited from one local authority and were attending mainstream schools. There was no significant difference between the groups: both groups fell below the national average on reading test scores; both groups scored high on behavioural difficulties.

The study explored some possible causes for low educational performance, even where the placements were considered secure and stable, and the foster carers had high aspirations for their Looked After children. Social workers, teachers, carers, and the foster children were interviewed. Social and economic disadvantage were not factors as the foster homes were more advantaged than the control social group, and were closer to the average normal family. The authors claimed that the foster homes were 'educogenic environments,' and could be seen as homes that would provide conditions for higher educational attainment than was normally found; these were homes that could have been seen as an escape from the disadvantages of their homes of origin.

The result of the study showed that Looked After children did not do as well as others who lived in their natural home; they were performing well below the national average on standardised attainment tests. It also found in the three rounds of testing over three years, that the children who were suspected of being abused or neglected scored significantly lower than the other foster children. The authors recognised from these results that pre-care experiences, and the actual event of being taken into care, might be responsible for depressing their attainment levels and their educational progress in middle childhood. These findings showed that a history of neglect and abuse before entering care had lasting effects,

recognising that trauma from these early experiences would take a considerable time to overcome, though it was expected that achievement levels would improve when the children were fully integrated within the foster home. Instead, it was found that the children did not improve over time although initial gains on standardised reading scores were made for very young children if the carers had good qualifications. These gains were not maintained over time, however, and it was identified that even middle class foster care did not raise the expected educational attainment. Even when children were placed in long-term settled placements from three to ten years duration, they still underachieved and continued to display a high degree of behavioural and social problems. The authors asserted that children in long-term foster placement also showed higher rates of behavioural problems at school than children in the general population, or those that are adopted. It was also found that adoption was viewed more favourably than long-term foster care, as it was less the permanence of the placement that mattered, but the expectation of stability and the sense of security that comes with the expectation of permanence. The authors recommended that exceptional inputs were needed to lift them out of their disadvantaged state. It would only be by providing 'exceptional inputs' that any significant improvement would be shown, and then it would only be to average levels of success, but they did not go on to say what those inputs might be.

One major factor to emerge was the lack of importance social workers placed on educational matters. Almost all social workers placed education and the development of children's talents at the bottom of their list of priorities. The development of a positive self-esteem was also given a low priority, and very little of the 'Boarding Out' allowance was used to fund any educational resource. A most significant finding is the disclosure by social workers that information held by carers about educational progress was not included, or deemed important enough to be included, in statutory reviews, either verbally or in written form.

A large proportion of the carers in the study thought that decisions about behaviour, school issues and care planning, should be their sole responsibility. Social workers thought that decision-making should be made jointly between themselves and the carer. My own research will hopefully clarify and bring to light the specific role of carers and their perceptions of that role. In the A. Heath *et al.* study the foster parents were described as 'model parents', attending school events, encouraging library use and book-borrowing, supporting homework,

and yet, despite this literate environment and the high expectations of the carers, the children still underachieved in school.

Three small projects deserve a mention as they are significant to this study, and will almost complete this historical review of previous work and current research: *Read On – Write Away* (ROWA), the *Buddy Reading Project, Life Story Work* and *Talking Pictures*. The Buddy Reading Scheme is an innovative project designed to recruit young people in public care to become reading 'Buddies' to schoolchildren. It is a Derbyshire County Council Literacy Initiative and involves young people who are recruited from Care Leaving organisations. There are thirty projects running in the county, and sixty young people are being trained to give support to children in school for one hour a week. The training includes issues of confidentiality, health and safety, and they are expected to record their experiences in a training file. The success of the projects is due in part to the effective partnership of other agencies (The Basic Skills Agency/ Training and Enterprise Council/National Literacy Trust) as part of the Literacy Partnerships Network and 'joined up' service. There was also an enthusiastic response from the community and from the young people themselves, after it had been initiated in response to local need. It was a way of showing young people that learning could be enjoyable, even in school; it was a way of encouraging them back into an educational environment that may previously have had negative connotations for them if their school career was disrupted. It is hoped that by reading to children younger than themselves, that young people will feel a sense of purpose and belonging to a community. The services of the young people are valued, and this is having a very positive effect on confidence and pride.

Talking Pictures was a small-scale project funded from the National Year of Reading and delivered through North Tyneside library service, supported by other organisations. It involved seventeen Looked-After children aged fourteen-sixteen, who designed their own novel in eight workshop sessions. The aim of the project was to develop creative and social skills, as well as encouraging literacy skills and raising self-esteem. The children used a range of different media and artistic techniques, including photography, puppetry, mask making. At the close of the project a book was compiled entitled, *I was a Teenage Terror,* and this was distributed to schools, clubs, libraries and youth centres. Accessing the young people to volunteer to join the project proved difficult, as many different people were involved in the care of the young people; some did not encourage the participation in the

project, which affected attendance. It was felt that communication between project organisers and care workers would have been improved with more planning, and the organisers felt that such projects received bad publicity because they were offering the activities to a certain category of children, i.e. Looked After children. Overall the project has been successful.

Life Story Work has been included in this review, because I consider it to be one of the best initiatives for allowing children to explore their background and to work through the emotional currency attached to it. It is a little known initiative when one considers the importance of its work. Life Story work is an attempt to bridge the gap between 'home' and 'care' for children separated from their own families; its theoretical rationale is that children need to experience continuity and a sense of belonging. Exploring and charting past family life and history give a child a sense of identity and a background which too many children in care can lose sight of. A child is provided with a history when they might previously not have had one. The work involves gathering information about a child's past and present situation. Building up a history in the form of photographs, official documents, greetings cards, drawings, gift tags, etc, enables children to make sense of their circumstances and to come to terms with issues that may be affecting them. It is a therapeutic tool, and one that can create in children a feeling of continuity and shared care. By telling their life stories children can articulate any issue of concern, and make explicit any anxiety. Dates of special events and anniversaries are included, and anything else that forms a life history for the child. Through Life Story work children are able to talk with carers about life events, and it can help with the all important questions, such as Who am I, Where did I come from, What is happening now? Life Story work fits together the pieces of a child's life that may have been disrupted by constant placement moves, abuse or illness. The book may be the only stable thing in a child's life. Everyone involved with the child can contribute towards the life story, and this can provide the child with a documented record of the people who have been involved in his life. This can bring comfort and security if the experiences were positive. He is able to build his own 'family' from the people who are involved with him. This work has enormous potential, but we need to exercise caution in the stories that are being told. They have to represent the true reality, or else we are deceiving the children in order to protect the lives of adults. Life Story work should work towards making the child feel positive about his history, but it should not mask the truth of that history.

Other research evidence

The last section of this chapter extends itself to include the works and research of Cohen (1968) and S.B. Heath (1982). This is a supplementary section, but one that is necessary to include, because literacy acquisition and development do not occur in a vacuum. Literacy is not a linear process of development, nor does it occur solely as a result of instruction, but is significantly influenced by cultural influences and emotional factors, factors related to learning potential and social pressures. I felt Cohen and S.B. Heath's separate studies were valuable for inclusion, for they claim that socialisation processes in the home develop a specific conceptual learning style, and one which could be alien to the predominant learning style of the school. They claim the school is a middle-class milieu. This was most interesting, because, if children have a specific learning style before they entered school, which is not the same style of learning as that promoted by the school, then putting them into middle class foster homes, as identified in A Heath *et al.* (1994) study, would further disadvantage Looked After children because then both home and school are alien environments.

These two studies show that knowledge of the ways we learn, and the influences that inhibit learning must also be acknowledged, and therefore it becomes even more important to investigate 'home-grown' literacy. This is because different family groupings lead to different literacy expectations and different applications to literacy tasks.

Cohen identifies the two predominant learning styles as field-independent and field-dependent, or conceptual/ analytic and relational. She asserts that, when relational pupils are in an analytic school environment, then culture conflict can occur irrespective of natural ability. Identity is tied up with literacy practices. Both authors showed independently that children from impoverished backgrounds were at a disadvantage in acquiring literacy competence, because their 'known' literacy priorities were different from the school; as a result of the socialisation processes in the home, they had developed a learning style that was more objects related. The predominant style of the school, on the other hand, promotes a more analytical/conceptual style of learning. Osborn and St Clair (1987) and Aldgate (1990), have identified that the majority of children in care, or who come into care, come from impoverished working class families. This research by Cohen and S.B. Heath reassured me once again that we needed to look at the literacy culture of the home, and at the conditioning influences that may affect literacy development. If we waited for literacy to be developed in the school, then we would be increasing the difficulties for these children gaining sound

skills because of the disparity between home and school literacy. I will draw together a synthesis of Cohen and S.B. Heath's research.

In separate research designs, Cohen and S.B. Heath claim that educational disadvantage is a result of a specific learning style that is different to the indigenous learning style of the school. The ways children interact with material is dependent on, and influenced by, early socialisation practices, and the behaviour exhibited will reflect different learning patterns. They claim that the predominant learning style of the school is an analytical/conceptual style; it is a stimulus- centred approach that develops an ability to extract salient features from an embedded context, such as comprehending a difficult text and eliciting information from obscure sources. Both authors found that children from minority groups, who suffer socio-economic disadvantage and come from working class backgrounds, display a relational/non-analytic style; in other words they have a self-centred conceptual learning style that is more object-related, being based on a concrete reality. They claim that the style a child has is a predictor of how well a child does in the educational system. The relational learning style is found in the interaction and sharing of functions by low-status families, and is developed and sustained through the primary group, the family, and through participating with others who share the same values, norms and mores. Both authors claim that this learning style makes it difficult for children to adapt to the demands of the school. The family network sustains and reinforces these characteristics, and they become part of the cognitive apparatus. Cohen (1968) asserts that deprivation must be seen to be a result of particular learning characteristics, and that these characteristics can predict learning outcomes and educational achievement for the majority of children with this learning style.

Having a different learning style to the indigenous style of the school also creates consequences for the psychology and personality. As Cohen (1968:202) identifies,

> ... requirements of the school environment are largely analytical.
> Pupils with inadequate development of these skills and those
> who develop a different cognitive style could be expected, not
> only to be poor achievers early in their school experience, but also
> to grow worse, comparatively, as they move to higher grade levels.

Cohen goes on to say that when the two styles meet (in school) then a culture clash and conflict can exist. She sees them as two mutually incompatible learning styles, irrespective

of ability. Styles are formed by what we do with information, how much information is given, how we organise it, how it is selected, what is selected, and how the individual processes it. They evolve from social and psychological differences, differences in exposure to reading material; they evolve in dependencies on primary group interaction, in the development of concentration and attention, and in the application towards novel material and impersonal learning stimuli. Styles are formed as a result of formal styles of group organisation, and from interpersonal and socially processing behaviours. If there is congruence between middle class values and school values, then learning is optimised. However, if children interplay and intersect between different culture and value systems, then individual learning may not proceed satisfactorily.

S.B. Heath (1982) conducted a comparative, ethnographic study of three communities in the USA, and showed the different 'ways of taking' from books. She studied language use in relation to bedtime stories and reading, and she explored language patterns and socialisation processes. The study identifies that use of literacy varies between cultures and social groups. Ways of using literacy are embedded in the socialisation process and in patterns of oral language use. She describes the literacy events of bedtime story-telling in a white working class community (Roadville), a black working class community (Trackton), and in a middle class community (Maintown). She found different language use meant different adjustments to school demands, even when there were pre-school literacy opportunities. She recognised that ways of taking from books will depend on the culture a child grows up in. She identifies the disparities between different social class groups in relation to their use of literacy, and how such differences can have educational consequences for the children when they go to school. S.B. Heath (1982:61-64) identifies a field-dependent relational learning style in working class families and asserts,

> that pupils with this style are unlikely to be rewarded in the school
> setting either socially or by grades, regardless of native abilities
> and even if his information repertoire and background of experiences
> are adequate...They have no way of keeping up or of seeking help in
> learning; what it is they do not even know they don't know...are rarely
> able to take knowledge learned in one context and shift it to another.

The way that books are interpreted, the knowledge gained from them, identification of them with the external world, will be dependent on the children's 'known culture.' It is also

dependent on how children relate to the contents of books: whether books reflect their own reality, which has been learnt in the socialisation process. The ways of learning, S.B. Heath asserts, is through modelling, mirroring and emulating those around us, and ways of taking from books reflect this. She agrees with Cohen that early socialisation experiences determine a learning style, and are learned in patterns of child rearing and social organisation, She recognises that the school has to deal with a learning style that is different from the mainstream way 'of taking'. Differences include ways of reading together, sharing a literacy environment and being exposed to environmental print.

> Each community's way of taking from the printed word and
> using this knowledge is interdependent with ways children learn
> to talk in their social interactions with caregivers.

> S. B. Heath (1982:50)

S.B. Heath recognises that the analytical (or field independent) style is one that is identified with high achievement, and social and academic success. The style's characteristics reflect raised awareness of abstract, non-obvious features of stimuli, meta-cognition, selective attention and heightened concentration. They are learned patterns of specific behaviour and cultural norms, strongly identified with the social group the child belongs to; therefore, it is not simply enough to supply children with books, as supported and identified in the research of Neuman (2000). These seminal studies show how different literacies are developed, and why it is important to study diverse family structures and subcultures that have their own set of constructed practices.

Commentary

In summary, I have given a historical review of government policy and initiatives that were implemented to draw attention to the underachievement of Looked After children. The Children Act, 1989, became the watershed for change, where the children were now to be consulted in the decision-making process affecting their lives, and where parents would have continuing contact and responsibility for their children, even though they were living apart from them. An SSI/OFSTED Report in 1995 found that local authorities were failing to promote or provide adequate educational resources, or monitor progress. As a response the Utting Report (1996) was commissioned, which recommended a major restructuring of the care service, and The Quality Protects initiative was the initial response. This project would

reform and modernise the social services, and one of its major remits was to raise the educational achievement of Looked After children. This programme ran until March 2004. Each local authority was required to submit Management Action Plans, among other recommendations, to show what was being done to improve the life chances for this group of children. Action Plans were required that outlined the clear targets and objectives to be met. These were to include monitoring of progress, and providing information and goals in a Personal Education Plan that would be reviewed regularly.

Following on from the Quality Protects, *Choice Protects* was initiated to strengthen and reform fostering services. This included improved provision for carers to access specialist services and to help and support them in meeting children's educational needs. At the same time, a report by the Social Exclusion Unit found that, despite all the interventions, carers were still not receiving training in supporting children's education, and it highlighted a lack of communication and information sharing between agencies.

These findings led to the restructuring of Children's Services: the development of Children's Trusts and boards at local level, and a new Children's department at Government level that unifies and brings together all children's services under one umbrella.

Alongside these developments other recommendations were being implemented. A magazine published by The Who Cares? Trust bridged the gap, while these initiatives were evolving, by providing guidance and advice on the literacy needs of Looked After children. Charlie Griffiths (1999:5) the editor, suggested that carers were ill equipped to meet the literacy needs of foster children for the following reasons: they were uneducated themselves, were not very literate, were unaware of the importance of reading, and justified it by claiming that, 'others simply cannot be bothered.' My research will show if this is so. She also asserts, 'that as a society we do not expect children in care to succeed.'

The *Equal Chances* project (1998-2003a/b), supported by The Department of Health, developed a whole-authority approach to improve the corporate parenting skills of local authorities: its intention was to encourage cross-departmental collaboration through the sharing and disseminating of information. The project recognised that,

education is the key to the future but it is often
given a very low priority by people who make
decisions on behalf of looked after children and
young people.

The project provides resource material and advice that would enable authorities to meet the objectives set out in Quality Protects. *Care About Education* was another initiative that focused on raising the educational achievements of Looked After children. Offering a training package to authorities to address the critical issues surrounding education, and, a support network that could be used by professionals to share information or solve any problem would do this. It enabled practitioners to belong to a sharing and caring community with like-minded people.

Bald *et al.* (1995) study identified the importance of creating a reading culture in the home. He asserts that local authorities should have a book-buying budget, and that all children in care should own their own books as well as being regular library users. Books should form part of a sharing reading community. His study shows how the impact of establishing strong literacy links within the home increases confidence, and the study's recommendation is that carers will sit and read with their charges.

Literacy is a key issue in the education of all young people and
that promoting literacy in the lives of 'looked after' young people could
be a key factor in enhancing their educational life chances.

Bald *et al.* (1995:33).

The *Right to Read* project was another initiative specifically aimed at children in public care. Its aim was to promote reading in the care population by putting in structures that gave children opportunities to read with an interested adult. This included setting up libraries in residential settings, involving community services with bookshops, and encouraging carers to take a more proactive role in literacy development by reading together and selecting appropriate books that would increase reading enjoyment. A wider recognition was made of children's achievements, and these were acknowledged by the giving of awards. This successful project provides evidence that acquiring home-grown literacy skills is instrumental in engendering enjoyment in reading and success in school.

The work of Menmuir (1994), followed by Neuman (2000), showed that carer involvement in literacy practices encouraged a reading ethic in Looked After children. Neuman's experiment showed significant gains in reading competence in children who had been in constant and close physical proximity to books. The experiment also identified an increase in both verbal communication and range of vocabulary. Childcare staff was also supported in their reading activities, and it was claimed that training staff to support reading exercises would result in future reading success for the children. It was the active, interested interaction of an adult that was one of the principle keys to reading success. Flooding the environment with books alone or other literacy-enriched resources would not necessarily result in raised achievement. What the researcher found was that positive results only occurred when there was an interested adult who fully interacted with the child.

Menmuir's study identified that future success in reading rested on the reading culture of the home, and his research involved training key staff to recognise the importance of creating a reading climate. He argued that barriers against providing adequate learning resources were a result of bureaucratic muddles, with different departments and services giving different weighting to educational priorities. Schools, he suggests, do not give disadvantaged children access to equal opportunity because of the market-led nature of school policy. This project, too, trained key staff in reading techniques and acting as role models, in the hope that children would mirror their example. The main approach rested on the close interaction between carer and child. Foster carers were more committed to the project than residential staff who found it difficult to record reading sessions, and often found it hard to find the time to read with the children.

Life Story Work, Book Buddies and *Talking Pictures* are three small scale projects designed to raise literacy awareness in Looked After children. The Buddy Scheme encourages care leavers to become reading 'buddies' to younger children in a school environment. The scheme encourages the recruits to see education as valuable and reading as a positive and enjoyable activity. Life Story Work involves the charting of personal history. Documents are gathered, experiences and events are noted, and these are then made into a book. This work allows children to work through their own personal experiences and to retain a sense of identity with the people that have cared for them.

Talking Pictures was a novel project that involved seventeen young people in care. The project's rationale was to develop creativity and social skills through the use of art materials, and a book was designed and produced that was distributed to key organisations and services. This project identified the difficulty of accessing a 'hidden population' and the barriers that can affect a project's outcome. Communication between agencies was not effective. This affected recruitment, and the project director felt that such projects receive little public support because of the public's perception towards Looked After children.

Despite the provision of a long-term, stable foster placement, children were still unable to overcome their care and pre-care experiences, which impacted on their educational chances; they continued to underachieve despite having settled placements. A. Heath *et al.* (1989) study showed that a stable environment was not an indicator for educational success. The authors claimed that pre-care experiences might be to blame, especially where there was neglect or abuse. Even in a constant environment, children still displayed high degrees of behavioural disturbance. The authors assert that pre-care experiences may have depressed the children's attainment chances, and they recognised a considerable time may be needed to overcome this early disadvantage.

The last influential contributors to this review belong to the work of Cohen (1968) and S.B. Heath (1982). Their research is significant in identifying other influences that may account for educational underachievement: notably the learning style with which a child enters school that may be counter to the predominant learning style of the school. They claim that conflict exists when the relational learning style of the working class child is at variance with the more analytical style of the school. They assert that learning styles evolve through the socialisation process of the home, that ways of 'taking' from books and other learning material directly affects how the material is processed and negotiated, and that social class factors affect different codes of behaviour and learning patterns.

CHAPTER 2

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND INITIATIVES ON LEARNING
TO BE LITERATE

What obstacles get in the way of developing literacy in the foster placement, and what helps to promote its acquisition? This chapter is concerned with building on my historical knowledge and literature review from the inception of this research to the present. It explores how acquiring literacy skills is all the harder in a rapidly changing society: that is, the difficulties of improving the chances of becoming literate in a continually changing educational and social care climate. The chapter will also provide an evaluation of the most up-to-date findings to emerge from the statistics that have charted the results of academic performance of children in care from 2000 to the present.

Before any analysis of my own findings can be made, a number of key theoretical issues have to be discussed that will contextually embed my research. My own research findings are but a small contribution to a growing body of knowledge that shows the forces that inhibit or promote the development of literacy in the foster placement.

Lack of literacy competence or lack of educational qualifications is not confined to children who are Looked After. An Adult Literacy Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) Report, in 1995, showed that one in five adults is illiterate. Illiteracy is a national disgrace when we consider that a school career spans ten years. Measured against these odds, the chances of a Looked After child acquiring effective literacy skills could seem slim. Illiteracy is one of many hurdles these children must overcome, and we must ensure they do not become an adult statistic. Therefore, action has to be taken long before a child leaves school. Hopefully, the provisions made in the Pathway Plans for care leavers, who fall under The Children Care Leaving Act (2000), will ensure that the continuing educational needs of these children are met now they are to be assisted in accessing further education, training and work. This lessens the chances of becoming an adult with literacy difficulties.

Building on the literature review

Before we can claim that Looked After children are being given every opportunity to succeed in education, we need to look at all who could play a part in this success. Never before in the history of public care has there been this unremitting challenge to improve the life chances for Looked After children and the thrust continued with the publication in the autumn of 2003 of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) Report: *A better education for children in care.* The report outlined five major reasons why Looked After children were failing in education: instability, too much time out of school, insufficient help when they get behind with schoolwork, primary carers ill-equipped and not expected to provide support and encouragement for learning, and Looked After children had unmet emotional, mental and physical needs that impacted on their education.

Alongside the SEU Report was the publication of the Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (2004). This report offered guidance on the wider reforms in children's services and focused on *all* children. The guidance examined ways to improve the future of children's services, including looking at ways to reduce educational failure, particularly for Looked After children. The paper recognises the work that foster carers do, but carers were still not cited as a professional body of workers in the same way as teachers and social workers, or as valued members of the children's workforce, although the report recognises that one of the main areas of change has to be in raising the status and perception of carers, and includes suggestions on how to recruit and retain them. There was also recognition that they have to be paid more adequate allowances (including paid leave), improved respite provision, provision of better working conditions and enhanced training opportunities. They are not represented as key stakeholders, working together and pooling information through inter-agency collaboration to form a unified children's workforce. In fact, section 3.24 of the paper advocates 'paid leave (from work) to balance caring with their work.' It appears that foster carers do not work at looking after Looked After children but only care for them. The report recommends that foster carers could seek paid work in addition to their caring duties.

Three years after the inception of my own research, this publication supported my assertion that nothing much was being done to identify the foster placement as another potential educational site, or the carer as a potential educator, despite the welter of empirical research I have cited in my introduction and in chapter 1: that is, research which demonstrates that literacy development begins in the home, and home life influences the child's performance at

school. The seriousness of this failure continues to be overlooked by Government and so-called experts in the field who fail to identify (or do anything about) the connection between the family home and educational success. This relationship was still being overlooked even though the paper made reference to its importance. This is what the paper *Every child matters* also identified:

- 1.14 Children are particularly affected by their experiences during the early years before they reach school age.
- Research suggests that parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational attainment at age 10, which in turn is strongly associated with achievement later in life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers.
- A stronger focus on parenting and families. We need to pay more attention to the critical relationships between children and their families. When children cannot remain with their birth parents, we need the structure of the foster home to provide them with opportunities to develop personal autonomy, and the agencies that support the home should be working collaboratively to bring about this change and transition.

Despite these observations not much is happening at the level of the foster home in supporting carers to assist in raising educational achievement. Although the report appears to be implying that carers should be (even if they are not at present) dual partners to professionals, it is failing to see the full ramifications of equal partnership.

The report does recommend a reduction in the workload of social workers and the appointment of a local director of children's services to oversee the work of both social services and education, but there is no mention about the allocation (or re-allocation) of resources, or increased budgets to meet the new financial demands that will arise from the proposed increase in allowances for foster carers.

As a consequence of *Every Child Matters*, the Children's Bill passed through Parliament and became enshrined as the Children Act 2004. This new act now placed extra duties on local

authorities with an expectation that they must now actively promote the educational achievement of Looked After children by making sure that Looked After children have their educational needs properly identified and assessed.

Educational outcomes

The unprecedented drive to raise literacy standards in schools began in the late 1990's when the National Literacy Strategy was introduced. This was a strategy targeting all primary schoolchildren that hoped to create a reading culture and improve reading standards by introducing a *literacy hour*. This was an hour that would be devoted exclusively to reading and writing, and it was to be divided up between whole class, group and independent work.

In 1998 the government set a Public Service Agreement target that would be used as a marker for the concept of educational success for Looked After young people. This measure would be the gaining of one GCSE or its equivalent at any grade for all care leavers. The target had been set to narrow the gap between the educational accomplishments of young people in care and their peers in the general population, after it was established that 75% of care leavers left school without any qualification. By 2001, it was hoped that 50% of Looked After children at key stage 4 would achieve at least one GCSE or its equivalent, and by 2003, the percentage of Looked After children achieving this one GCSE was to rise to 75%. At the same time another target was set: that by the end of 2003/4, 15% of care leavers would achieve five GCSEs at grades A*-C. The targets referred to Looked After children who were in care on 30th September and had been continuously looked after for at least a year. (Source: Children Act Report (2000).

It was during this period that the first-ever recorded National Statistics on the educational levels of Looked After children were published. Following the publication of the Government's objectives for children's social services (1999) statistical returns (OC1) 'Educational Qualifications of Care Leavers' were required from local educational authorities with information about the educational attainment of all care leavers. This collection records the educational information at the point of leaving care. One of the objectives was 'to ensure that children Looked After gain the maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities...'

In 2001, another statistical return was required by authorities (OC2), which broadened the range of information to be collected to include the educational attainment at Key Stages 1 to 3, including separate English and Maths results at 11 years old. The OC2 data also recorded exclusions, absenteeism, and SEN statements. Included in the returns were the Personal Social Services Framework Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) indicators: A2, the percentage of young people leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grades A* - G, or GVVQ; and C24, the percentage of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months who were of school-age and had missed a total of at least 25 days during the previous school year.

By March 2003, the PSA targets were revised and new ones set. Now only 10% of Looked After children needed to gain a GCSE or equivalent, at any grade, and 90% of Looked After children had to sit (not pass) a GCSE by 2006. There was uproar from many voluntary agencies with accusations that the government had now lowered the expectations of this group, suggesting that these children cannot achieve educationally.

> The unacceptable state of affairs in educational attainment
> of children Looked After is reflected in the target chosen
> for the National Priority Guidance.

> DoH Report (2000)

These new targets now took into account *engagement in education* instead of focusing just on a measurable outcome. This took into consideration other variables such as the numbers of care leavers disaffected by school, and those who had studied a course but had not completed it. The new targets stated that by 2006, children in care at age 11 should be at least 60% as good in English and maths as the peer population, disaffection with school would be reduced, and there should be a 4% increase each year to fulfil the 15% target of care leavers achieving five GCSEs, grade A* to C by 2006.

In line with the PSA targets for Looked After children, the government set itself targets for all 11 and 14 year olds. In order to raise standards in Key Stage 2 in English (and maths) the Government set national learning targets for 11 year olds: that by 2006 (and sustained until 2008) 85% of children at this age should achieve Level 4 or above. For 14 year olds the government set another national target: by 2007, 85% of pupils nationally should achieve a Level 5 in English (maths and ICT) with this level also sustained until 2008.

The following tables expressed in numbers and percentages provide a summary of the statistical data supplied by 150 councils in England at September of each year, 1999 – 2005. The key indicators cover the number of Looked After children who were of school-age during the previous twelve months: absences and exclusions from school, SEN statements, and educational achievements and outcomes at critical key stages including GCSE level. They do not include children who did not sit their exams. Most tables include comparative figures for pupils of all ages and from all schools and data for this is collected from LEA's. Participation by independent schools is voluntary so any national analyses only include those independent schools which sent back returns.

The following information has been gathered from The Children Act Reports 2000-2004, DFES statistical bulletins and First Releases and Outcome Indicators for Looked after Children to 30th September 2000/01/02/03/04/05. 'Outcome Indicators' is a term used frequently in publication titles across government. It just means 'results'. The outcome indicators are not provisional figures but final ones. (Source: DFES Head of Profession for Statistics)

Table 2.1 Number of children looked after and in school at 30th September 2000-2005

	Looked-after children					
	Numbers					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of children Looked after	42,200	43,000	44,100	44,900	45,000	44,700
Number of LAC in school	33,100	33,800	34,500	35,100	35,300	34,800

Sources: Dfes 'Statistics of Education: Outcome Indicators for Looked after children: September 2002/2003/2004/2005 (Volume)' .Children Looked After in England (including adoptions and care leavers), 2004-05.

1999-2000: 42, 200 children were Looked After. Of those 33,100 were of school age.

2000- 2001: in September 2001 there were 43,400 children Looked After. 33,800 children were of school age, a slight increase on the 2000 figure.

2001-2002: at September 2002, 34,500 children of the 44,100 children in care were of school age. There has been a steady increase since 2000 of the number of children entering care.

2002-2003: by September 2003, 44,900 children had been looked after for at least twelve months, a small gain on 2002 figures. 35,100 of these children were of school age

2003-2004: at September 2004, 45,000 children had been Looked After during the last twelve months. 35,300 were of school-age, again a slight increase on last year's figures. The table shows that there has been a steady increase in the numbers of children entering care and staying longer than twelve months. The table also records a corresponding increase of Looked After children who are of school age.

2004-2005: by September 2005, 34,800 of the 44,700 Looked After children were of school age. The trend shows a steady and gradual increase in the numbers of children admitted to care during 2000 – 2004, with a slight decline in 2005. The trend shows a corresponding decline, in 2005, in the number of Looked After children who are of school age.

Key Stages Results

All pupils aged 5 – 16 must be taught the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum measures standards of achievement against attainment targets. These targets are divided into 4 key stages designed for pupils to progress through the standards. By the end of each key stage most pupils are expected to achieve level 2 at key stage 1, level 4 at key stage 2 and level 5 at key stage 3. This is approximates to 1 level every 2 years, and at the end of each key stage pupils will take national tests. National tests measure the specific knowledge, skills and understanding that each child should have mastered by the end of each stage.

From 2005 the assessment criteria for 7 year olds was modified by the Department for Education and Skills, and, for this year and subsequent years, only teacher assessments are required: assessment being undertaken by the class teacher, where prior to this both National Curriculum tasks, tests and teacher assessments were submitted. This modification followed

on from the results of a report *Excellence and Enjoyment – A Strategy for Primary Schools* that showed a more flexible approach to testing at this stage needed to be introduced.

The following table outlines the performance of Looked After children compared with all children at each key stage. The results do not include a Value Added Measure: a measure of progress that pupils make between each key stage and which gauges the progress pupils make during each term. The overall results show that Looked After children continue to lag behind their peers though showing a gradual improvement.

Table 2.2 Children in Care reaching target performance in key stage tests, per cent, compared with all children, at 30th September 2000-2005

	Looked-after children					all children			
	Percentages								
	2002	2003	2004	2005		2002	2003	2004	2005
Key Stage 1									
Number who attained									
At least a level 2 in									
Reading task/test	46.2	50.8	54.4	56		84	84	85	85
Writing	52.4	48.5	48.3			86	81	82	82
Key Stage 2									
Number who attained at least									
a level 4 in									
English	34.6	37.1	39.9	44		75	75	75	79
Key Stage 3									
Number who attained									
at least a level 5 in									
English	22.1	22.3	22.5	27		67	69	71	74

Sources: Dfes 'Statistics of Education: Outcome Indicators for Looked after children: September 2002/2003/2004/2005 (Volume)', Statistical Bulletins and First Releases: 'Statistics of Education: Special Educational Needs in England: January 2004 (provisional)', 'National curriculum assessments for key stage 3 and key stage 2 to key stage 3 value added measure for young people in England, 2003/04 (Final),' 'National Curriculum assessments for key stage 2 and key stage 1 to key stage 2 value added measures for young people in England, 2003/04 (Final)', 'National curriculum assessments of 11 year

olds in England, 2005 (Provisional)', 'National curriculum assessments of 14 year olds in England 2005 (Provisional)', 'National curriculum assessments of 7 year olds in England, 2005 (Provisional and Final)'. Statistical Press release 'Outcome Indicators for Looked after children: twelve months to 30th September 2004, England, (restricted statistics).

As the table shows, 79% of pupils nationally attained level 4 in Key Stage 2 English in 2005. Compared to the equivalent figures for 2002/03/04 progress towards the national target of 85% of pupils reaching level 4 by 2006 is doubtful. The figures represent no change for the years 2002/03/04 and a rise of 4 percentage points in 2005. If the same rate of progress is sustained the national target for 2006 will not be met. For pupils aged 14 years, 74% of them achieved a Level 5 in English. Again in comparison to the previous figures for 2002/03/04, the figures represent a rise of 2 percentage points for each year 2002/03/04 and a rise of 3 percentage points for 2005. If the same rate of progress is made then it could be predicted that the national target of 85% by 2007 will be reached. Note: The figures for 2005 are only provisional. The Final figures are not due to be published until the summer Of 2006.

It seems unlikely that the Public Service Agreement target of 60% of Looked After children at age 11 doing as well in English as their peers by 2006 will be achieved.

Table 2.3 GSCE or equivalent performance of looked-after children compared with all children, at key stage 4, school year 11, ending 30th September 2000 -2005

	Looked-after children						all children					
	Percentages											
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number who obtained at least:												
1 GCSE at grade A* to G or GNVQ	49	50	53	53	56	60	94	95	95	95	96	97.4
5 GCSE's at grade A* to C	7	8	8	9	9	11	49	48	52	53	54	56.5

Source: DOH: 'Outcome indicators for Looked after children 2001', Children's Act report 2001, DfES: Children's Act report 2002, Statistical First Releases 'GCSE and Equivalent results for young people in England, 2004/0 (Provisional)',

The results in Table 2.3 show that the PSA target for 2001 of 50% of care leavers achieving 1 GCSE, grades A* - G or equivalent, was actually reached according to the Department of Health's Outcomes for Looked After children published in 2002. (This is the document I have referred to throughout the five years of publication to assess the educational progress of Looked After children and young people.) If 'Outcome Indicators' are final results, as I was assured by a statistician at the Department of Education and Skills, there should have been rejoicing, but there was nothing, not even any press coverage. Nevertheless, if the result was correct then real progress was being made.

By 2003, the percentage of Looked After young people achieving at least 1 GCSE A* - G was targeted at 75%. The above table shows that 53% achieved 1 GCSE, the same as the year before, and only 9% achieved 5 GCSEs. The PSA target hoped there would be a 4 point rise on the previous year of care leavers attaining 5 GCSEs at grades A* - C, but this was not reached.

In 2004, school year 11, 56% of Looked After children achieved at least 1 GCSE or GNVQ. This figure is a rise of 3 percentage points on the previous year, which is encouraging, with 9% of Looked After children obtaining 5 GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A* to C and this remains the same as the year before.

The results for 2005 show that 60% of Looked After children achieved 1 GCSE at grades A* - G, or an equivalent GNVQ. 11% obtained 5 GCSE's at grades A* - C. The trend shows a slow but steady narrowing of the gap between the educational attainments of Looked After children and all children.

By 2006, the percentage of Looked After children achieving 5 GCSE's at grades A* - C was targeted at 15%. If the same rate of progress is made it seems unlikely that this target will be met.

Table 2.4 Educational information of Looked After children and all children

	Looked-after children						all children					
	Percentages											
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number with a Statement of Special Educational need	26	26	27	27	27	27	-	-	3.0	3.0	3.0	-
Number of permanent exclusions	1.5	1.3	1	1.1	1	1	-	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-
Number who missed 25 school days	12	12	12	12	12	13	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number who remained in full-time education	52	53	56	57	59	61		71	72	72	72	73

Source: DOH: 'Outcome indicators for Looked after children 2001', Children's Act reports 2001, DfES: Children's Act report 2002. 'Outcome Indicators for Looked after children: Twelve months to 30 September 2003/ 2004/2005 England.

1999-2000: 26% had SEN Statements. Special Educational Need is a learning difficulty which requires children to have special educational provision made for them and data is obtained in the January school census, although other data are based on figures at September. 12% missed at least 25 days of school (figures for this collection are not recorded for all children). 1.5% received a permanent exclusion. If a child was excluded permanently more than once in a year, then each occasion has been counted. 52% remained in full time education compared to 71% of all school leavers.

2000-2001: 26% had SEN statements, the same as the previous year. Coincidentally, 12% missed at least 25 days of school, again the same as the year previous. 1.3% received a permanent exclusion, which was down slightly from the previous year. 53% remained in full-time education compared to 72% of all school leavers, comparable to the previous year.

2001-2002: 27% of children had a SEN statement, a slight increase from previous years. Interestingly, 12% of children missed at least 25 days of school, the exact percentage as in previous years. For this year there was a slight decline in the numbers of children being excluded, with 1% of children receiving a permanent exclusion. 56% of children remained in full time education, a small increase on previous years.

2002-2003: 27% had SEN statements. 12% missed at least 25 days of school. 380 (1.1%) received a permanent exclusion compared to 0.1% of all children. 57% of young people remained in full-time education compared to 72% of all school-leavers.

2003-2004: 27% had statements of special educational need, the same figure as the previous year. 12% missed at least 2 days of school, with 1% having a permanent exclusion. 59% of Looked After young people remained in full-time education compared to 73% of all school-leavers.

2004 – 2005: the figures for this year were similar to previous years. 27% of Looked After children had SEN statements. There was a small increase in the number of Looked After children who missed at least 25 days of school; with children being permanently excluded remaining the same as last year. 59% of children remained in full-time education. This compares with 73% of all school-leavers.

We can see from the tables, which really needs no explanation, how poor the educational performance of this group is. We can also see how movement to improve the educational chances of this group is very slow and how over-represented Looked After children are who have SEN statements when the national average is approximately 3%. These figures also show how likely it is for Looked After children to be excluded from school. The trends outlined show how difficult it is to raise the educational stakes for Looked After children, and although from the statistics we can gauge a very slow improvement, Looked After children still lag far behind their peers.

> Improving the education attainment of children who
> need to be looked after by local authorities is a more
> difficult problem than originally thought.

DoH Report (2001)

Data quality

As with all statistics the results outlined here must be viewed with caution and only used as a gauge of what might be happening. There are inconsistencies in the recording of data in addition to revisions and updates throughout the year, rounding up and down of figures, suppression of very small numbers, and sitting exams before or after coming into care compound the difficulty in recording accurate data. An improvement in the educational results year on year may only be because councils become better at gathering information and recording quality data. It is also complicated by the transient movement of children coming in and out of care (perhaps even in the same year)

Collection of data could be further complicated by loss of contact with a young person who leaves care: their educational record going unrecorded because of a failure to keep records up to date or a failure to transfer records to appropriate places. Young people may also sit exams earlier or later than their peer group, and two results could be recorded for the same child in the same school year if a child is permanently excluded twice in that year. Note: Permanent exclusions are not for indefinite periods. There may also be difficulties for local authorities submitting data to the Department because they have failed to obtain the data from some schools. Schools who fail to send in data before the cut-off date have to submit the results later in the year. In 2005, there were also data omissions because a high volume of GNVQ results went missing from the data supplied by the Awarding Bodies. Source: First Release GCSE and Equivalent results for Young People in England, 2004/05 (Provisional).

Discrepancies in the recording of data do occur and is why results can only give 'indications' of the educational attainment of Looked After children. For example, for the year ending September 2000, the results recorded in the Children Act Report of 2000 (published by the Department of Health) showed that 30% of Looked After children left school with one GCSE A* - G, and only 4% achieved at least five GCSEs A* - C. In 2001, the new Children Act Report (2001) showed the same figure of 30% (for the year 2000) for children gaining one GCSE A* - G. Yet if we look at Table 2.3 of the Outcome Indicators for Looked After children for the year ending year 2000, 49% of Looked After children obtained at least one GCSE A* - G and 7% gained five GCSEs A* - C. Since only thirteen authorities in the first cohort, 1999/2000, recorded sufficient information and reached the set targets, this first year must only be viewed as a guide of what might be expected in subsequent years.

I found other anomalies both in the Children Act Report 2001 (published by the Department of Health) and in the Children Act Report 2002 (now published by the Department for Education and skills). Both recorded different figures from one other, and both set of figures were different to the Outcome Indicators recorded in the tables for the years 2000 – 2002. I found the discrepancies in the data curious and frustrating, especially as it appeared that the PSA target of 50% achieving a GCSE in 2001 had been achieved according to the Outcome Indicators recorded for that year, while the Children Act Report 2001 and 2002 recorded very different figures of 37% and 40% respectively. According to their figures the PSA target had not been reached.

I decided that if the difference in the figures was only one percentage point, then it would probably not affect the overall national figures. If the rise in percentage points was greater than this, then this would affect the overall results. The figures quoted in each report are the final figures and are not provisional or revised so any inaccuracies cannot be due to amendments or revisions. Note: 'Historical data may differ from older publications. This is mainly due to the implementation of amendments and corrections sent by local authorities after the publication date of previous materials'. (Source: Statistics of Education: Children looked after by Local Authorities Year ending 31 March 2005 Volume 1: National Tables, published April 2006).

Unfortunately the benchmark for success in academic terms in schools is meeting the key stages of the National Curriculum and the achievement of GCSEs, so these statistics are useful in knowing how Looked After children compare with the general population. Statistics, however, are only useful as a gauge to show how much more there needs to be done, in and out of school, to raise the educational game for this group of learners, and they must not be used as a tool to label pupils and place them in a situation where schools may not welcome them, because of the increasing pressure on schools to get 'results'.

It is also unfortunate that schools are only judged to be a success when 50% of its pupils fulfil the criteria of achieving five or more GCSEs. If schools achieve less than a 25% success rate for pupils gaining these awards, the school is considered to have serious weaknesses and can be put into special measures. This has serious implications for Looked After children.

The government peddles success. Indeed, it is preoccupied with it.
Targets and league tables rule the day. Schools, universities, hospitals,
local governments, the railways are all being measured and judged
against performance targets.

<div align="right">Hartley-Brewer (2002:31-33)</div>

School literacy development

The considerable coverage in the press of the exam grade inflation fiasco of 2002, and the

continuing yearly coverage by the media of accusations that standards are now 'watered

down' does not give us faith in the school and exam system, and this at a time when the drive

is to raise the educational standards of Looked After children. There have been many claims

that this is happening, reinforced with comments such as,

for all the Government's boasting about its great
success with the literacy hour in primary schools the fact
is that standards in secondary schools are still – thanks to
fundamental flaws in the literacy scheme and epidemic
cheating in school tests – shockingly bad.

<div align="right">Phillips (2003:12)</div>

Woodhead, the ex-Chief Inspector of Schools, described Britain in 2002 as living in 'an

educational cloud cuckoo land'. Our Looked After children must play no part if 'success' is

through dishonest means, social engineering or any discriminatory practices that do not

reflect authentic ability. All negative publicity about grade inflation and watering down of

results only serves to depreciate true achievement and will not make Looked After children

feel they have achieved something really worthwhile when they do get the results now

expected of them.

...in the last 30 years, academic standards have fallen
and bright children are not adequately stretched. The
GCSE, for example, is the 'exam that no-one can fail'
and has arguably pulled much of the educational system
down.

<div align="right">Lea (2002:62)</div>

Schools have many pressures that can impact on the goals set out in the new Children Act. 2004. *The Schools Admission Code of Practice* (2003) identifies Looked After children as a disadvantaged group and recognises the admission difficulties for these children. The Code recommends that local authorities give priority to children in care by allowing admissions procedures that might fall outside the normal admissions criteria. Recommendations, however, are not the same as having a duty to comply with the guidance given, and in 2004 the government unveiled its five-year education plan that could appear to give schools even more chance of non-compliance. Schools now had increased powers to manage their own affairs, including autonomy over their own admission policies. Concerns were now aroused by the Education Select Committee (2004) about overseeing schools to ensure their admissions procedures remained inclusive. The Committee feared that Looked After children could be further disadvantaged.

Schools have other pressures, too, which can impact when making decisions about admissions. The Education Minister in late 2003 was urging schools to teach pupils from other lands the language native to them, even though the Home Secretary was calling for all immigrants and those from ethnic minorities to learn English in order for them to be a fully integrated and active participant in society (Daily Mail, October 16[th]2003: 29). Moriarty, a columnist in the Daily Express, informs us that detention is now outlawed in schools.

> Teachers have been banned from handing out
> detention to unruly pupils because education
> bosses fear they are breaching schoolchildren's
> human rights.

Moriaty, January 6th, 2003:2.

The implementation of a new National Curriculum in 2000 saw the development of a modularisation system. This system now made it possible to 'modularise' subjects, completing units instead of studying one block of knowledge all at once. If a candidate failed a module it became possible to re-sit until the outcome was successful. This also allows more time to work through each unit, which means that many candidates are able to get higher grades and many passes, and a low failure rate. This reflects in the national tables. This type of learning can mean there is the time and space to consolidate the learning material and this can work well for students who have missed out chunks of schooling, but it is questionable

whether students are really learning how to learn by this method. Curriculum 2000 also saw the launch of 'booster' classes in the core subjects of maths, English and the sciences. This is a 'crash course' of programmes designed to get children through their exams.

The National Literacy Association's Education Officer argued in 2003 that:

- Inspectors have said about Curriculum 2000, which was devised to give all schools a clear curriculum model, and cost £163 million, that it has achieved much less than intended. The range of subjects has not broadened significantly and the scope of teaching within subjects has narrowed. In other words it has had exactly the opposite effect to what was intended.

- The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have not brought any real improvements in pupils' achievements. Inspectors asked for a review of the elements in the National Literacy Strategy.

- Key Stage tests at 7, 11 and 14 cost enormous amounts of money and are said by parents to cause unnecessary stress, and by teachers to produce unreliable results. Key Stage 2 targets will now be dropped.

In February 2002 the DfES published its Green Paper, *1-19: Extending opportunities, raising standards*. This report announced that more vocational GCSEs would be introduced, such as applied science, engineering, and business studies. These courses would allow pupils aged fourteen and upwards to learn work-based skills, take up work-related courses, and work in paid placements.

The recommendations also outline the fast tracking of brighter children, skipping GCSEs altogether and going straight onto AS levels. I am not sure whether all these changes from year ten will not complicate even more the accreditation route for schools having to deal with transient pupils. Skipping major stages in learning development is not such a good idea when knowledge and skill building requires a slow steady growth, and expansion of the knowledge and skill base built on existing knowledge and skills. You would not build a house without first putting in the foundations.

Virtual Schools is another initiative to try to address the issue of underachievement, and Liverpool Council was one of the first councils to launch a virtual school. Virtual Schools deliver e-learning packages via a computer. They can provide Looked After children and their carers with additional tuition outside of school hours. The children are able to get extra support designed to help them improve their school performance, and designated teachers, who have responsibility for monitoring and charting the educational progress of every Looked After child, advise and support the programme with study aid support and learning materials.

In another effort to improve the educational chances of this group, plans were drawn up in 2003 by the Education Minister (of the time) to send Looked After children to private, fee-paying boarding schools. This seemed to be an uncharacteristic proposal, given the egalitarian philosophy of the present government who abolished the assisted places scheme when they came to power in 1997 because the scheme was seen as inequitable. Public and private schools are seen as privileged. One reason for this proposal rested on the belief that boarding schools could provide more stability and continuing care, because instability of placement had been identified as a major factor in poor educational attainment. Barnado records in The Times, 13 June 2003, that social services already had the power to buy in services from the independent sector, but did not do so on 'ideological grounds', viewing private education as elitist and unfair to children being educated in the state sector.

In an effort to widen access to higher education, the Government also introduced at this time an 'Improving Retention' fund, where extra cash was given to some universities to support, throughout their chosen courses, students who came from poorer, more disadvantaged backgrounds. This special funding, which was cash from the Higher Education Funding Council, was also allocated to students who may not have fulfilled the admissions criteria, but who came from a minority group.

The funding crisis in 2003/04 did not help to assist the passage in raising achievement. This arose because overall spending had increased, and changes to meet new pension, National Insurance contributions and salary scales were not adequately funded. There had been wrangling between government and local authorities with accusations that authorities had been mismanaging their budgets, because schools were not getting the extra funding from the

local authorities that had been allocated to them. Local authorities counterattacked and accused the Government of not meeting the new demands.

Funding issues had struck local authority social services earlier when the increasing diverse needs of Looked After children threatened good service delivery. In the Community Care magazine (February 21st 2002) The Association of Directors of Social Services (ADDS) claimed that councils were having difficulty 'keeping afloat', and are 'creaming off' funds from other essential services (as well as raising council tax) to cope with the increasing demands on their budgets.

Arun (2003) argues that any new money always comes with too many strings attached, and asks if the public sector organisations will be given sufficient resources to allow them to allocate enough people to improving service provision, or whether improving service provision will be just another spinning plate to impress audiences and voters.

The funding, which has been released into the system to try and improve things, has been substantial.

- In 2003/04 £19.75 million was given to local authorities to improve and strengthen fostering services, some to be used to train foster carers.
- The SEN small programmes Fund.
- The Children's Fund.
- The Standard Fund foster children's education.
- Vulnerable Children's Grant: £84m for 2003/06, to help raise the education of children in care.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). £140m grant for Child and Mental Health Services
- Choice Protects: £113m for the years 2003 to 2006, some of which should be used to support and train foster carers.

During 2003-4, in response to the Choice Protects Programme, each local authority was allocated £19.75 million to improve and strengthen existing services and to initiate new ones. It was hoped that each authority would now be in the process of implementing even more changes to their fostering practices and policies. Despite this intervention there continues to

be a crisis in foster care recruitment, and, according to Frean (2003), children are moved between foster placements every few weeks. Prasad, in an article from The Guardian (2003), argues that the unfair treatment of carers is also fuelling the difficulties.

In a letter to all Chief Executive's in 2003, the then Minister of State for Health wrote, 'I expect each local authority to put this money to good effect – for example, to improve the support and training offered to carers…' The SEU Report (2003) reported that the Quality Protects funding, some of which was earmarked for improving the fostering service, was not being spent on it.

> Choice Protects funding, worth £113m over 3 years, is ring fenced
> for improvements to fostering services, including measures to
> promote placement stability. Funding can be used to help foster
> carers to support children's education.

> Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003:4).

With the thrust to reform all the major services, the real needs of children can get submerged beneath a tidal wave of change. There are many influences that impact on the ability of services to raise achievement. Some are subtle and some have a more direct effect. Adoption issues have in recent years placed fostering in the backwaters as the drive has been towards more permanency through adoption. These pressures, along with continual demands for change in meeting performance criteria that came into force with the introduction of the new Performance Ratings for Social Services in 2003, demand high standards of practice. All exert a pressure and threaten efforts to raise achievement.

The increase in older children and young people being admitted to care - and staying in care longer (DoH 2001) - means increasing demands are made on shrinking resources. Even the impact of devolution in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland may in time show that instead of having a unified service delivery, the services have become fragmented and fractured, and, depending on where you live, determine the quality of care provided. Diversity does not necessarily mean unity when services are disparate and unequal in service delivery; it may not strengthen, but weaken, a unified fostering service and our services to

children. Reform has brought about changes in infrastructures, organisation, management policies and implementation, but budgets are squeezed as areas are prioritised.

What happens when all the initiatives have gone home, the money has dried up and the heat is turned down and attention is drawn to some other electoral issue? Funding for the Quality Protects initiative ran out in March 2004. (£885m over five years) Has it been wisely spent? Denise Platt, the then Chief Inspector of Social Services, speaking at a conference in October, 2001, stated,

> thereafter [after 2004] the funding will become part of mainstream
> budgets and it would be up to councils to maintain the improvements.
> That's your challenge and not ours.

It becomes all too obvious why these children underachieve in education and there must be a concern that this plethora of interventions may be diverting attention away from being proactive with the children or with foster carers on the front-line. Changing priorities divert attention away from fully engaging with Looked After children and young people, which will impact on their ability to perform and succeed in education, and inhibit the development of literacy. If agencies and departments are continually being buried under constantly changing policies (new legislation, new targets) then something or someone has to suffer while these changes are being implemented. Raising the educational level of a group of disadvantaged children may get lost amongst such hectic activity.

CHAPTER 3:

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

This research sought to explore the contribution carers made in providing a literate environment in the foster placement, and to assess how carers perceived themselves as educators. These were my central aims. The choice of research focus has been influenced by current debates, government interventions and academic discussion, all of which claim the education of children in local authority care is in crisis, and that local authorities and schools are not as good a corporate parent or educator as they should be in supporting and promoting educational opportunities of the children in their care (Fletcher 1999). The intention of this research was to find out if the foster placement is in any way responsible for this failing. This chapter is divided into four sections, each identifying a specific aspect of data generation. The first section explores the research problem. The second section explains the choice of methodological instruments used. Section three explores sampling techniques and the sampling frame, while section four looks at access and ethical issues.

A big problem is a series of little problems, so my research evolved from a series of little steps. This prevented me from running in all directions and enabled me to keep focused; it also kept the research process systematic and rigorous. Therefore, in order to make sense of all the data that I gathered, I first needed to have some kind of conceptual framework to work within and to keep the research 'tidy' as far as possible.

In my introduction I have acknowledged how very important it is for intellectual growth to promote literacy awareness and development in the home. I have also identified in chapter one other researchers in the field and their methods of investigation, and I have given an account of projects involving book schemes in residential units and in schools involving children Looked After.

My literature review shows that sharing knowledge within the home and socially interacting within a known community establishes known 'literacy' rules: that is, social literacy rules that become a part of the socialisation process within families. The review also shows how

influences from the environment impact on the learning process, and how these dynamic learning processes operate within the family setting.

Now I wish to extend the concept of family literacy development to explore the foster home. It is essential to gain an understanding of literacy development within this home situation, now that it is the major provider of care for children who do not live in their own families (Haydon *et al.* 1999). There is a need to explore 'alternative home' literacies and to identify specific events and practices between diverse family structures, since 'family', as a concept, has changed from its perception as a nuclear unit of two adults, married, with 2.2 children, to one where there are many different family arrangements. Literacy development and practice is not a unidirectional process, but one where the practices and processes are fluid, changeable, embedded within a social context, and in different family constructions. Literacy acquisition in foster placement is a unique educational setting, but it is one that also has different 'types' of fostering arrangements: specialist, family link, respite, remand, long and short term (Schofield 2000). So we can see that carers are not a homogenous group or any foster home an atypical foster placement.

The literature search would continue to be ongoing and form part of my data collection, because it would keep me informed of changing priorities, new developments and new research. It would support my own research, introduce me to key issues and enable me, in the first instance, to formulate my own research design and methods of data generation. I would also draw on the work of other researchers throughout this investigation to promote any argument and to broaden my discussion when my findings and results became known. When a research investigation is of several years duration, there is a constant need to modify existing priorities as others emerge. Therefore the literature review and search for new supporting evidence would continue to grow and emerge. My analysis cannot just be restricted to my own findings; otherwise theory cannot evolve and develop.

The research problem

What is it that I wanted to know? The specific research problem area has to emerge gradually by a process of elimination. I wanted to find out what literacy opportunities were in place in the foster placement and to understand the specific contribution carers made to literacy development. I needed to know if carers had knowledge of the importance of giving literacy opportunities, and whether they provided them. How *did* they foster literacy in fostered

children? *Who* were the carers and *what* were their perceptions of themselves as educators? What were their own literacy practices, and how did they regard their own literacy competence? Were they educated themselves? What was their own standard of education, and did some have literacy difficulties themselves? Griffiths (1999) said they did. How equipped were carers in promoting an educational work ethic? Did they value educational effort? How did they perceive their role in relation to the school and the placing agency? Did they have to undergo training, and, if so, did it involve literacy awareness? How significant was the literacy development of foster children to carers? Were there difficulties in providing or promoting a literate environment? I also needed to understand the subtle influences that inhibited or promoted literacy development within this setting.

Research objectives

I had literally hundreds of questions swimming around in my head! I had identified my central aims; now I had to determine what my main objectives were, develop a theoretical framework, and frame my initial questions. My main objectives for undertaking the research were:

(i)   To generate an acknowledgement that literacy development in the home is as important (if not more so) as literacy instruction in the school and should be part of policy and practice in foster placement.

(ii)   To increase understanding of the relationship between literacy, learning and personal autonomy of a marginal group, and the need to equip such groups with 'literacy life skills'.

(iii)   Provide recognition (hopefully) of the important role carers play in literacy development.

(iv)   To promote an understanding of the need to put in place an infrastructure that supports the development of literacy, irrespective of funding criteria.

I was narrowing the field in defining my research focus, and now I had to decide how to utilise my questions and decide the framework in which they were they going to be asked. The direction of my initial questioning would be influenced by five important ideas. One was from the A. Heath *et al.* study (1994:459).

We doubt, given the evidence reported here, that the
explanation (failing to achieve despite being in
long-term, stable placements) will lie in insufficient
attention on the part of the foster parents to the children's
educational needs.

I sought to find out if the suggestion is true. I was also interested in the following idea that

came from the magazine, *Breaking their fall.*

Some carers are perhaps not aware of the importance
of reading with a child. The most vulnerable may
be cared for by the least qualified.

Griffiths (1999:5)

The next pertinent thought came from Bald *et al.* (1995:19)

...more needs to be done to ensure that carers are fully
informed about the educational progress of the young
people they are looking after.

These quotes were supported by Menmuir (1994) who claimed that children may have

limited exposure to adult interest in educational matters, because the adults may not have had

positive experiences of education themselves to support the children.

It is they (foster carers) who talk and play with children,
read books and listen to reading, choose books and toys, take
them to the library, on outings to places of interest and create
a family environment which may do more or less to contribute
to the child's cognitive development. They also, implicitly or
explicitly, provide health and social education and have the
opportunity to teach the child skills which are not included in
the school curriculum, but may be very important in adult life.

Jackson (1988b:10).

Is this important thought from Jackson also true? Do carers provide this educative

environment? I earnestly hoped so, and I drew from the quotes and determined to find out

for myself.

Apart from gathering data about the literacy practices in the home and the perspective of the carers, I was hoping to generate some clues as to why children continue to fail educationally in stable foster homes. Would I be able to detect subterranean influences to find clues for under-performance? I hoped to be able to learn everything that impinged on the literacy learning process, and, even though it might not have direct relevance to the investigation, it would deepen my understanding of the dynamics within the foster placement. The skill of the researcher is in drawing inferences from the accounts given, and from observation of people who are usually complete strangers at first. Was it also true, as claimed by Griffiths (1999), that carers had little knowledge or skills to promote and provide a literate environment? I was beginning to feel like a detective. I wanted accuracy in my results, so the questions posed had to reflect exactly what I wanted to find out.

What other information did I need? Do carers read stories regularly, daily? Do they read bedtime stories? Are the children given opportunities to read with an interested adult? Are there plenty of books, magazines and comics in the home? Are there plenty of crayons, pencils in sight? Do children have use of a computer? Are they encouraged to write thank you notes, cards and letters? Do the carers involve themselves with school matters, attend parents' evenings, encourage homework and take an interest in education generally? Are the children attending school regularly? What influences impact on attendance? Do the children have a school advocate / a designated teacher, who takes an interest in them personally? Do the family visit places of interest, belong to a library, and give books as gifts? These are some of the questions that were addressed.

I needed to remain clear about the main aims and objectives of my research design. The major underpinning theory (or idea) of this research was on the foster placement as a potential educational site and the carer as a potential educator in developing literacy competence. I wanted to obtain an in-depth description of the literacy dynamics within the foster home, but I wished to focus only on the principal carer, and only seek information from them. I did not extend my investigation beyond this aim. I wanted carers who were unrelated to their foster children, and they could be drawn from local authority social service departments and independent fostering agencies, but not from private fostering arrangements. No distinctions were made between lengths of stay of any particular foster child. I had to keep these fundamental principles in the forefront of my mind when developing my working practices.

The research question

There has to be a starting point in any investigation, so the scene must be set by asking appropriate questions at the outset to act as a springboard for further development. In this initial phase I had to ask a 'why' question as well as a 'what' question; otherwise the investigation would lead towards a more descriptive analysis, rather than one that sought to find the reasons why a certain phenomena was occurring, though it is true I also needed to find out what actually was occurring. I wanted to extend my investigation beyond a descriptive analysis to find explanations. Could underachievement be due to the level of education of the foster carers, or due to their own negative educational experiences? If either condition exists, then developing literacy in the home would be made all the more difficult. Could it be due to lack of opportunity in the home or factors related to the school? Would I find relationships between these variables? My literature review was already giving me clues. Further clues and answers would be found by asking pertinent questions, probing, becoming more enlightened about what was going on, gaining deeper insights, finding out what actual practices, opportunities and events were taking place, and how carers perceived their role as educators. It would also involve finding out if recent initiatives had changed carers' perceptions of how their role should be fulfilled.

Research shows that it is the active participation of parents/family that is the main determinant in successful literacy promotion. Were carers actually engaging with the children? (Neuman 2000) I wanted to know if carers engendered and fostered an ethos for learning by consistent encouragement, support and active involvement. The main research questions that needed exploring were these:

(i)   What literacy opportunities, events and practices are taking place (or not taking place) in the foster placement?

(ii)   Does the foster home foster literacy development?

(iii)   How equipped are carers in providing a literate environment, and do they perceive themselves as having an educational role?

(iv)   Why are children still failing academically, despite some being in stable, long-term foster placements? How do we know carers are not partly responsible? This question is a supplementary one, and my design will probably not allow me to fully explore the reasons; however, I will still

look for clues, cues and covert influences that may account for this phenomenon.

Methodological instruments

Drafting the precise questions was the next stage but which methodological instruments did I want to use and why? What would be my information-gathering process? My emphasis would not be solely on the end product or outcome, but would involve giving an account (and explanation of) the process of the research. After all, who could tell at the outset if the intended end product would be realized?

Because I only wanted to explore one small facet of family life and not general family dynamics, The Family Assessment and HOME Inventory Assessment tools were not used. Ultimately, I only wanted to provide an account of the literacy practices within the foster home: an account that was balanced and impartial, which hopefully would make a contribution in furthering our knowledge of the educational practices and literacy opportunities within these homes. I wanted to find out how literacy was being developed, about the literacy opportunities inside and outside the home, and what actual events were taking place.

Research has many twists and unexpected turns, and is not a straightforward process that can be neatly packaged. I had found that out early on. Before I could analyse data I had to generate it. I decided that the only way I could address the many questions identified was to conduct a small focus group of experienced carers and a pilot study in the first instance: to assess the viability of the research area, to find out what the reality is for the carer, and. to iron out any misunderstandings. This was to be followed by a small and simple questionnaire design, and then by structured, and semi-structured, interview schedules.

Focus group

The research process began when I met a very experienced carer living within my locality. She became my key informant and helped me to clarify the research aims and objectives before the investigation proper. Through networking within my local community, I was able to meet, on two occasions, another two carers, and they were also able to point out major issues relating to foster care, and provide other useful information and guidelines. These carers formed the focus group, but were not included in the cohort of carers that were

eventually investigated. The carers in the focus group would offer valuable help in the development of the survey questions by drawing on their expertise in the research arena, allowing me to make adjustments and amendments and modifying my research objectives as necessary.

Pilot study

The small pilot study would assist me in the further development of my questionnaire by commenting on design, structure and wording and by ironing out any further irregularities before I distributed them to a wider audience. Now I had to decide how I was going to draw my sample, and what sampling frame I was going to use. There was no specific sampling frame that I could draw from, as this cohort is very much like a hidden population, and I would probably have to generate it from a variety of sources. I decided the sample could be gathered from two main sources, independent fostering agencies and social service departments, and I used a random but purposive sampling technique because I knew the particular cohort I wanted to investigate. I was able to receive both positive and critical feedback from a small number of gatekeepers before I commenced with the general distribution of the questionnaire.

In the first instance I contacted six gatekeepers by sending out letters to three Social Service departments, three Independent Fostering Agencies in Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Central England, and one London borough. These letters introduced my research focus, and me. I asked them to participate in my pilot study: to assist me in the further development of my questionnaire design. I received two prompt replies, and I wrote again to the others when they did not reply within three weeks. I asked why they had ignored my introductory letter, stating that, if they really had the interests of this group at heart, then the least they could do was to reply and tell me they were overworked, over stressed, and overloaded with requests from researchers. As the research was still in its infancy, just barely at the pilot stage, I wondered how on earth I was going to fare when the investigation really took off (or crashed). Eventually I received replies to all of these initial letters, although one had transferred my details to a colleague and I was now to contact this other person. I wrote again, but there was no further correspondence from this authority. Five authorities (or agencies) finally assisted me during the pilot stage of my research. Even at this very early stage, the responses to the initial survey were setting the scene and beginning to give me an insight into the dynamics of the foster placement.

It was during this early stage that I was able to arrange a visit with a Placement Officer from a London borough. I wanted to discuss my research intentions with someone in the know and to get a sense of what was happening in the field, other than from carers. This borough was able to distribute ten provisional questionnaires and offer good productive feedback. An association of foster carers in the Northwest also provided valuable feedback and help, as did a senior social worker in the Southwest who emailed and wrote on two occasions offering advice and support. Following this I was able to distribute a further twenty surveys.

Eventually I sent out thirty surveys and received just twelve responses. Although small, it did enable me to readdress some questions and reframe others when the returns showed that one or two were being misinterpreted. It was to take several months to smooth out these small irregularities before I finally had a reasonable questionnaire design that I could now circulate across England. There were sixty six items in the now completed questionnaire and these were divided into four subsections, each identifying a specific aspect of fostering practice: policy context, fostering context, literacy context and school context. The focus group and pilot study completed the first phase of my research. (See appendix 1)

Questionnaire

My use of the survey method was solely to elicit and expose the most important key issues and to eliminate questions that needed no further explanation. The information that became known would then direct me into the next stage of the research, the interviews, and it will be at this point that I would no longer direct the course of the research, as the research becomes self-directed. Hopefully, these methods would elicit clues if not causalities.

The social survey looked simultaneously at many aspects of the literate environment. It looked at how the foster home was organised to provide this environment, and it sought to elicit a personal profile of each carer. It asked questions about existing and prevailing characteristics of literacy provision in the foster placement and the input in educational matters by other institutions. The pre-coded questions were closed unless stated, and there was no manipulation of the environment. This option eliminated leading questions because there was no negotiation, nor could an alternative interpretation be made which might alter response. It was only factual information that I needed at this stage, and further explanations would be elicited in follow-up interviews. Details on the type of books read or on explicit writing activities were not required, as it was the prevalence of such activities that I wished

to identify. The questions needed to be simply understood; they had to be direct and straight to the point. I wanted to limit the choice of answer to only one out of two that could be made, allowing the results to take the form of a simple statistical analysis from which comparisons could then be made even though some questions did require an attitude response or a memory recall, enabling respondents to qualify and deepen their responses to some of the questions. I understood that limiting responses in the social survey design could produce an artificial result. Therefore the sampling frame and questioning had to be such that they would generate as many responses as possible, from as many sources as possible, in order to get general possibilities. The follow-up with interviews would broaden and deepen the responses.

The questions were so phrased as to be user-friendly and to engender a feeling of helpfulness, and of course they had to be non-irritating. Bald *et al.* (1995:29) identified the difficulty of communication between project worker and respondent in administering and completing the questionnaires in his study. Questions were misunderstood through lack of appropriate wording, because they were perceived 'as questioning the competence of the carer.' I was guided in the construction of my own survey by drawing on the survey designs of two publications: *No lessons learnt* by The Children's Society; and Survey 29, *Improving information/communication for foster carers through the strategic use of the Internet/Email*, devised by the Fostering Network. My guidance for the questioning of the survey was taken from the National Standards for Foster Care and the OFSTED Report 2000. The key to a successful outcome is the use of appropriate instruments that avoids ambiguity, and this requires a questionnaire design that is straightforward and asks the right questions.

Sampling frame
At the time of gathering my main sample there were 36,000 children in foster placement in England (DH: Oct 2001); therefore, I thought if I could gain a sample of ninety (0.25%), this would make the survey, as a research tool, a feasible proposition for eliciting the categories from which I could form the concepts for the framing of the interview schedule. Although not representative of the whole population, it would, I was sure, uncover some certainties.

I knew that a small increase in numbers in a survey leads to a substantial increase in accuracy, and reduces sampling errors. I knew also that larger samples are less affected by sample attrition, but my use of this method was solely to identify common concerns and not

to make universal statements. To reduce sampling error in a sample would need a very much greater increase in the sampling size. The rule is, 'that to halve the sampling error we have to quadruple the sample size' Dometrius (1992:71). The degree of accuracy required, how much error tolerance is acceptable, depends on the research under investigation. It is desirable to reduce sampling error, but if there is difficulty in obtaining a representative sample because of access difficulties, or if the number required to make a representative sample is too great for the lone researcher to handle, then a snapshot sample will have to do, and a snapshot was all that was needed for my declared purpose.

Devine and S. Heath (1999) identifies the difficulty of gaining a representative sample from a minority group. Many potential respondents may not wish to identify with a study, especially if it is of a sensitive nature. Jackson (1998) supports this assertion, and claims that trying to gain a true representative sample of a marginal population is almost impossible because of the difficulty in establishing its actual size. Foster carers are a transient group and, because the demands now placed on them have substantially increased, this may inhibit their willingness to participate in yet another research project.

Now that I had some idea about sample size, I wrote to fifty-four agency and department managers, because they would act as my main gatekeepers to access carers. I sent self-addressed envelopes for ease of response and return. My initial letter outlined my research intentions and gave them the opportunity to voice any concerns, and I asked each to distribute a small number of questionnaires. I hoped that a small quantity would encourage them to assist me, even though it meant more work for me in negotiation, mediation and access matters. I would therefore be depending on the goodwill of the managers and placement officers to gain my sample.

I knew from the slow response in the initial phase of this research that replies might take a while; therefore, I figured I had to send out a large amount of introductory letters in order to gain a small response, and I was proved right. I wanted as wide a spread as possible. If the accessing was going to prove as difficult as it was in the first phase, then I wanted as much chance of getting a reasonable sample as I could. Time was also marching on and a little bit of panic was setting in. Letters were sent out in batches of ten. This was done to make it easier for me to handle the replies and to keep the data collection process manageable. Each batch still covered all the regions of England and was equally divided between independent

fostering agencies and social service departments. I found the response rate in replying to my letter of introduction much quicker in the independent sector than from local authorities. These private agencies often sent me their prospectuses - they even wrote on better grade paper than the LA's. Some letters even came with humour, 'Your completed faeces would be of great interest to my company, and I'd be really interested in obtaining a copy if possible.' (See appendix 2)

It was good that I sent out so many letters, for I received only nineteen replies and even fewer, fourteen, were prepared to help me, but this did mean that fourteen separate agencies and departments across England were giving me a wide cross section of the population. The fourteen participants consisted of seven social services departments, six Independent Fostering Agencies and one Foster Care Association. However, many of the letters came with conditions. One could only help if I had been police-checked; another, if I had a contact number to verify my research intentions. Many required a second letter to clarify a detail or to explain my research request more fully. All of this took my time and energy. I knew there was a lot of paranoia floating around: some gatekeepers vehemently defended their patch by writing that a questionnaire would have to be sent to them first; alternatively, I would have to be given permission by them for any contact with carers. There were comments such as: 'I have to see if the questionnaire is suitable' or 'I shall judge whether you can contact my foster carers.' I knew that ethical considerations had to be respected, but, although I had been police-checked, I was not going anywhere near carers at this stage. I even changed the tone of my letter to see if there would be any change in response, and so there was – after I reminded them that we couldn't take the educational chances of Looked After children for granted anymore, and it was up to agencies and departments to do something about it. I was sure I could have conducted a research project on accessing gatekeepers alone. Gatekeepers are a scary lot; I felt that social service personnel thought of foster carers as their own property. I seemed to be intruding into the secret sanctity of the foster placement - and I had been warned.

Carers do seem a precious commodity, and I suppose they are, now that private agencies are creaming them off from local authorities. I could have accessed them privately had I so wished, but I thought by contacting gatekeepers I would ensure the probity and integrity of all parties, and keep within the strict ethical guidelines I had set myself. During the pilot phase of this research, I had asked for volunteers to participate in follow-up interviews by

putting my direct contact number at the bottom of the questionnaire. In the later questionnaire, I decided to include the placing officer as a contact as well, as one who could also be responsible for forwarding the carers' details to me. I wondered if my direct access to the foster carers might have appeared threatening to the gatekeepers, and this addition would mean that gatekeepers could keep some control over the accessing process. At this point, I also enrolled myself onto an agency, and worked in the field as a residential social worker. This would add to my current knowledge and give me valuable and greater insights into the care-taking experience.

Accessing marginal groups is difficult, and it is easier for such groups to ignore requests from researchers working alone than those attached to major research departments. One of my informants told me that two universities were currently conducting research in the fostering arena: this was in relation to improving foster care provision and exploring ways to recruit and retain carers. Possibly the demands being made on them were now excessive. I had already suspected that research departments, because of the government's high profile in this area, were probably being inundated with research requests. My resolve was strong, however, as I sorely wanted to make a contribution to the betterment of a group of children of which I was once a member: to investigate a particular research area, literacy development in placement, that was in fact under-researched.

I did wonder on occasions whether the questionnaires were being distributed at all, since there seemed a delay in their return, but later, on reflection, found it was not such a long wait after all. At times, I also had my doubts about whether I was on the right research pathway and my confidence flagged once or twice. Sometimes the task before me seemed enormous when illness and bereavement got in the way and slowed me down. Did other research students get these doubts after slogging away hard for over a year or more? What do you do if you don't get the sample you initially wanted? Do you change direction even though you have already done a great deal of work? Do you have to 'dumb down' your expectations? And what was meant by the drawn-out silence of the fostering agencies replying to me about their interest in the literacy development of Looked After children? With my nails now bitten down to the quick, I became slightly bemused by the fact that the survey was not even going to be my dominant methodology, yet here I was struggling to get replies: first to my letter of introduction, and now for responses to my questionnaire. The survey was being used simply to elicit the 'practice facts' and to gain an overview of the research area. It would allow me

to discard topics that I may have considered important, but which might show to be insignificant. I was hoping it would draw out the most pertinent issues and key points, before I developed a grounded research approach using interviews. However, the difficulties of access were becoming clear. I determined that the process and development of the research was as important as the findings and outcome; therefore, I continued to describe my research journey, as well as wading through the hurdles and obstacles, with my stamina and determination to see it through strengthening with every setback. Finally, a total of 130 questionnaires were sent out, and I received fifty-two returns: a response rate of 40%. Postal response is notorious for having a low response rate, and although not as large as I would have liked, this was not a bad return rate at all.

Because I wanted a measure that would simply provide categories of key issues that could be easily and reliably compared, I conducted an exploratory analysis, using a nominal scale of measurement. The data enabled me to obtain a distribution to show the most frequently occurring events and practices that could then be quantified. These in turn could be converted into percentages, and then presented in the form of descriptive statistics and tables. The data gathered provided me with firm information from which to group the responses, but as the numbers were less than expected, I have presented them in number form only; however, the overall findings have been collated in the form of bar charts (see chapter 4: pages 105a; 113a; 119a and 125a). The results have identified what is important to carers, and what is actually happening in the foster home. The data furnished me with 'Practice Facts', from which emerged the patterns, themes, and commonalities that were to be developed in the second phase of the investigation.

Interviews

During the second phase of the research seven carers from the survey phase volunteered to participate in the follow up interviews. I was able to gain a further three volunteers by writing to several more fostering agencies or departments and conducting a group interview with carers from a fostering association. I had now to keep in mind that the volunteers would know the investigation's remit and research objectives, but I knew also that during this second phase of the research it would be necessary to disclose my full research aims and objectives. Interviewing a cohort of this size is about as large as I am going to get, but there were to be follow-up interviews one year after the initial ones: to assess any change in perception, to keep abreast of any changes that may affect the foster placement, and to

develop the original responses. I would continue to evaluate the crucial roles of other agencies, social services and schools, in order to provide me with more global information and to assess the continuum of shared care and service.

The interviews in the first round were organised in the form of statements taken from the survey findings. The responses received would then allow me to further probe and develop an analysis for discussion in the second round, culminating in giving me some idea what exactly the overarching issues were in the foster placement. Although framed within a category, respondents would have free rein to expand and elaborate on each theme or topic therein. They would still be able to give their in-depth, subjective accounts of their fostering experiences and perceptions related to each topic without direction from me. The interviews were to be conducted in a non-invasive way to let ideas, attitudes and opinions flow freely without restraints from the researcher. I would be, for the most part, just the 'listener' who lets the voice of the carer be heard. The results of the interviews would be presented in the form of transcribed speech and verbatim quotations.

Initially, I wanted only long-term, experienced carers in my sample; their attitudes and approaches to caring and their perceived role as literacy educators may be different from new and short-term carers. They would have experienced all the changes in legislation and the new demands that are now exerted on them, which meant they would be able to assess the full impact on their caring role. They are the ones who would need to make the biggest adjustment to implement any education action plan. In the end, I had to take whoever volunteered. It is unfortunate, but true, that access to this sample might have been easier if I were working for a major voluntary organisation or research department.

Interviewing within the intimate domain of the family may increase familiarity. I did not know the respondents at first contact, so my perception of them as people would not influence my theoretical position, but I had to remember that overt familiarity may compromise the research objectives if I do not keep within a strict frame of reference. I also had to be careful that my own personal experiences of growing up in care did not compromise my research objectives, and that any pre-conceived attitudes I might be harbouring did not contaminate the research. Increased awareness of the researcher's own perceptions and prejudices must be identified and acknowledged. Familiarity of the fostering context and foster families, however, could actually deepen the analysis and promote greater

insights. This awareness protects the validity of the research since it enables covert influences to be kept in check and lessens the possibility of bias creeping in, ensuring that the process and outcome of this investigation would be conducted to the highest standards of research integrity and codes of conduct.

> On an intellectual level, the researcher should make explicit the reasoning procedures used in carrying out research. In addition, on what is often called a 'reflexive' level, the class, race, sex, assumptions, and beliefs of the researcher must be available for scrutiny and must be explicated in terms of their effects upon the research and upon analysis.

Renzetti & Lee (1993:68)

My presence in the interviews had to be friendly and non-threatening. The emphasis at this stage of the research was on establishing good relations with the foster family. It was with these respondents that I had to build a rapport in order to gain trust between us. I had to remember that even body language, facial gestures and the way I responded to what they were saying, could alter the communication process if I was emitting the wrong signals. It is not an objective of this research to change carers' attitudes and perceptions in the way they deal with their charges, and this must not be conveyed. I did not intend to develop the literacy skills of the families, and nor was there to be any dialogue concerning literacy promotion. I needed to set these parameters because I wanted only responses that were authentic, honest, and only relevant to the literacy topic or issue under discussion. It was through interviewing that I hoped to elicit the hidden agendas, the unspoken responses and messages, as well as gain a deeper, richer response. This would make great demands on my intuitive and interpretive skills.

The researcher's encounter with the foster placement may mean that new significances may emerge over the course of the investigation as new interpretations arise and as a result of my interactions. I had to consider whether my visits to the foster home were intrusive and invasive; therefore I would take extra care to ensure that they were not, and I would do this by being relaxed and friendly. Providing it could occur naturally, I was hoping that foster children would be introduced to me also. This would enable me to gain a more rounded

impression of the foster placement, but it would not be essential to the outcomes of the investigation.

Researching the specific contribution foster carers made to developing literacy was to chart new territory; therefore, I used a grounded theory approach. This would be an appropriate research process, because the construction of new knowledge in a relatively new field required new insights to be gained, new interpretations to be made, and required that I challenge and question the existing orthodoxy as new meanings were assigned to specific acts and practices. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:31) Grounded Theory,

> enables the researcher to ask pertinent questions of the data
> and to make the kind of comparisons that elicit from the data
> new insights into phenomena and novel theoretical formulations.

Whilst research has focused on the importance of reading and book ownership schemes in the foster placement, there is almost nothing about the specific role of the carer as educator; therefore, grounded theory was an appropriate inductive approach to use. As a process, grounded theory would allow me to develop and build on new knowledge, as it became known, and to draw on both primary and secondary data to develop my analysis and discussion.

> The researcher continually asks questions as to fit, relevance
> and workability about emerging categories, and the relationships
> between them. He continually fits his analysis to the data
> by checking as he proceeds.

Glaser (1978:284)

This type of research demands exploratory, interpretative methodologies, yet I needed to utilise a quantitative method as well, if I was to find common threads that can be examined in fine-grain detail within a qualitative technique. The conceptual foundation therefore was essentially a qualitative one, while utilizing a quantitative methodology. The socio-contextual setting of the research required that I build a true and whole picture of the dynamics within the home, explore and give an account of family life, and reflect upon the experiences and actions of its members in relation to literacy development. This human dimension could not be elicited by confining oneself to quantitative methods alone. Devine

and S. Heath (1999:43) recognise that, 'qualitative research has remained the predominant approach within sociological research on the family.' Therefore it was an appropriate paradigm to use for this investigation.

My theory (or ideas) about literacy development in the foster placement would be developed as I generated data. The different stages of the research process would inform the next. Once I had the information from the survey results, the dominant categories that emerged directed the next phase, the interviews. These categories became the themes or topics, which would be further explored in the interviews. The key findings elicited from the survey results would direct my questioning towards the issues that I needed to explore more fully. An in-depth exploration of this kind draws out the most salient features taken from the survey, and allows deeper meanings to be assigned to them through interviews. I needed to add flesh to the more measured results of the survey design in order to elicit hidden meanings and agendas. I wanted to be able to make explicit the common patterns that emerged and to explore them further, iron out any contradictions and fill any gaps in knowledge.

As a lone researcher, with limited funds and time constraints, the research is small-scale, drawing a small proportion of the total population of practising carers. This will challenge its standing as a representation of the whole, but will give valuable insights for others to expand on and act as a foundation for further development. This new knowledge recorded here can be used for the development of more substantive theories by other researchers in the future.

Other access and ethical matters

What other access and ethical considerations did I need to think about? Accessing carers was going to be a lot easier than jumping over hurdles and running through hoops trying to gain permission to interview children, or so I had thought. One consideration was the amount of disclosure I gave to respondents, both in the questionnaire and interview. I needed to be honest and truthful, but if I divulged my full intent then I might jeopardize a genuine response and reaction to my literacy inquiries. What should I disclose at the inception of the investigation to ensure responses are genuine? It would be unwise to give too much away, as it might alter the behaviour of the respondents; interviewees might rush out to buy some comics, join libraries or run to the local bookshop. Those respondents completing the questionnaire might not be truthful if they knew at the outset of my intentions: it might raise their awareness, and change their perceptions and interpretations of their role. This would be

good insofar as their heightened awareness might improve their practice, but how would I be sure if they were really genuine responses?

The type of social survey I designed eliminated a lot of anxiety for those worried about their own literacy state, because it was straightforward and simple to complete and it would lessen the possibility of respondents producing answers that fitted the desired outcomes of what they felt I might expect. I set myself the strictest protocols by sending an assurance of their confidentiality: their responses would be kept completely anonymous. I did not know who the respondents were, or the locality in which they lived, and the returns were only coded with a number on completion and return. Confidentiality might help in eliciting more honest responses, but the volunteers who did agree to be interviewed would be assured of confidentiality, because each participant would be known through a code, which only I knew. I requested unsigned returns but offered them the chance to participate in the interview schedule. Of course this meant that those who did volunteer would forgo their anonymity. Filling in a questionnaire anonymously might also lessen any worries they could have about disclosing policies and practices that do not fit current rhetoric. In the end I enclosed a brief covering letter with the questionnaire outlining my research objectives to the respondents; later on I would disclose the full intent of my investigation to the interviewees.

The investigation had to be as near to everyday life as possible at the interviews, even though the very presence of a researcher (albeit a friendly one) might be enough to alter a natural response and change behaviour. They might become worried about someone sneaking around and checking up on their literacy state. I became aware of the ways in which a subtle bias can creep into an investigation, and how hard it is to be totally objective and neutral, particularly if the research focus has meaning for the researcher. A subjective judgement had already been made on the choice of the research focus. Because my respondents were adult, and not a particularly sensitive group in terms of vulnerability, my research would not become a moral issue. I could be open about my investigation, because there would be no major controlling variables, except, perhaps, in the more subjective nature of the interview schedules and the design of my survey questions.

During the early stages of this research I explored training opportunities for carers, and I enrolled myself onto a Fostering Network training course, and became increasingly aware of access restraints. This was to be a two-day non-residential course based on the Fostering

Network's competence-based assessment materials. The course was to explore how foster carers and teachers could help children to succeed better in school, and it followed the 1995 OFSTED and SSI Report, which addressed the problem of low achievement and recognised that responsibility for education often fell between social services and education. The course participants would have identified obstacles to learning, including the poor perception of achievement by agencies caring for the children. There was to have been an exploration of strategies to overcome the hurdles that are put in the way of educational success for this group. An examination of the education plan was to have been made and ways of improving performance. The course was cancelled due to lack of interest, and the course that replaced it later in the year was based on the 'Who Cares? Choices' material.

The 'Who Cares? Choices' is designed to enable a young person in care to develop decision-making skills, but does not address, directly, educational issues. When the course was due to run, I received a letter from the Training Officer to say that this course, too, had been cancelled due to lack of interest. I was beginning to think that all the current rhetoric about raising achievement, and the initiatives that were being implemented to do just that, were really just a cover for doing nothing. During this time I also found a training organisation that offered an accredited qualification for social services personnel and foster carers. The course offered NVQ equivalent level 3 qualifications, and the course content concerned itself with equipping carers with underpinning knowledge to enable them to be effective educators. There was also to be an examination of current legislation, addressing special educational needs, social exclusion and pupil support, with emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of corporate agencies. The course content would also concern itself with defining and agreeing upon protocols and specific responsibilities for working collaboratively with other national organisations. The course seemed rigorous, so I contacted the Qualifications Manager. After communicating with him three times I was finally told that, 'unfortunately, there are no centres currently offering this scheme.'

It was during the latter part of 2002 that I received an invitation to a *Choice Protects* conference for early 2003. This was to review placement choice for Looked After children. Unfortunately, the invitation arrived just after I had planned to go abroad and would be out of the country. Finally, in late 2003, I was able to enrol and attend a training course entitled *The Education of Looked After children*. There were seven of us who attended, even though twenty were supposed to be the minimum to run such a course. All the participants (except

me) were either managers of Independent Fostering Agencies or learning mentors in schools. No one from a local authority fostering service was represented. The small number of participants showed me once again the lack of interest given to this aspect of care, and I was even told by one manager that, 'education isn't that interesting, is it?' The course did not exceed my expectations, so I was prepared for the emphasis to be directly focused on what the school could do to raise educational attainment; it did not acknowledge the contribution of the foster carer (until I brought it up), and then it was covered only very superficially, and, I felt, just to appease me.

Embedding oneself within these initiatives enables me to build a network, deepen my knowledge of the research arena, and keeps me informed and up to date with current thinking, changes in legislation and trends. It also enables me to see the fractures: great gaping holes, in fact, in what is being said and what is being done. It was amongst this initial activity that I made an enquiry about the Standard Fund. The Standard Fund is an access fund that can be accessed for educational purposes. I wanted to know if carers were able to draw from it for help with the added expenses of out-of-school activities. I sent an email to the appropriate person at the Department for Education and Skills, and it was sent back as 'undeliverable' as the Department did not recognise the recipient's name, a name I had got from them the previous day.

At the same time I phoned a local Family Placement Team about the possibility of volunteering for them. They did not return my call, and when I rang again I was told they would ring back once they had investigated the possibility. It was the last I heard from them. I did not contact them again, recognising the sensitivity of my request and the added workload that I might be placing on them in order for them to allow me to volunteer. Then, in the Internet magazine *Children* (March 2002), I read an article entitled *Children may die in care crisis* that suggested Britain's social services departments are on the brink of collapse due to increasing pressure and the 'bombardment of new referrals rising remorselessly.' I was beginning to think at this stage that accessing these important gatekeepers was going to prove even more difficult than anticipated, and I did fleetingly wonder what I was letting myself in for. I was also concerned about the impact this breakdown would subsequently have on the protection and interests of Looked After children, and my concern turned to alarm when I read a report about the increasing pressures on schools also. In a *Young Minds* magazine (February 2002:18/24), a teacher commented, 'government is over-interventionist.

Children are over-measured and there is now an initiative overload.' In the same magazine a contributor had written,

> children today are forced out of their homes far too early,
> into schools where they are neither loved nor respected
> and the care they get is largely linked to their compliance
> and academic prowess.

I was not about to abandon a sinking ship, but I was growing fearful when I found writing for information also posed a problem. I have written several times to the Department of Health, and have not yet received one reply of substance. I thought, perhaps, they were overloaded with requests for information, until I read an article in another *Young Minds* magazine (Sep/Oct 2001:03). Amongst other key areas, the article pointed out that it is now a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989, for the Department of Health to report to Parliament about the educational attainment of Looked After children. It went on to say of The Children Act Report 2000 that it 'was printed after a five year gap, even though the Department of Health is obliged by law to publish an annual report.' The Health Select Committee criticised the department for its neglect, and commented, 'It should not have been necessary for us to remind the Department of Health of its duty to obey the law.' These statements made me feel better for knowing the Department of Health was showing a normal incompetence, and were not just ignoring my requests.

Writing to any agency invariably results in nothing more than a compliment slip. It is discouraging, but I persist. Some individuals, or agencies, do not even write back when I enclose a SAE. I am also disappointed to note that at three conferences I have attended, *Feeling Safe*, the launch of *Care-zone*, and the AGM of The National Childminding Association (where the impact of the National Childcare Strategy was going to be discussed), all chief speakers, prominent members of Parliament, sent their apologies because they were unable to attend. Later, the BAAF conference, *Resilience, Education and Life Chances of Looked After children*, scheduled for the 16th January 2002, was deferred. I was determined to keep a note to see if the same happened at future conferences, when I received a letter from the National Children's Bureau,

> I am sorry to announce the postponement of our special members'
> event in the House of Lords; unfortunately the Minister is unable
> to be with us...

I waited with interest to see if this pattern continued, when I received a letter from BAAF in 2001 apologising for a publication that I was waiting for: *Meeting the Educational Needs of Looked After children* was still not ready for distribution. In 2002 I received another letter and another apology with an offer of an alternative title. I enquired about the delay in publication and was told the original author commissioned to write the guide withdrew from the project ending with, 'I apologise again for our inability to meet your first choice or to say when it will be published.' At the closure of this research I was still waiting for this publication. It seems that Acts of Parliament can get passed quicker than this publication.

At this embryonic stage there did not appear to be much enthusiasm for giving help to researchers like me. I was hoping that my fortunes would change as I built up some kind of relationship with the people and agencies that I knew would be very useful to me in the future. Since that time I became a member of important organisations and have circulated at conferences and workshops. I also became a member of a writing team for my local health authority, which was writing a mental health document as part of the Mental Health Promotion Strategy. I submitted a paper on the mental health needs of Looked After children, but when I received a draft of the document there were only two small paragraphs referring to the specific mental health needs of this group. This miniscule insertion was in a chapter that focused on mental health interventions, so I wrote to the Director in charge of the Strategy and asked for an explanation. At the end of 2003 I was still waiting for a response. I never received a reply.

Other considerations

What else did I need to consider? I had to be realistic in any plan that I made. The research objectives had to be feasible to ensure that the outcome of the investigation (the analysis and results), although perhaps not representative of all foster carers, would thereby still hold credibility. It had to be reliable, and should be able to be replicated in a similar form with consistent findings at a later date. I had to remember that new demands are now being made on foster carers all the time; therefore, I had to ensure that the questionnaire could be completed in less than half an hour and not overstay my welcome when I conducted the interviews.

I also had to consider funding and time management. Realistically, I was not going to be able to investigate as many homes as I would like (and there were access and travel considerations) but I was able to interview a cross section of carers across England to get a sense of what was happening nationally. I wanted natural behaviour in a 'normal' fostering family setting in various regions. I wanted to research the 'real world': to explore the literate culture of the foster home. It is by examining particular social situations that we may begin to understand how literacy is developed, how practices are socially constructed, and how roles are played out in different family structures. The investigation would determine what specific literacy events were taking place in the foster placement, and identify whether the new childcare reforms were bearing fruit.

Other essential features of the research design were that I drew from my diary entries and field notes, official documents and ongoing research evidence to help support my own research. I needed to look at and explore all possibilities; understand how literacy development is represented and incorporated within the fabric of these families. What mediation and negotiation processes were at play, and how were they impacting on the behaviour of the foster carers in relation to the literacy development of their charges? The new insights that I gained would determine each step that I took and the new ground that I covered. This could only be done by exploration: by understanding the actual 'lived' experiences of the carers and sharing their information. It meant challenging alternative interpretations and meanings, and questioning commonplace assumptions. I would only achieve ecological validity if the research setting were as close to 'real life' as it possibly could be, without any manipulation of the environment or by my incursion into it.

Before I formulated and finalised a plan for my data-collection techniques, I had to 'activate' specific concepts and definitions. Research could not begin in earnest until specific terms and facts were addressed. The terms and concepts, which would be used throughout the research, must be known and made explicit. This was done in order to bring regulation and structure, clarity and greater common understanding of the definitions and concepts used, to the research. It also avoids any ambiguity. One of the main concepts that needed to be understood is the actual definition of the term 'literacy' and its use throughout this research. Another important concept was the actual title being used for children who are looked after by the state.

Literacy investigations and definitions shift and change according to current thinking and the period of time in which we live. The definition of literacy went from being an absolute, universal concept, to one embedded in a social context. It moved away from the concept that literacy was a single, finite, discrete set of skills learnt in isolation, to one in which literacy is seen to be embedded in the literacy events in which they operate: that is, within a local context and used in different ways according to specific cultures and contexts (Barton & Hamilton 1994) This perspective identifies that there are many 'types' of literacy, each operating within different literacy practices, and, as such, there is no specific or precise definition of what literacy is or how it is used.

An individual's culture, class and status will determine the literacy practices and specific literacy events. There are many 'ways of taking from books and using language' as identified by S.B. Heath (1986) and there are different types of literacy: computer literacy, school literacy, family literacy, functional literacy, and emotional literacy. Technological changes produce different uses of literacy and different ways of handling written language. The evolution of mobile phone texting over the last five years has been phenomenal, requiring a range of new skills for processing text, inputting instructions and sending texts. This new form of literacy may well overshadow other literacy writing and reading forms in the future, especially for the young. Many of the projects that have been initiated to help raise the educational attainment of Looked After children have been literacy based activities such as book buying and reading. While appreciating there are many forms and uses of literacy, for the purposes of this investigation I have focused on literacy forms related to books, book-reading and writing.

The literacy concepts used in this research will seek to explore the literacy that equips foster children with the skills to perform the everyday activities of reading, writing and speaking in a confident, competent way. Ideally, these are ways that are engendered within the home and can be translated into the wider arena: literacy that is authentic, meaningful and embedded within the context of the foster setting. This includes the resilience to act in ways that are self-directed, independent and autonomous. Literacy is a multidimensional concept; we are more literate in some situations than in others and the importance of literacy competence varies with different cultures and at different periods in time. Were carers providing 'literacy for life' for Looked After children, and which type of literacy was being promoted? Did the literacy of the foster placement equip children for school literacy practices? Did all foster

placements offer the same literacy? Did these children form a particular society that is different from mainstream society, and are their literacy 'events' peculiar to this specific community or foster culture? Does living in a foster placement rather than in the home of origin have an effect on literacy development, and can this be measured in a predominantly qualitative investigation? I believed that it could. I sought to understand the definition of literacy in the foster placement, and to ascertain whether its promotion met the needs of Looked After children. Current research that is situated in the field explores the real life experiences of different literacy practitioners; I was looking specifically at the significant practitioner in the foster placement.

This investigation was set within a socio-contextual perspective that moves away from the literacy research base and concept: one that defines literacy research as the testing of cognitive abilities by the use of tests and experiments. It moves instead towards one of general literacy principles, informal literacy practices and events, and participation in the social situation. It also looks into the research on the social practices of the foster placement. Current modern thinking claims that literacy development should be explored in specific social settings, and that acquisition of literacy is learnt more easily in situations that are known and familiar: in 'situ', within a 'lived' experience that is comfortable and non-threatening. As literacy is used in different environments and communities, it is necessary to understand the many ways it is used, and to understand and provide models that will support children and initiate them into appropriate literacy practices (Street, 1984).

There are several terms that are used to address children in care: *Looked After, Children in Care*, and *Children in Public Care*. For clarity and simplicity I have addressed such children as *Looked After*, which was the terminology in use until it was changed in 2001 to Young People in Public Care. 'Looked After' children are children, who have a care order, or who are being accommodated by the local authority; they are children who do not live in their natural home of origin. Looked After children are children whose welfare is placed with the local authority, who thereby assumes the role of a *corporate parent* and with whom I consider responsibility is placed (Children Act 1989 s.22.1). The *foster placement* is defined as the foster child's total environment, his or her current living arrangement, which provides the physical, emotional and educational well being of the child on a day-to-day basis. The Children Act (1989) replaced terms like foster 'mother' for 'carer', because of the requirement for continuing contact with natural parents and the range of tasks they were now

expected to undertake. Being 'Looked After' should be a humanizing experience, not a dehumanising one, and one wonders what effect removing 'comfort' words like 'mother', 'father' and 'parents' has on children already dislocated from feeling a sense of belonging? However, for the purposes of this research I had to adhere to current terminology, and therefore the title *carer* is used in relation to the foster parent

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY FINDINGS, RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter one gives an historical account of the initiatives, interventions and legislation implemented to help raise the educational achievement of children Looked After. Chapter two explores the difficulties of acquiring literacy and records the educational performance of this group with data from national statistics. Chapter three gives an account of the research problem and explores and explains the process of selecting appropriate methodological instruments to generate data. The chapter also discusses access and ethical considerations.

This current chapter analyses the first phase of my own research findings taken from data elicited from a small social survey. The data generated allowed me to assess what is actually happening in the foster placement in relation to the educational improvement of this group. This research, an original piece of work within an area that has never been explored in such detail before, concerned the literacy development and practices in the foster placement. It will identify whether significant progress is being made in the field, particularly in the educational related practices of the foster placement and in the perception of carers as significant players in raising achievement.

The dominant features, issues and themes that have emerged from this phase will be used as the raw data to build upon in the next stage, phase two the interview schedules. The dissemination of these findings assesses what practices, events and opportunities are operating in the foster home to promote educational success, and looks at what might inhibit its development. The analysis assesses what is happening at the personal level and at institutional levels, and evaluates whether carers perceive themselves as having an educational role.

I have heard that the process of research is a messy business and this research has been no different. Throughout this investigation I have been keeping a log and a personal diary to chart progress and record all the hiccups that occurred along the way. On a couple of occasions I have gone up a blind alley or taken a wrong turn and then had to reappraise my

research objectives to get me back on track. The research process is as important as the outcome. Vital lessons can be learned on the pitfalls and triumphs experienced along the research path. At one time I thought I would never reach the stage where I would actually be analysing data, or even completing the research.

As identified in the previous chapter, a total of 130 questionnaires were sent to fifty-four agencies and departments and I received fifty-two returns, and since the base number is smaller than I had hoped for, the analysis that follows will use the actual numbers recorded, unless otherwise stated. The presentation in number form, however, is clear and straightforward. Where the results have not added up to the base number of fifty-two, it is because of non-responses to the questions set. These omissions are very minimal and do not reflect the total responses. Even questions that were left unanswered, or responded to with a 'don't know,' were still making a response of a kind and this has been taken into account when tallying up. A non-response still gives me a response in the sense that the respondent did not choose to respond.

Information obtained from the survey enabled categories to be formed, but where the numbers of responses are few, or where analysis elicited very little then these questions were discarded after a brief explanation. Some questions were only included to add breadth to my initial investigation; they were supplementary to give me a broad overview of the research field. Other questions were not applicable to some individuals, while others were often left unanswered. When this occurred, the calculations have only been made on questions that have been correctly responded to. This means that interpretation of the result has to remain flexible and 'loose' because of the gaps, omissions, and supplementary data. Therefore, analysis and interpretation remain difficult. However, commonalities, patterns and themes have emerged. These have allowed an analysis and interpretation to be made that retains and upholds the validity of the research.

Distinctions have not been made between the different types of fostering arrangements: long term, short term, respite, remand, special needs, support and rehabilitation planning in the foster placement; again this has meant that some of the questions could not be answered by all because of the diversity of each placement. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the foster placement questions cannot apply to all settings. This posed problems for the construction of the survey, a drawback in its design. To overcome this, the covering letter that I sent with

each questionnaire, explained to carers that they were only to answer those questions that were relevant to their situation and only in relation to one child, even if they had more than one foster child. It was felt that these distinctions do not wholly matter as the concerns are on literacy practices and development in all types of foster placement and on carer perceptions irrespective of each unique setting. Analysis and interpretation of the results are, of course, made more difficult and complex because of this.

I found also that some questions were not responded to even when they were straightforward, while others were often missed out when the question demanded an attitude response or a memory recall. I did get a sense, that some merely wanted to get the task over as quickly as possible: when all the ticks for the yes or no response seemed identical, and no expansion on answers was made even when they were requested. I also wondered if carers understood the term 'accredited' when I asked it in relation to training. All carers had undergone some form of in-service training, but a high proportion stated that they had attended, or completed, an accredited training course too. Were they getting confused with on-the-job-training, or was there really such a high proportion getting professionally trained? This issue will be explored and discussed in the interviews. Two respondents only fostered 'babies.' They considered they were not responsible for providing a literate environment, nor did they consider themselves as having an educational role in relation to the babies.

No research result or finding can claim universal laws, because all research is open to negotiation and different interpretations by the very nature of investigating human phenomena, and, although the difficulties of analysing a heterogeneous and transient group are clearly evident, common patterns can be detected. What any research can do is to give us insights, and deepen our understanding of a specific social condition or phenomena. The primary focus of the survey was to ascertain the literacy events, practices and opportunities that were being developed and practised in the foster placements, as well as the perceptions of carers as educators. The questions of a more general nature served only to give a more global assessment of the foster placement and contextually embed the most pertinent questions within the fabric of family activity, and to this aim they served their purpose.

From the data obtained I looked for the social patterning of the families to assess the educative role of the carer. For this, I explored the range of literacy opportunities that were a part of everyday activities to see how family members participated, and to assess the

contribution other agencies made towards literacy development. Where I have quoted a response, I have put beside it a number in brackets that is the participant's signifying number assigned to them on the return of their questionnaire. This has been done so that no participant can be identified, but allows me to build a picture of each participant's responses. If a response rate to a question has exceeded 75% of the total response, then I have taken that response to be significant. I was surprised to find the responses very consistent, and this enabled me to dispense with many of the questions once I had acknowledged and described them briefly. These would need no further explanation. The results were so consistent I am confident in saying that, had the sample been larger, the findings would still be the same. This process of deduction eliminates less important responses, and focuses increasingly on the questions that need a deeper exploration. This means that, from the remaining questions, dominant themes began to emerge, as categories that could now be developed.

Presentation and Interpretation of data

How do we sort, sift and 'weed out' important data? According to Glaser (1979) the first level of data recording is the raw data elicited from the questionnaire, and this first procedure and information forms the original data set. Open data coding is the first step before data analysis and Glaser insists that the researcher should ask of themselves 3 questions:

> ➢ What is the data a study of?
> ➢ What category does this incident (event/practice) indicate?
> ➢ What is actually happening in the data?

Difficult decisions now have to be made and addressed in order that the most important information is not edited out, allowing the dross to become the material for the analysis. I have looked at congruence between respondents, comparing them for uniformity, similar patterns and relationships. I have discarded some questions, but nothing must be eliminated before it is given a brief explanation; otherwise, I cannot claim that my data has been given full theoretical coverage. There must be no 'waifs and strays', no stone left unturned,

> no matter how conceptually primitive, these beginning codes
> quickly start theoretical sampling and constant
> comparisons of incidents. How relevant these concepts
> are to the basic problem and basic social processes
> becomes a question of further analysis.
> Glaser (1979:57)

This sifting of information at level one provides the categories for level two. The data is now prepared for more processing at level two, where further refinements are made, and categories are now formed that describe in more detail the existing codes in level one. The process of my research has been one of thematic progression, and now the codes formed for level one become the categories in level two. Further processing combines and compares the concepts that are formed at stage three. It is then that new constructs are formed that develop the themes and, with the knowledge gained, theory is gradually being developed. There has been continual reappraisal of the codes and categories until my themes become defined and the constructs formed. The conceptual categories are, according to Glaser (1978), now well grounded in the data.

Key findings from the survey

- All 52 foster carers attest to making some contribution towards the literacy development of their fostered children.
- 47 foster carers feel equipped to support children educationally and 37 perceive themselves as having an educational role.
- 37 foster placements had children who enjoyed comics or magazines.
- 45 foster carers did not get any additional help to fund out-of-school activities.
- 42 foster carers were involved in reading events, and most homes, 50, have a variety of communal books.
- 22 foster carers felt they were not responsible for encouraging reading, or reading to or with, their fostered child.
- 47 foster carers felt equipped to help with homework, and 50 carers did help with homework.
- 23 foster placements had children who did not own their own books and 27 foster placements had children who did not bring any books with them when placed.
- 30 foster placements had children who went to the library regularly.
- 44 foster placements had children who read books other than school ones.
- 46 foster carers felt they were responsible for providing reading and writing materials, and 38 foster placements had children who are encouraged to write thank you notes and letters.

- 39 foster carers had a GCSE above grade C.

- 47 foster carers felt part of an interagency team.

- 31 foster carers said that educational support has not been made an explicit part of their fostering role.

- 42 foster carers had not received training on the importance of supporting education.

- 31 foster placements had no specialist books for their fostered children.

- 36 foster placements had foster children who had experienced behavioural problems and/or bullying.

- 28 foster placements had foster children who did not have a Life Story Book.

- 20 foster placements had foster children who came without 'essential' information when placed. 20 placements had no Assessment and Action Plan, and 25 foster placements had children who had no Educational Plan.

- 25 foster placements had children who attended school regularly.

- Information, action guides, circulars and current developments (i.e., supporting websites/ charities) are not being cascaded from local authority departments and Independent Fostering Agencies to the frontline worker – the foster carer. 41 foster carers had not received any educational guides or booklets.

Personal profile of foster carers

This section provides information on the carers. The personal profiles of the respondents are given in terms of age, gender, length of fostering commitment, the number of children fostered over a fostering career, the longest period of fostering with the same child, in-service and accredited training, and the fostering wage and allowance. It includes memories of the carers' own school experiences and standard of education.

The changing climate has moved away from where the background of carers and personal motives of fostering are assessed, towards one that looks at the skills the foster carer possesses and ability for carrying out the fostering task. This now means appropriate and professional training. It also means that demands on carers are greater than ever, and a typical foster home now has to be one that not only provides a home from home, but also must be one that is now task centred. Bebbington & Miles (1990) identified a typical foster home as a two-parent family, the woman being in the 33-55 year age group, one parent

working, living in a three-bed roomed house and usually with older children. My sample was not much different.

The participating Foster Carers

- 51 women and 1 man were surveyed and were the principal carers.
- Foster carers were aged between 30 and 65.
- 39 were educated above GCSE grade C.
- 36 had positive school experiences.
- 47 had undergone in-service training.
- 39 had attended an accredited training course.
- 22 received a wage apart from the fostering allowance.
- 26 had natural born children living at home.
- The longest stay in same placement was 20 years.
- The largest number of children fostered to one carer was 200 plus.
- The foster carers in my sample had fostered 1267 children.
- The shortest term of fostering by a foster carer was 4 months and the longest period of fostering experience was 30 years.

Base number: 52

The longest serving carer had fostered for a total of thirty years, 'our eldest foster son is 32 – he still returns home a lot!' (8) Another carer had the same foster child for over twenty years, and yet another had fostered over two hundred children. Twenty-eight carers had fostered between 0-5 years, while twenty-six had fostered 7 or more children throughout their career. A carer had adopted one foster child. This makes the sample a stable and balanced one in terms of fostering experience, and one that is able to gauge the changes in fostering practice.

The following tables provides an illustrative description of the findings to show the breakdown in age of respondent, length of time fostering, number of children fostered over a fostering career and the longest and shortest time spent by a child in any one placement. Subsequent tables will each identify clearly the strength of a specific response in each of the questionnaire categories, and each question therein will be reviewed through an analysis or commentary. Each section will reveal and identify the significant findings from that category and, if it warrants further explanation, this will be brought forward into the next phase of the

research. Several questions will now be eliminated at this point; either because they serve no further useful function in increasing our knowledge or the response is so significant the answers speak for themselves without further elaboration. This process of deduction will be the same for all the subsections of the survey. The series key represents one for a yes, two for a no, and three for a non-response.

See Tables 4.1 – 4.4

Educational level of the foster carers

A. Heath *et al.* (1989), Osborn and St Clair (1987) and Lucey and Walkedine (2000), all identify that the educational level of carers did not appear to make any difference in raising achievement of foster children, even when foster parents were highly educated. Initial gains were recognised in the A Heath *et al.* study, but progress declined over time. Osborn and St Clair (1987) found the educational level of foster parents to be consistent with that of the natural parents. My remit did not include finding out the educational level of birth parents, but I did ask carers if they (the carers) were educated above grade C, GCSE. Thirty-nine carers said they had at least one GCSE above C grade. I was pleased, yet surprised at this finding. This was in stark contrast to the views of prominent researchers and commentators. Griffiths (1999:5) has stated that foster carers are uneducated, and suggested that training was needed to

...improve the literacy skills of the adults who are caring for them.

A benchmark has to be established that is an indicator of a level of achievement, and some may argue that having a C grade at GCSE is not an indicator of a well-educated individual, but it does show a standard of education that is a requirement in this country (England) for going on into further education.

Training.

Most carers, forty-seven, have undergone some form of generic in-service training. This is now a mandatory requirement for becoming a foster carer. Jackson and Sachdev (2001:89) reassure us that, 'many authorities across the UK are encouraging and financially supporting foster carers to train for an appropriate qualification'. Thirty-nine claimed they had attended

Table 4.1   Age of foster carers

30-35 Years	36-40 Years	40 Plus	Total number of carers
3	11	35	52

The youngest foster carer: 30 years old.   3 non-responses

The oldest foster carer: 65 years old.

Table 4.2   Length of time fostering

0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11 or more Years	Total number of carers
28	11	13	52

The longest period of fostering experience: 30 years.

The shortest period of fostering: 4 months.

Table 4.3   Number of children fostered over career

1-2 children	3-4 children	5-6 children	7 or more children
8	6	12	26

The carers had fostered a total of 1267 children.

The largest number of children fostered by one carer: 200 plus.

The smallest number of children fostered: 1.

Table 4.4   Length of stay in same placement

0-2 Years	3-4 Years	5-6 Years	6 or more years
29	13	2	8

Longest stay in same placement: 20 years.

Shortest stay in same placement: 9 weeks.

or completed an accredited course. Accredited professional courses are slowly being developed, but I am dubious of this finding as explained earlier.

Fostering Allowance/ Waged

It appears that carers who work for local authorities receive an allowance that just covers the expenses of the foster child, while the carer who works for an Independent agency receives a wage as well.

Natural Born Children

I did not ask if there were any problems in the home concerning natural born children, but I asked if there were natural born children, aged 18 years or less, still living at home. I have sought to look at all aspects of the placement that might influence the development of literacy in the foster placement, and this area has been recognised as being an area of concern. Pugh (1996), Kelly (1995) Berridge & Cleaver (1987) all identify that foster children, who are close in age to the natural born children, have an increased risk and a high rate of placement breakdown. Twenty-six carers in this sample had natural children under the age of 18 years.

Own school memories

School experiences can make or break the potential to learn throughout life. How we perceive those experiences can, and will, be transmitted to others who emulate us or see us as role models. If our experiences of learning have been positive, and we have been successful, then the chances of transmitting positive images of school are greatly enhanced. Thirty-six of the carers in my sample had positive school experiences and some I identify here (the figures in brackets are the numerical identities for individual respondents and are not the numbers of respondents who held the view quoted):

> 'Very good ones.' (13)
> 'Clear memories of good educational experiences.' (17)
> 'Very positive, I come from an academic family where
> education is highly regarded.' (8)
> 'Whilst I hated school I understand the importance of a good education
> and now try to encourage my placements at school and also after

school activities.' (26)

'Mixed good/bad. I was sent to a boarding school by LCC, as a guinea
pig for 3 years and before that, moved very often to avoid the Blitz.' (18)

'I was top of my year group all through junior school, I attended
grammar school but found that rather 'narrow' in its subject
areas.' (23)

There was of course negative comments such as, 'hated it.' (26). 'I used to play truant.' (2).
'The repercussions kids suffer if their background does not fit into the norm.' (51)

Overall, the carers were very positive when describing their own school experiences, but, as
identified before, this is contrary to some commentators. Lucey and Walkerdine (2000)
recognise that carers' own experiences of education will reflect on the educational ethos
within the home, and I agree.

Commentary

All influences that impact on the carers' response to educational matters and their support for
education will be dictated by the dynamics within the home. If there are competing priorities,
hostilities, or a carer has a low skill base, then pressures will always seek the least line of
resistance, which might mean that carers who are not educated, or who do not manage time
effectively, may overlook their responsibilities in providing literacy-based activities in the
home. It was good, therefore, to see that a high proportion of these carers had at least a
GCSE at C grade, even though A. Heath *et al*. (1994:254) suggest that:

> There is no sign that foster children in educationally advantaged
> environments made greater progress over the course of our study.

The poor level of education of carers has often been cited in various research reports, as have
the negative school experiences of the foster carers, so it was rewarding to see how positive
this cohort were towards their own educational experiences. These are findings that need no
further exploration or discussion in this investigation. My results do show there is a disparity
between those who receive a wage in addition to an allowance, and those who only receive
an allowance. While this finding does not significantly impact on the carer's potential to
support education, it does inhibit the availability of resources, and it will not unify the
fostering service if some carers are discriminated against financially. There has also been

concern in research studies of the effects on placement stability where there are natural born children living in the home. Again, in isolation this influence is insignificant, but it is a factor that needs to be recognised, if not explored further.

Fostering context

This section of the survey focuses on the perception of the carer of their educational role. It explores the contribution carers make to the literacy development of foster children, and it asks questions about out-of-school activities in the community and specialist books in the home: all areas which help a child make sense of his or her care experiences. It seeks to find out if educational support has been made an explicit part of a carer's role, and whether the carer actually feels equipped to help children educationally. Have the carers received training on the importance of giving educational support? Are they fully involved in issues related to learning difficulties? Have there been bullying and name-calling incidences?

Main findings

- 37 foster carers perceived themselves as educators
- 31 foster placements did not have specialist books in the foster home.
- 38 foster homes had children who attended out-of-school activities.
- 47 foster carers felt equipped to support education.
- 31 foster carers stated that educational support was not made an explicit part of a carers' role.
- 36 foster homes had children who had been bullied or called names.
- 46 foster carers were involved in all decision making.
- 36 foster carers feel it is their responsibility to secure an educational placement.
- 42 foster carers had not received training on the importance of giving educational support.
- 27 foster carers were contacted by the school/pre-school about behaviour problems after a visit by a birth parent.
- 45 foster homes had children who did not get extra allowances for outings, books, and coaching lessons.
- 50 foster carers had not received the booklet, *Breaking their fall.*

- 43 foster homes had children who had not heard of the Children's Charity, *A National Voice.*
- 29 foster homes had children who did not receive the *Who Cares? Magazine.*
- 52 (100%) foster carers gave examples of positive contributions to literacy development.

See Table 4.5

An educating role

Thirty-seven carers identified themselves as being an educator in some capacity. I used the word 'educator' in the survey question to see how carers interpreted the word in relation to themselves. Some carers felt their educating role was only in relation to the school, concerning themselves only with school literacy and with teachers as the only educators. Other carers felt their role was more to do with the teaching of life skills, and encouraging emotional and social education in the home. Another group of carers felt their role was to foster education at every level. 'Education is a way of giving a child a future.' (36) Many saw their role as one of helping children to overcome previous disadvantage, to enable them to catch up. 'Most children are behind academically and I try to help them catch up.' (23) 'Helping a child overcoming disadvantage of school moves, lack of precious home support and consequent low self esteem due to low achievement is a central part of the fostering task.' (1) Many carers took the time and trouble to spend time teaching their foster children to read and engaging them in a range of other literacy activities. 'I believe it's the duty of every foster carer to help with homework, reading and maths and other schoolwork.'(50) 'Many of the children placed come from very deprived backgrounds and have never had the opportunity or encouragement to learn. I encourage my placements as I do with my own child.' (26).

Contribution to literacy

All carers, a 100% response rate, claimed they made some positive contribution towards the literacy development of their foster children, and many literacy-based activities were discussed. My small sample shows that improvements are occurring, and foster carers are feeling significantly more confident in providing educational support and contributing towards literacy development. Most feel they make a positive contribution to literacy

Fostering Context

A bar chart titled "Fostering Context" with the y-axis labelled "Number of Respondents" (scale 0 to 60) and the x-axis labelled "Source of information".

Legend:
- Key 1
- Key 2
- Key 3 respon...

Categories (Source of information):
- Educating role
- A National Voice
- Contributing to literacy development
- Specialist books in home library
- Out - of - school activities
- Equipped to support education
- 'Breaking Their Fall' guide
- Educational support in placement
- Bullied
- Carer secures educational decisions for LAC
- Involved in making decisions for LAC
- Received educational placement
- Problems after visit from birth parents
- Who Cares? magazine
- Extra allowances

Table

development, and the activities they felt to be important were centred on school activities such as reading and homework. Not one carer identified that contributing to literacy development might also include playing board games, enjoying puzzles together, family quizzes. Not identified also were activities such as exploring the countryside together: walking, bird watching, fishing outings, etc. R. Sinclair (1997) recognises that foster carers need to be more skilful. However, I think they are; they just need to raise their awareness of the range of opportunities there are in the home.

Some responses from my respondents:

> 'Both children are on Special Needs at school. I have a good relationship
> with school, we do all homework and reading at home.'(6)
> 'Read and listen to reading.' (4)
> 'Whatever I can.' (12)
> 'Help with schoolwork at home, reading and spellings.' (2)
> 'Help and advise with schoolwork and help to enjoy books.' (23)
> 'I take them to the local library.' (11)
> 'Short sessions of RRR.' (51)

Farmer *et al.* (2004) asserts that carers varied in the extent they concerned themselves with educational matters, and I tend to agree. Some of the respondents, who identified themselves as working for independent agencies, were more explicit in their responses when describing the work they did. The responses showed clearly the degree of interest, not only in responding to the questions, but also, in the way they described their involvement in educational matters. A deeper, more thorough comparison could have been made from the differences of returns, but this was not within my remit.

Specialist Books

Only twenty-one homes had books that children could relate their own experiences to. I found this finding surprising. Why is it that only twenty-one homes had books in them that would help vulnerable children make sense of their unique experiences, and give them an opportunity to identify with others in a similar situation? One carer had 'teenage books about experiences of fostering but nothing for the younger age group.'(10) Another had 'life support books, colour and feel books.'(9) 'We have leaflets on every subject going,' wrote another (20), while one more said that the only books given 'were what fostering and care

orders are about.'(16). I had asked respondents to elaborate on this question and say what type of books they had, but most left the space blank. There were some responses, however: 'Talk about books relating to fostering and adoption emotional health as well as novels of children in care.'(1) 'Books that reflect their interests – mixed-race background.'(8)

This result does imply that there is little importance placed on having specialist books in the home and a lack of knowledge about the need to provide them. There is also a lack of respect shown by their absence. Registered childminders, who provide a home based service, are asked by OFSTED inspectors to ensure there is a wide range of books and toys to reflect the diversity of individuals and are asked to see them on inspection. Why, then, are not carers asked about the resources they provide? There are many good authors that write specifically for and about children who are fostered or adopted (Jacqueline Wilson, the Foster Family series, etc); yet there seemed to be little on the home library shelf in the foster home. (See appendix 3)

Extra Allowances and out-of school clubs

Volume 4 of The Department of Health series of guidance to the Children Act (1989) states that 'children should be encouraged and given opportunities to develop and pursue leisure interests and specific gifts they may have.' The National Standards for Foster Care (11.5) states that the foster home provides an environment where financial and other support for attending school trips and other activities are met. However, when I asked respondents if foster children were given extra allowances for outings, extra books etc, the predominant answer was a resounding no. One carer gave an emphatic *NO* to the question of extra allowances being given for leisure pursuits, but this was followed by 'the local authority will pay for an educational trip.' (11) Some private agencies do make allowances: 'Agency carers receive a professional fee to cover some of these, but at times extra tuition and specialist school is essential and not funded.' (1) Another carer responded by saying, 'Unknown, never asked. Have funded everything ourselves. Social Services are saying there is no money.'(12) It appears that private agencies will provide extra funds, but local LA's will not.

Forty-five carers were not given extra funds, yet thirty-eight of the foster children attended some form of out-of-school activity. The foster children enjoyed a range of activities: swimming, music lessons, scouts, dancing lessons, extra private tuition, etc. Gilligan (1999) identified that talents and gifts should be encouraged and enhanced, yet no extra allowances

are given for children to participate in extra activities, and, had it not been for the motivation of the carers to pursue the children's interests, they would not participate in them at all.

Equipped to help educationally

Literacy practices are bi-directional: from carer to child, and from child to carer. It is a two-way exchange: a support system that will actively promote literacy competence. A. Heath *et al.* (1989) and Jackson (1986) were right in stating that a reason for underachievement was not because there was insufficient attention given to the foster children; my sample showed that most of the carers were competent and skilful. 'Many need to be taught the basics that are not taught at school.' (27) A massive forty-seven carers said they felt equipped to support children in their education, and were doing so, even though they had not received specific training in this area. The homes are not impoverished or limited in literacy opportunity, and the carers, forty-seven at least, are very suitable role models and educators. Education has a value in the foster placement, even though it is not made an explicit part of the carers' role. These are significant findings: 'I am not a teacher but I can assist teachers and give general life education.'(36) The transmission of literacy practices is not a one-way channel and carers actively interact with their foster children: '[You] take on the role as parent and teach your child life skills.' (13) This is good news.

Educational support made explicit/ Training on educational matters

Educational support has not been made explicit as part of a foster carers' role. Only twenty-one carers had been advised, or told, that part of their role was to give educational support. 'It is presumed that I will support education on which I agree with, but there has been no specific training on it.' (23)

Even though carers may not yet have comprehensive training opportunities on the importance of giving educational support, many are very well equipped to give it. 'No training planned but as a mother I feel I must give my placements as much support as if they were my birth children.' (26) 'We feel it is an essential part of parenting and therefore part of fostering - with the extra component of children who have clearly been disadvantaged in the education system and often have emotional/ behavioural problems which inhibit their ability to learn.' (29).

This lack of training is not a surprising result when major reports, such as the SSI/OFSTED Report (1995) *The Guidance on the Education of Looked After Children* (2000) and the Social Exclusion Report (2003), although making reference to the importance of appropriate training for foster carers, continue to focus more on the contribution of the school. Are we to be convinced by the assertion made in the quote by Jackson and Sandev (2001:89) when my results show differently?

> To ensure that children living in foster families receive adequate educational support, a number of authorities provide training to foster carers, to raise their awareness of the importance of educational attainments and to provide them with appropriate skills and strategies to support their foster children's education.

The quotes cited by carers show how dedicated they can be in supporting education, but forty-two, a staggering 81% of carers in my sample had not received any training on the importance of giving educational support. 'The agency runs a day of education jargon that was informative but sometimes initials are used but these were explained.' (11).

Even though the survey was completely anonymous some comments made by the carers led me again to understand that independent agencies provide far better working conditions than local authorities: better training, better support structure, and carers are better funded and financed, not only receiving a wage, but able to draw on funds to access specialist services.

Behaviour and bullying problems

Bullying continues to be a problem. Thirty-six children in placement had undergone some form of bullying, either in the community or in school. Bullying and name-calling can even have life-long effects. It is something that requires to be addressed. I asked carers also whether there had been behaviour difficulties after a parental visit, and twenty-seven stated there had been. I had expected this figure to be even higher due to contact having the potential to disrupt behaviour. Nevertheless, both figures were still too high.

Rowe (1984) found significant behaviour problems in her studies, and reported lack of concentration, attention-seeking behaviour, raised anxiety levels and insecurity: all of which would impact on the ability to learn. Kelly (1995) found that behaviour problems were a

common cause of family breakdown, and Hunter (2001:123) comments, 'Self-destructiveness makes the child all set to make even good carers powerless to help.' If behaviour issues and bullying continues to be a problem then these issues will continue to present a barrier to learning.

Guides and charities

There are numerous guides, booklets and leaflets published with information that benefits young people in public care, yet, startlingly, my respondents are unaware of most of them. In recent times, voluntary agencies and charities have come into being to promote the interests of this group of children, recognising that information-sharing contributes to and promotes equal opportunity. *Breaking their fall* is a publication written specifically for carers to inform them of the reasons why many children Looked After have poor literacy skills. Surprisingly, fifty out of the fifty two carers surveyed had not heard of the magazine, yet according to The Right To Read Project Report (2002:8), '*Breaking their fall* put forward a number of proven strategies for addressing the poor literacy of children in public care.' There was the same kind of response regarding the magazine, *Who Cares?* This is a magazine specifically written for children in public care, yet twenty-nine homes did not receive it. This publication offers advice and support to children and young people; it offers helpful tips to help a child make sense of their unique experiences. It has competitions, quizzes and articles of interest, as well as a letter section. Forty-three carers had not heard of *A National Voice,* a charity that concerns itself with safeguarding and representing the interests of this group. I found these results astonishing too. When answering the question about the magazine one carer (36) said of their foster son that 'he throws it away unopened,' but at least the boy received it.

Decision-making

Forty-six carers were involved in the decision-making process regarding issues related to learning difficulties, statement procedures and behaviour. This is good news and shows that effective co-operation and partnerships between home and school may actually be working.

School placement

Thirty-six carers secured a school placement for their foster child, but there are exceptions: 'When I take a child more often than not no schooling has been arranged. The last boy had no school for 12 weeks. He was offered 2 hours for 2 weeks the last week I had him. He is illiterate. I had private tuition for him; he picked up his 60 key words very quickly. However,

he has moved on and the situation will happen again. He is totally terrified of school thanks to the system. Social Services blamed the absence of a statement for this.'(27) 'This is a shared responsibility – but we feel concerned that sometimes children need a small supportive unit which may only be available within the independent sector, and funding is difficult to obtain, as is advice.'(1)

Circular 13/94 states that carers are the ones that make the first contact with school on any issue related to education, and my results show this to be happening. Carers have common knowledge of local schools in their area and are usually the ones who negotiate admission.

Commentary

Carers do perceive their role as one of an educator in some capacity, and they do feel equipped to offer educational help and give support in educational matters related to the school. Some provide educational input in their own right. Significantly, all can describe some contribution they have made towards the literacy development of their charges, even if it is only providing some paper and crayons. Most feel it is their responsibility to secure an educational placement, and the majority are involved in any decision related to educational matters. Regrettably, over half of my sample had contacted the school about behaviour problems after a visit by a birth parent. There are no extra allowances given for out-of-school leisure interests, even though research shows that enhancing gifts and talents through leisure pursuits engenders the growth of resilience, and has a protective value against later mental health problems. Guides and circulars are not being distributed and that a charity exists to support the interests of young people in public care is not generally known.

Training in educational support is not an integral component of the carers' in-service training, even though major governmental reports have advised on this for over 12 years. The reports have emphasised the important contribution carers can make, but the educational role of the carer has neither been made explicit in recruitment nor in training. There is no provision for specialist books to be in the home, although research again shows the protective value of working with books or materials that address issues of conflict or distress in an indirect, non-threatening way. There are no extra allowances to buy such books or materials, but luckily carers have provided the funds and many children participated in a range of activities. Bullying is still commonplace.

All issues in this context are important but the aspects on training and educational support and specialist resources will be explored in greater depth later. The cascading and information sharing of important documents will be discussed too.

Literacy context

This section deals explicitly with literacy related activities in the home and environment to assess exactly what literacy based opportunities, events and practices are taking place. My initial impression is that there is a great deal going on in the foster placement to develop literacy-based practices. I must again define what I mean by 'supporting education' because I have to reiterate that I have only seen the term used in relation to the support carers can give to other agencies in supporting the education of Young People in Public Care; it is not seen in relation to what the carer can do for them in the home, except to ensure the young person has, 'suitable school clothing and appropriate equipment such as PE shoes....'(Source: NVQ training manual, 2001:22-24). I use the term 'supporting education' to mean the practical 'hands on' help a carer can give in relation to the provision of literacy opportunities, events, practices, and development of literacy within the home, and not just the support they give to the school by ensuring children have the right PE shoes.

> You can really help a child's or young person's schoolwork
> by doing simple things at home, like helping with homework
> and getting them to talk about what they are doing at school.

> NVQ Training manual (2001:22)

Numerous questions were asked in this section, which would identify the actual opportunities, events, practices and developments that were taking place.

Main findings

- 23 foster homes had children who did not own any personal books.
- 50 foster homes had a variety of books.
- 27 foster homes had children who had not brought books with them when placed.
- 37 foster homes had children who regularly read/ and were bought comics and magazines.

112

- 44 foster homes had children who did not have access to Care websites.
- 46 foster carers felt they were responsible for providing reading and writing materials.
- 42 foster carers were involved in reading activities.
- In 30 homes library borrowing is a regular activity.
- 47 foster homes had a quiet place for children to read or study.
- 28 foster homes had children who had no Life Story Book.
- 38 foster homes had children who were encouraged to write letters, notes, and messages.
- 52 (100%) foster carers are able to spend quality time with their foster children.
- 50 foster carers did not receive the Government's supplement to the guidance, *Education Protects*.
- 22 foster carers thought they were not responsible for reading to, or with, their foster child.
- 50 foster carers thought listening to music important.

See Table 4.6

Book ownership and books when placed

Ownership of books was my first question because the response would indicate, in the first instance, the book reading culture of the home. Twenty-nine children owned their own books and this indicated to me that reading for pleasure was part of the practice of many of the homes. This number, however, was discouragingly low. Owning books, as opposed to borrowing books from library or school, indicates that reading is enjoyed enough to want to own them, but what about the other twenty three foster placements who had children that did not own any personal books? And only twenty-five foster placements had children who had brought books with them when placed. These findings could appear outrageous until we look a little closer at them. Twenty-three foster placements had children who did not have a book of their own, but fifty foster placements had a variety of books in them that were shared by the whole household. The home library did appear to be well stocked. 'We are bibliophiles.'(8).

Literacy Context

Number of respondents

Y-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60

Categories (Source of information):
- Brought own books to placement
- Home library
- Providing literacy materials
- Comics/Mags
- Involvement in reading with/to LAC
- Library use
- Quiet study area
- Life Story Work
- Letter writing/notes
- Reading responsibility
- Owning personal books
- Website
- Guide: Education Protects
- Music
- Quality time

Source of information

Table

The question now was, did the children have access to those household books, were they age appropriate and suitable, and did the foster home encourage the foster child to engage with them in an active way? Reference books, fiction and non-fiction reading material were described, and talking books, read-along books were all identified as having a place in the home library. If fostered children do not access the household books then this finding becomes very significant. It appears, however, there is reading activity going on in many of the foster placements because forty-two foster carers were involved in reading activities and forty-six carers felt a responsibility to provide reading material.

Involvement in reading and reading responsibility

How luxurious it must be to sit with an interested adult and read a much loved and much thumbed book! Shared book reading opportunities are the greatest precursor to later reading success (Topping and Wolfendale 1995). Griffiths (1999) has accused foster carers of not being aware of the importance of reading, but this was not upheld in my findings. 'I would like them to have as much pleasure from reading as I have.' (40) 'Who else would read to them or with them? (4). Forty-two carers were actively involved in shared and paired reading activities or in giving encouragement to read alone, although curiously only thirty thought it was their responsibility to initiate them. I would have to find out why this was the case.

'I read individually to each child every evening.'(1) 'We listen to them read. We help them to choose books. We read bedtime stories.'(8) Many carers were professional people, besides being carers, and they included teachers and social workers who acknowledged the value of reading in the home and to the children. Research has shown it is not simply enough to flood the environment with books and writing materials, and my findings show that carers actively interacted in a positive manner. They were also involved in the provision of literacy materials. 'We read at home. Our aim is 30 pages a week. We don't always manage this but we keep trying.'(6)

Research shows conclusively that literacy development, which begins in the home, is instrumental in future achievement at school (Bus *et al.* 1995; Wells 1987). Social and cultural disadvantages (J.W. B. Douglas 1964; Osborn and St. Clair 1987 and Halsey *et al.* 1982) have also been implicated in studies as a reason for the failure to progress educationally. They report that if parents were genuinely interested in the child's progress, and actively encouraged them, this could alleviate other disadvantages. It could be argued

then, that young people in public care are not disadvantaged in an educational sense by being in the state system, and may even fare better than if they were in their birth families. If the children's family of origin placed no value on educational success, and did not positively encourage educational achievement as most of these carers in this sample did, then being looked after by the state may actually be to their educational advantage.

Comics and magazines

Comics and magazines also formed an integral part of the reading ethos with thirty-seven households regularly buying them.

Provision of reading and writing materials and letter writing practices

Questions were asked on the provision of reading and writing materials. 'Children need to be helped to appreciate and enjoy literacy and this has to start and be encouraged at home.' (1) Providing the materials to develop literacy competence is 'part of good parenting.'(14). Another carer provided materials because, 'I want to give them the tools to be creative in any way they choose.'(8) Several others simply said that they provided everything the child needed. 'I provide everything as I do with my own children.' (10)

It was encouraging to learn that forty-six carers provided on a regular basis some form of writing or reading materials, and these were integral items of the household. Thirty-eight carers also encouraged their foster children to write letters, thank you notes and messages. It is commonly assumed that the tools of literacy (pens, paper, crayons, etc) are readily available in every household, but this is not so. Therefore it was gratifying to see that in the foster placement they were commonplace.

Library use, library membership and home library

Bald *et al.* (1995) identified in his study that children rarely went to the library and in my survey only thirty fostering households used the library regularly, or used it as an opportunity to make it a family activity. There was no regulation by either the independent fostering agencies or the social service departments to make library visiting a mandatory requirement. Libraries, today, offer much more than just borrowing books and this aspect of improving the educational chances of this group of children is not being utilized. There are one or two isolated projects where the library service is in partnership with a local social service department, and together they find practical ways to encourage young people in

115

public care to take full advantage of what is on offer. One such initiative in the West Midlands, *Caring with Books*, which provides the foster home with family tickets, book buying sessions, free photocopying facilities, and involves them in reading-trains and writing competitions. The children are also invited to presentations of published authors talking about their books. Another resource of the project is to overlook fines on overdue books, but this is arguably one resource too many. Part of learning and being self-directed is to take personal responsibility for one's own actions and to be disciplined; waiving book fines does not encourage this personal autonomy.

Quiet study area

It was most satisfying to see that forty-seven children had a quiet area in which to study or be alone. The bedroom was of course a popular place, but a spare sitting room was identified, as was a separate study. 'Their bedrooms - they also have a large playroom with tables and chairs in – and books!'(8) 'He has his own room with a desk and a chair and computer facilities.'(23)

Life Story Work

Only nineteen children had, or were continuing to build, a Life Story Book. This figure is probably higher because five respondents did not indicate in their returns if their fostered children were building a Life Story Book. This was a disappointing result when the significance of the work involved in creating and building an identity and background through Life Story Work is so valuable and important for a child who is dislocated from his or her own family. Throughout this research I have met key contradictions. Policy decisions enshrined in law state that the best interests of the child must always be paramount, yet I have found instances where the child is not best served. Life Story Work is one of these contradictions. On the one hand, the background and culture of a child's own family must be promoted and respected, where identity with the family of origin must be maintained. On the other hand, there is a lack of respect for the child's need to work through their life's pathway when Life Story Work is not in place to help a child learn about, and identify with, their own unique family circumstances and their journey through the care system. It should be an integral part of policy and good practice: as important as the care, educational plans, assessment and action plans, and other LAC forms. These forms monitor and chart the child's development and progress objectively, yet it seems that because of its highly

subjective and aesthetic nature, Life Story Work has not become part of a policy that grounds it in practice.

Quality time

Unanimously, (100%) carers indicated that at some point during every week they made time to spend some quality time with their young charges. Can we believe such a good result? For some this meant incorporating this time into the fabric of normal everyday activities and routines, but nevertheless, making sure it was precious and special. 'When the children are in the bath every night, and private talk time just before bed.'(8) Another carer found the opportunity to spend quality time with her foster child, 'on days out, journeys, in car and daily sit round the table etc, and one-to-one.'(6)

Guide

The guide, *Education Protects,* was issued as a supplement specifically for carers to inform them of their role in improving the educational chances of their foster children. I consider this document to be very important as a first tool to bring awareness of the vital and pivotal role carers play in raising achievement. Astonishingly, only one carer in my sample had received it. This is a disgraceful finding and has very serious implications of failure at the institutional level if such an important supplement is not being cascaded downwards to the key workers for whom it was meant.

Websites

The computer and Internet is swiftly becoming part of every household. Information technology has expanded considerably in the last decade making it accessible to everyone, and more employers require employees to have computer literacy skills. As a result of this expansion, and the belief that many homes now own a computer, software packages have been marketed and a range of online services geared towards young people in public care. Carezone is one such website designed to give children access to a wide range of information and support from other children in public care. There must be an awareness that this type of merchandise is still evolving, nevertheless, only eight foster homes had heard of CareZone, or any other site devoted to the needs of children in care. One carer stated that she had difficulty helping with homework, because they didn't have use of a computer. Many local authorities are now putting a computer in each placement, but this is not yet common practice.

Music

Music has the ability to change mood and be therapeutic. It has also been known to calm the nerves (although it does depend on the type) and so the inclusion in the questionnaire of the importance of listening to music was appropriate. Fifty carers stated that they felt listening to music had beneficial effects for their foster children, and this is an encouraging finding.

Commentary

The *Right To Read* Project Report 2001:8 recognises, 'the pivotal role of literacy is in enabling children to access all other aspects of education,' and it appears that most foster carers recognise it too. Jackson (1994:277) also identifies that,

> children who are read to often in their early years are more
> likely to read early themselves.

I was very happy to see how active carers were in the shared reading task, making reading opportunities part of everyday routine and actually knowing the importance of doing so, so I did not quite understand why a small percentage of carers felt it was not their responsibility to encourage reading, or to read to, or with, their fostered child? Topping and Wolfensdale (1995); Wells (1985); Wade and Moore (1996a); Bus *et al.* (1995) and Topping (1988), have all identified how vital and important it is to share in a reading activity. In addition, forty-seven of them were providing a quiet place to study. Thirty-eight carers encouraged letter writing and notes of thanks, but only twenty-nine children owned their own books and not many children brought books with them into the foster placement. Thankfully, all the carers found time to share special moments.

> Proximity of books and psychological proximity of people
> around enhanced the placements, opportunities, and access
> to books for children.

> Neuman (2000:308)

Comics and magazines buying are integral practices of the household and listening to music is considered important, but access to appropriate websites has still to evolve. In all but two households there are a variety of books for the whole family, even though library borrowing was not a practiced activity.

There are numerous literacy based opportunities and events being offered in the foster placement, so the overarching topics to emerge from this subsection relate to Life Story Work (or lack of this work) as a practice of the foster placement and access to books, book ownership and book reading responsibility, even though the literacy practices within the home will form a common thread throughout the rest of this research.

School context

This context explores the relationship between home and school, and enquires about attendance, liaison matters, issues of exclusion and truancy, reviews, discipline problems, sociability, and the role of the designated teacher. The emphasis was not on the school as educator; therefore, the discussion will only concern itself with school related issues that impact on the home, i.e. homework and attendance.

Main Findings

- 40 foster carers knew their foster child's designated teacher
- 44 foster homes had children who read other books besides school ones.
- 40 foster carers were given advice on exclusion and truancy issues.
- 45 foster homes had children who attended school regularly.
- 44 foster carers had some liaison with school.
- 46 foster carers attended school concerts and parent's evenings.
- 21 foster homes had children who were withdrawn from school to attend reviews.
- 48 foster carers attend parents' evenings.
- 38 foster homes had children who mixed well socially.
- 50 foster carers helped with homework
- 47 foster carers felt equipped to help with homework.
- 30 foster carers involved parents in decisions regarding the school.
- 45 foster carers had not received the guide: *Who Cares? About Education?*
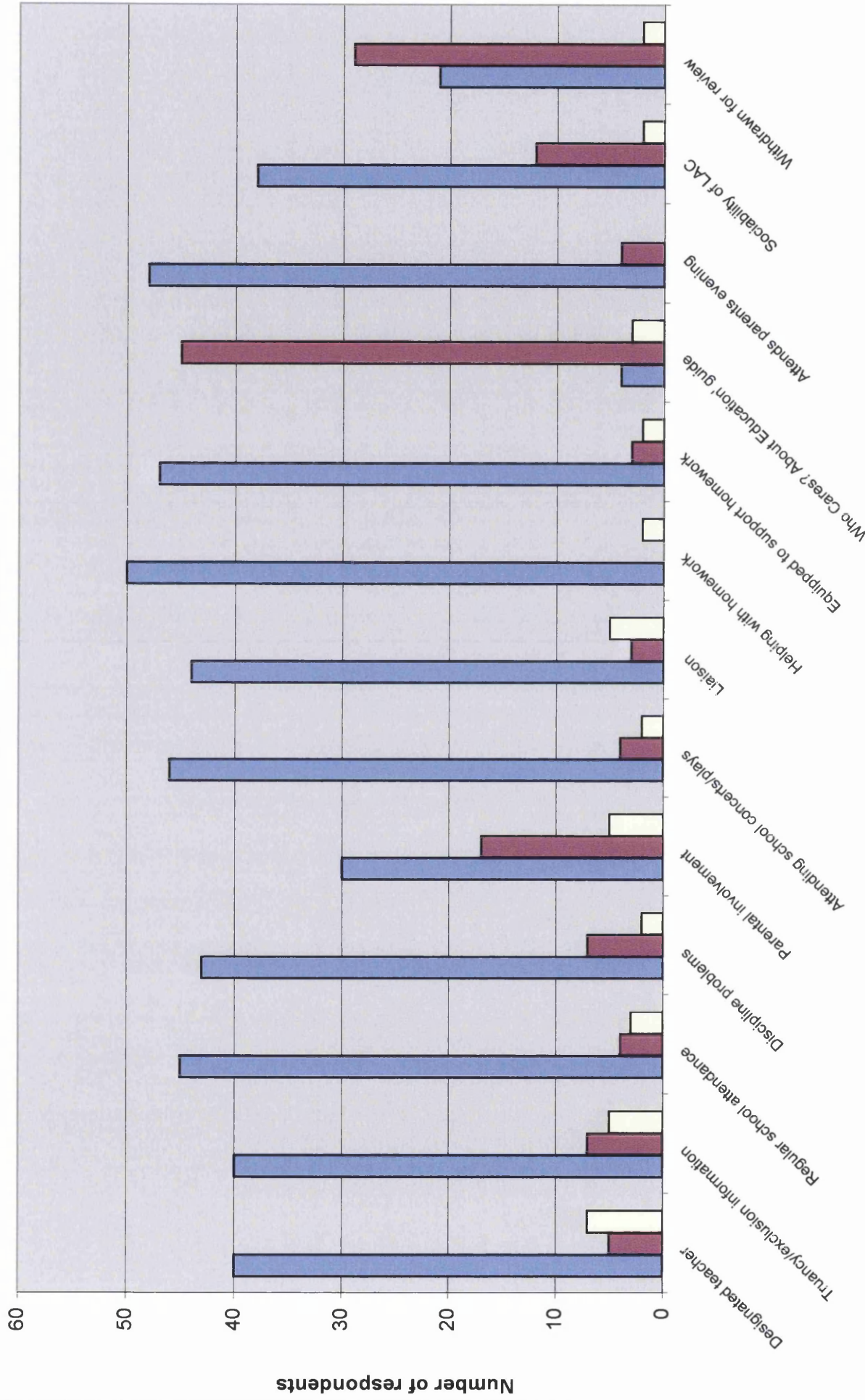
See Table 4.7

School Context

Number of respondents

Source of information

Key 1
Key 2
Key 3 respo...

Table:

Withdrawal from class for reviews

Happily it was not a regular occurrence to withdraw a child from school or class to attend a review. Twenty-one carers in my sample had children withdrawn from class to attend a review. Some carers find this unacceptable. One carer stated she was, 'totally against this. We are trying to make life normal but days off are difficult to explain to children in class and when X goes missing with head teacher.'(48) Childcare reviews should be out of school hours, because it is not appropriate to withdraw a child from a class to attend to business that is not school related.

Involving parents in school matters

The question I asked was: were parents involved in the educational decisions of their children? Thirty carers did involve parents in school matters, but there was no enthusiasm to do so. 'Most of the parents I have been involved with are more interested in their own needs than their child's.'(36) 'It wasn't easy as parents violent.'(14)

School attendance/ truancy and exclusion issues

Another of New Labour's 'targets' was to reduce the number of expulsions by one third, because expelled children cost four to five times as much to teach in the units they are referred to. Independent appeal panels can overrule head teachers who want to expel a child, and this has lowered the rate of expulsions. It does appear that carers take on the educational responsibility of their charges, and forty of them had been given advice on exclusion and truancy issues. One carer stated that her foster child was on 'half day exclusions at present.' (19) 'Most of the young people we have staying have been excluded from EBD (Emotional Behavioural Disorders) schools so we are often currently not in any schooling.'(20) Making it harder for head teachers to exclude pupils may mean that Looked After children could be discriminated against. The Social Exclusion Unit (1998) asserts that the educational achievements of young people in public care are symptomatic of the low priority that is accorded to this group, and, as they are already labelled and discriminated against, these children could be targeted. If it is harder to exclude, then children who are already stereotyped may find it harder to get a school place.

The government's drive to reduce exclusion may be one of the reasons why I did not find expulsion or non-attendance to be a factor in underachievement in my sample. Blyth and Milner (1994) researched at length the issues of exclusion and truancy, but I found no

evidence in my sample to say that exclusion was an issue, even though earlier research has shown that 40% of school exclusions involve children in care. Non-attendance and exclusion are 'significant features of the educational experience of many Looked After children. The proportion of non-attendance and exclusion was higher (26.6%) for children in the last two years of schooling.' (Social Exclusion Unit 1988)

Homework/ equipped to help with homework

Homework matters have also been under the scrutiny of researchers, and again I can find no evidence that homework is being withheld by the schools in relation to Looked After children, neither can I find evidence that homework is not being supported in the foster home. Fifty carers helped or supported homework, and, forty-seven felt they were suitably equipped to help in all aspects related to homework. If carers felt uncertain, then they would seek help from the school. My results show that most carers in this sample were equipped to help with homework, and all supported their children with their homework. 'Many looked after children are excluded from homework.' Griffiths (1999) If schools were excluding these children from homework, then they certainly weren't excluding the children of the carers in my survey.

School concerts/plays/parents' evenings

The carers are very active in attending extra curricula events. Forty-six carers attended play and concerts to support the extra curricula activities of their Looked After children, even though one carer commented that she would attend, 'if they stayed in the school long enough to take part in anything!'(20) Forty-eight carers did, however, attend parents' evenings and took an active interest in educational progress. Interestingly, carers were not enthusiastic about birth parents being involved in school matters. It didn't matter whether it was attending school concerts, issues of discipline or progress: carers in this sample were reluctant to involve parents. 'On some occasions it is not always beneficial for parents' input. Parents can feel resentful towards foster carers and do not want any sort of co-operation.' (3)

Guide: Who Cares? About Education

The guide: 'Who cares? About Education?' was written specifically for children in public care. This action guide was written for children aged eleven and upwards, so it must be stressed that the figure of forty-five children who had not received this guide could overstate the results somewhat, as some of the children will have been below the target age. However,

it is significant that the other guides have also not been distributed. The *'Who Cares? About Education'* guide was supposed to help children understand how to get advice from the people and organisations that would support the young person in school and in education generally. It was supposed to advise on how to go about matters if things were not as they should be. One carer explained, 'Wouldn't look at it if sent.'(35) The young person concerned would clearly make that decision once he had received the action guide but the choice not to look at it should be there to be made. There was no such guide to help younger children to weave their way through school with support, and this guide, I feel, should have been addressed to a younger age group as well. (In 2004, a magazine for younger children was published).

Designated teacher

Forty carers knew of and worked with, their foster child's designated teacher. This result is good, because there were only five that had yet to learn of the role of the designated teachers. The remaining seven from the sample either had children who had yet to attend school, or had just left.

Sociability/ behaviour in school and at home

It is a convention of questioning that some questions are asked in a different form in order to identify the strength of a response, and many questions in the survey could be cross referenced with others to find this out. Discipline issues and reading activities were two such areas. Forty-three carers identified that behaviour was a significant issue for the school and home, although they did report that thirty-six of their foster children mixed well at school. Earlier identification showed that in twenty-seven foster placements, foster children displayed behaviour problems in school and at home, after a visit by a birth parent. Discipline in schools is a continuing problem.

Liaison

Garnet (1995) identified there was little advice given to carers on how to liaise with schools, yet I found that little advice was needed because carers took the initiative to communicate with the school as they saw fit. Berridge (1987) felt that carers were unclear about whose responsibility it was to resolve educational problems, yet my sample was certainly clear about their duties regarding the school. Bald *et al.* (1995:29) also stated that carers are not fully informed about educational matters,

> ... felt inhibited about providing educational support
> on behalf of the young people with schools and teachers.

Things must be improving, however, because carers are taking responsibility for educational problems, and are certainly not inhibited in liaising with the school on behalf of the children. 'We work as a team since our children present a lot of discipline problem and behaviour problems.'(8) 'We all monitor behaviour closely. I attend regular meetings. School is aware of child's circumstances.'(23) It appears there is more face-to-face, direct school contact with carers than with social workers. Much of the liaison with the school, however, was concerned more with behaviour issues than with educational ones: 'Due to problems, we are in contact at any time if either of us has difficulties with behaviour or education, usually not doing homework.'(14) 'When I had a 6-year old boy I was in constant contact with school due to behaviour problems.'(27)

Commentary.

The results in this subsection were very consistent and almost all the questions in this context could be eliminated. The results from this section speak for themselves without further elaboration, except to challenge the perception and findings of other authors that proclaim that homework is not seen to matter in the home, or that the school relinquishes its responsibility to provide it. I cannot support these assertions here.

It is not reasonable to blame the care system for the poor educational performance of its children without identifying the limitations of other agencies. The research objectives of this investigation does not actively explore the contribution of the school (this has been adequately researched elsewhere) but it does look towards the school in relation to liaison between home-school relations, homework issues, exclusion, truancy and attendance, which will impact on the foster placement. Fletcher (1993) was amongst the 'leaders' in exploring the limited level of educational achievement of children Looked After, identifying the scant attention it received and suggesting, in part, that the school system was responsible. She proffered that educational departments and teachers give scant attention to the children's progress and had low expectations of them anyway. Carlen *et al.* (1992) insists that schools stigmatise, discriminate and humiliate; she suggests there is name-calling by both teachers and pupils. I cannot disclaim or affirm these claims, but what I can say is that carers are the lynchpins around which both education and social service departments rotate, and they are

the ones that have first contact with the school and have first hand knowledge of what happens to the Looked After child in school.

If children are seen as underachievers who will not make a contribution to the school's success in the league tables, then promoting their inclusion becomes even more difficult, and the division between care and education widens even more. It does not help collaborative working between these services. Schools could utilize foster carers more, because my evidence shows that they do effectively liaise with the school, even if the local social service department does not. It is regrettable that most contact with the school concerns behaviour issues, and perhaps perceptions by both school and foster placement need to change to recognise the educative value of the carer as an equal partner, and not solely as one who has the caring role. Discussions on educational progress should not be taking second place to behaviour problems, but, until behaviour issues are resolved, educational matters will get caught in the slipstream and receive less attention. Close liaison between these agencies is made difficult when the propulsion of the school is to be successful at all costs, and the need of the social services is to find a school place, irrespective of its academic reputation. Both have different agendas to meet, and these may not be in the best interests of the Looked After children.

Schools must show that the majority of its pupils are achieving, because they have the competitive 'race for results' mentality. Who wants children that research has shown to be not only disruptive but underachievers as well? The 1988 Education Reform Act saw exclusion rates soar. Competitive pressures and a market-led mentality, league tables and a results-led school system, has made the educational fate of these children even more dire; nor is finding a school place as easy as the government would have us believe. The foster carer appears to be the mediator between the two services and the one who makes the wheels run smoothly, but they are in a difficult position with so much at stake.

The responsibility for change doesn't just rest with care systems, but with an education policy that judges a school only on external results. The Educational Reform Act (1988) has effectively placed Looked After children on the educational scrap heap, and this may account for the fact that nothing was done to improve their educational outcomes until now. Certainly my results show that bullying and name-calling continues to be a problem in schools. This

will of course impact on the potential to learn, and put in the shade any initiative to raise standards.

Policy profile

What is happening at the institutional level? The present government developed a monitoring system to gather data, monitor performance, and to help raise achievement. Are plans being made with the active participation of the carer? Does the carer hold a personal education plan for each child and receive an assessment and action plan as well? Do carers feel they are an integral part of an interagency team? Are they given productive support, or is there a mismatch between agencies, interagency collaboration, and those on the frontline, as claimed by Cleaver (1998)? Is there congruence and concordance between all concerned? Do carers 'get along' with social services, schools, and families of origin? Do the stakeholders with responsibility for Looked After children share the same experiential experiences? Are they like-minded?

Main Findings

- 27 foster homes had children who held a Personal Education Plan.
- 45 foster carers had read Code of Practice and National Standards.
- 44 foster carers were fully involved in planning educational needs.
- 47 foster carers felt part of an interagency team.
- 20 foster carers did not receive Assessment and Action Plans with every child.
- 48 foster carers had regular, productive support from placing agency.
- 20 foster carers did not receive 'essential information' on the day the child was placed.
- 44 core members attended reviews regularly.
- 31 foster carers were members of the Fostering Network.
- 33 foster carers had not received the guide, *Education: A guide for Foster Carers.*

See Table 4.8

Social services departments have to implement all the new policy changes and measures and sometimes they can drown under the weight of all the new documentation and legislation. One of their central roles is to protect the interests of Looked After children, and they have to

Policy Context

Table: 4.8

Source of information

Legend:
- Key 1 =
- Key 2 =
- Key 3 = respons

Y-axis: Number of respondents (0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60)

Source categories (left to right):
- Member of ' Fostering Network '
- PEP
- Read Code of Pr/ Nat'l Stan
- Received ' Education: A guide for carers '
- Involved in planning
- Interagency team member
- Ass & Action plans in place
- Support from placing agency
- LAC forms in place
- Core group attend reviews
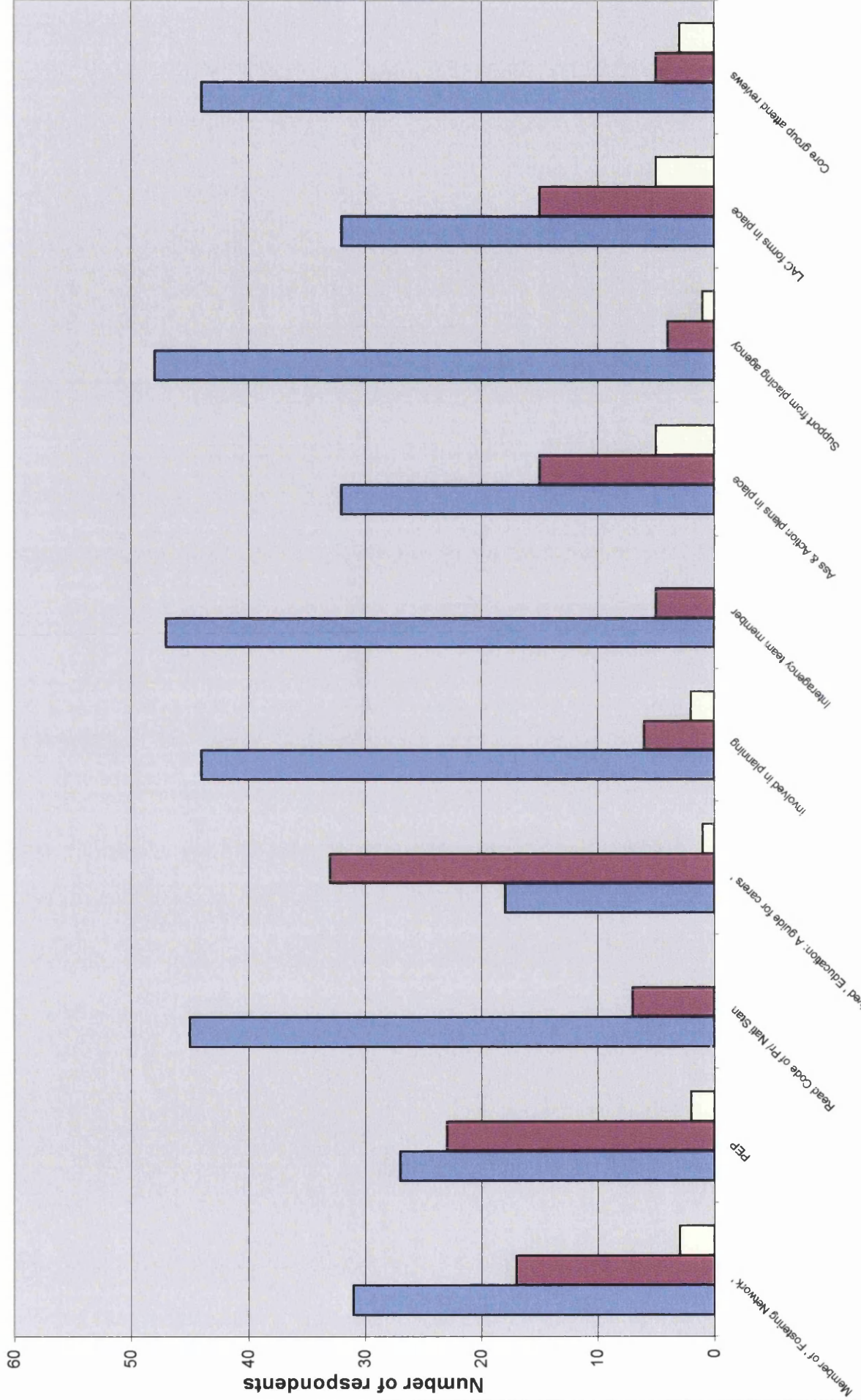
respond both to the needs of the child, while at the same time try to implement all the new policies that place increasing pressure on them. This subsection examines the role of agencies in promoting literacy development and practices within the foster placement.

Planning

Surprisingly, forty-four carers were fully involved in planning the care and educational needs of their foster child but 'It varies between LA's.' (1) The benefits arising from agencies and members within the same team working together cannot be understated. This was good news. There should be interdependency on all agencies and institutions, and upon individuals within them, to plan the needs of all children, not only the educational health of these children, but their total welfare and well-being, and carers are clearly involved in this.

Guides/ membership

Thirty-one carers were members of the Fostering Network. It appears that local authorities automatically subscribe their carers to the organisation. Independent fostering agency carers do not have automatic membership. One carer had not even heard of it.

Reviews

I asked if each member of the core group - social worker, designated teacher, carer, and parent - attended regular reviews in order to assess whether 'joined up' working partnerships were really in place. Forty-four carers identified that core members attended regular review meetings and all the carers in my sample regularly attended reviews: it was the school representative that was often absent. On the whole this was a good result, even though 'sometimes parents refuse to attend or a duty social worker will come instead.'(11) 'We were the only ones present,' stated one carer. (37) Another said, 'the short notice often precludes school staff from attending.'(36)

The role of the corporate parent does not just rest with social services; schools also have a responsibility as advocated in *Pupils with Problems*, DfEE Circular 13/94. Working partnerships are seen as essential and vital, where legal issues, provision and responsibilities are shared amongst the care providers to promote continuity of care.

They (social workers) expected teachers at reviews and make
a report but we found it surprising that social workers were
less inclined to include in their reports information from foster
carers about children's educational progress.

<div align="right">Hill (1999:374)</div>

Personal Education Plan, Assessment and Action Record and LAC forms

These forms of assessment and monitoring were brought into play to record and chart the care and educational development of each young person in public care. Twenty-seven homes held personal education plans, thirty-two received an assessment and action plan, and thirty-two received LAC forms on the same day the child was placed. My results show that the statutory forms are in place, even though there is no consistency in their use and application. Action and assessment records are working, but there is no uniform service and it has not been channelled into habitual practice. 'Yes now, but not in the passed [past]'(14).The records ensure that carers can plan and assess a child's developmental needs and outcome objectives, and they remain a means of charting progress and modifying existing priorities as new demands are met. They should ensure that a quality service is being delivered, but we have to be careful that the forms do not become a 'paper chase': chasing bits of paper to make a system appear efficient and looking as if the local authority or agency is delivering an effective, quality service that looks good externally, while it is little more than a smokescreen which disguises that nothing, or very little, is done to improve the life chances of young people in public care.

Interagency teamwork / support from agency

There has been much written on the lack of support from agencies to support carers in their work and yet forty-seven respondents reported good interagency teamwork. Forty-six stated that they received adequate support from their agency or department, but according to one carer it was, 'very variable between LA's… have independent social worker from fostering agency – supervision is regular, supportive and challenging.'(1) But another carer recognised that, 'not enough information shared with me! Visits too long apart, no phone contact in between.'(7) 'There have been times when the young person has not been allocated a regular social worker; this is very frustrating,' another said.(48) According to Maddocks 2002:2, 'Independent agencies were not regarded as potential partners but seen as necessary care providers during times of crisis or shortage. '

National Standards

Good news! Forty-five carers had read the Code of Practice and The National Standards for Foster Care. Reading is one thing, action another, but carers do seem to have taken on board the advice and recommendations given in section 4: 11.5.

Commentary

This policy context identifies that, although carers are the principal influence on a child's development, it is other key stakeholders that really have the power to implement change at the institutional level, Good effective teamwork and interagency support does appear to be evolving, but social work personnel, who have the greatest influence at policy level for implementing new practices and changing perceptions, still need to appreciate that carers are equal partners in the drive to raise educational attainment.

It does appear that carers do know their responsibility towards educational development, and are the ones that can be instrumental in raising the educational achievement of this group, and social service personnel in the delivery and dissemination of important information will accomplish this only if there are consistent practices. It also means that social services need to raise their own perception of the carer as able to support education in the home. Without such information and belief a good effective service delivery cannot be achieved. This can result in an ad hoc delivery of care because of status differentials, where one part of the team is perceived as being subordinate to the others and the importance of specific roles are undermined.

All children in need require a range of extensive support from a range of agencies. Burdened under the weight of changing priorities with the attendant form filling, continual bureaucratic interference, increasingly tight regulation and inspection, social service and independent agencies can be so overwhelmed that it strangles the spontaneity to be effective communicators who share information This can mean that important forms are left unwritten, and important documents may sit in dusty offices instead of being distributed, because pressures of work mean they become unimportant. If information is not shared, or forms are not filled in, then they do not help, support or advise Looked After children, or their carers, to gain access to information concerning their educational development.

General discussion of results

Carers are the key stakeholders in raising the educational achievement of Looked After children. They do provide a range of literacy-based materials and opportunities in the home, and they play an active and interactive role in engaging with the children and young people in their care. Most carers felt equipped to support education, and they do perceive themselves as having a role in supporting it, but mostly they see it in relation to school education, although there are some carers who felt they made a contribution in their own right. However, education received in the home is mostly identified with the teaching of 'life skills'. Life skills are very important, perhaps the most important, but there is much more a carer can do,

There is a lack of understanding at the institutional level of the educational role of the carer in supporting education and providing educational opportunities, and this is reflected in training and in failing to make their role in supporting education explicit. It is here that the weaknesses lie and is a significant loss of a valuable resource. The training of carers has still to incorporate elements that recognise the contribution they can make in the home for raising educational attainment, and in recognising that experiencing appropriate books and other resources can have a therapeutic value for the young people in care. Social workers and teachers need to be taught this as well. Schofield (2000) identified that social workers are unaware of the learning outcomes or learning difficulties of their young people, and I agree.

There appears to be little knowledge of the important nature of Life Story Work or the value of specialist books in the home library, and book ownership is not seen as an important literacy tool. Some foster carers do not even feel it is their responsibility to encourage reading.

There is a withholding of important information, and the circulation of important educational documents is not reaching the carer. There appears to be status differentials and mistrust between agencies and individual carers. Berridge (2001) states that carers' views are not taken seriously, that they are not empowered and not given appropriate information – and this still appears to be true, even though my findings indicate that relations between the foster home and external agencies are slowly improving, and many carers feel part of an interagency team, who get support from the group network.

The balance of power and designated responsibilities between LEA's, schools and social services as equal partners appears to be evolving, but has not yet reached the carer. It does appear, however, that the delegation of responsibility for decisions affecting the school rests primarily with the carer, who is the one that deals with the school at local level.

White (1996:21) proclaims that,

> there seems to be total confusion about who is responsible
> for the educational development of Looked After children.

We equate the welfare of children as being the responsibility of social workers, but it appears to be significantly with the carer, the social worker playing a subordinate role. Social workers do of course define the outcomes for Looked After children, but they do not have exclusive duties; the primary role seems to be assigned to the carer. If carers are burdened with much of the responsibility then should they not claim a higher status?

> Parents of all social classes give education much
> Higher priority than most social workers do. Local
> authority social workers tend to have low expectations
> of children in the care system. Foster carers are also
> generally aware of the importance of education.

<div align="right">Jackson (1994:277)</div>

There have been several overarching themes that have evolved during this phase of the research and they are as follows:

- Lack of book ownership and reading responsibility, specialist books and Life Story Work in the foster placement, and lack of allowances to provide for these extra resources.

- The omission in training of the importance of giving educational support and the low status placed on the educational role of the carer.

- The perception that the carer's role in educational matters is directly related to the educational matters of the school.

- Lack of information sharing and distribution of important educational documents.

These dominant topics will now be carried forward to provide the framework for the interview schedules. The development of further questioning will evolve from the responses of the volunteers, but these major areas will act as guides for the following issues: educational training and the perception by foster carers of their educational role, exploring the view that carers' contribution to educational matters is only related to the school, assessing the provision of specific literacy materials (notably specialist books and Life Story Work), and information sharing, book ownership and the carers' responsibility in providing reading opportunities. These will form the underlying base.

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEW PROCESS, RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

My first reflections on the findings from the survey are very satisfying. Overall, I think carers are beginning to recognise the importance of supporting education in the home, even if at the institutional and governmental levels their contribution has yet to be realised. It is very encouraging that at the grass root level there is an acknowledgement of the importance of supporting education, for it is these key workers that have the greatest influence on the developing child.

Summary findings and key issues for interviews

My results, so far, have shown some interesting findings. All carers claim to contribute towards the literacy development of their children, and most feel equipped for supporting their foster children in education in the home. This includes help with homework, providing a range of literacy-based activities and equipment, and encouraging letter writing and thank you notes. Many do perceive themselves as having an educational role, but some see it only in relation to matters of the school. Many carers have some form of academic qualification. Unfortunately, most carers had not received training on the importance of supporting education, and it had not been made an explicit part of their fostering role. These are shortcomings by departments and agencies in their drive to raise achievement.

The foster placement does, however, provide a variety of books, but many children did not own their own. Carers are involved in reading events but, interestingly, a few did not feel they were responsible, or had a duty, for initiating such events, although a great deal of reading (books, comics and magazines) was going on in and outside of the home. Most homes did not have any specialist books, and Life Story Work was not a part of normal practice. Many children enjoyed outside interests, but the carers funded these out of their allowance or own wage. Library outings were not regular practices. Information guides relating to raising educational achievement were not being distributed.

My intention in this chapter is to develop some key themes from the survey and set them within an interview schedule. I now wanted to explore in greater depth the issues that had not

given me a clear-cut result, or where a result still needed further development. These issues included the perception by carers of their educating role: to find the reasons why carers are not given training on supporting education, and why this specific role is not made explicit to carers. The findings that were explored in greater depth are these:

- 23 foster placements had children who did not own any personal books.
- 27 foster placements had children who did not bring books with them to placement.
- 22 carers felt they were not responsible for initiating reading events.
- 31 foster placements had no specialist books.
- 28 foster placements had children who had no Life Story Work.
- 37 carers perceive themselves as having an educational role.
- 42 carers had not received training on supporting education.
- 31 carers said their role in supporting education had not been made explicit.
- 45 carers did not get extra allowances for out-of-school pursuits.
- 41 carers had not received any educational guides or booklets.

In Chapter four it was identified there was a wide range of reading material in the foster placement. Forty-four foster placements had children who read books outside of school, but only thirty foster placements had children who visited the library. Thirty-seven foster placements had children enjoying comics and magazines. Did the children only read schoolbooks (brought home from school), comics and magazines? Why did so few visit the library? What needed to be explored now was how and whether the foster children had access to the reading material that was shown to be in the foster home, because comic reading, personal ownership of books and library visiting could not account for the discrepancy in the results.

Twenty-three foster homes had children who did not own any personal books. Why did some children not own personal books? Did the fostered children have no personal books out of choice because they were simply not interested in reading? Were their lives such that owning books did not really figure in their day-to-day living, or did they have no choice anyway? Only twenty-five foster homes had children who brought books with them when placed. The fact of books not being with the children did not mean they did not own any. It would be interesting to know if books were still in the birth home.

We know that forty-two carers were actively involved with the children in encouraging reading events, and therefore this would not need to be asked again, but what needed an explanation was why twenty-two carers felt it was not their responsibility or duty to initiate reading events, to read with and/or to their fostered child, when most of the carers provided reading opportunities and writing material, and felt it was their responsibility to do so, actually sharing in the reading task.

In this phase of the research I wanted also to explore further this perception of the carer as having an educational role. What did the carers themselves mean by *educator*? How had they interpreted my use of the term? Did they perceive it as one who transmits 'good manners' or good role model? Did they perceive their educating role as being related to the teaching of life skills only, which had already been indicated in the survey results? Or did it include knowledge-based teaching, or a combination of some or all of these aspects? I now had to operationally activate this concept of 'educator' to see how carers perceived the concept in relation to themselves.

I was hoping to find out why training programmes were not emphasising educational support in the foster placement, and why carers were not made aware of their educational role when it had been recommended in major reports. Forty-two carers had not received any training on supporting education in the foster placement, and thirty-one had said this specific role had not been made explicit to them. I also intended to find out in greater detail why carers perceived their educating role as only related to school matters.

It was important to discover why Life Story Work was not a common practice, and why specialist books, books that could help a Looked After child understand their unique situation, were not supplied. I was also interested in why thirty-eight foster placements had children enjoying a range of out-of-school activities, while forty-five carers claimed they got no support or extra payment in funding these pursuits. Did this discrepancy mean carers were buying in specialist services?

Finally, I was interested in the finding that, despite several studies and reports documenting the lack of cross-agency sharing of important information, the advice given in these studies had not been acted upon. It was imperative to know why, and also why important guides

related to improving the educational chances of Looked After children were not being distributed.

Interview schedule

Two interview schedules were conducted over two years: the first round followed by a second the following year. It was during this period that I took time to re-read past work and gain greater insights into the material I was handling. It allowed me time to develop my thinking; a time of reflection would allow for a re-evaluation of the work to make sure I was still on the research track. As I was conducting a grounded research approach, my data generation process was at the stage where it could be worked with, keeping some data and rejecting other data, until I was happy it was meeting my research objectives. Some issues would be discarded after the first round when they no longer had any relevance to the research outcome. In addition, conducting the interviews over two years would allow me to develop my thinking about the issues under consideration. It would allow me time to reappraise my findings and the significances attached to them.

The responses I received from both rounds of interviews would be categorized according to congruence of response and put into a grid for analysis. After the completion of both rounds of interviews I would analyse and explore my findings to develop my discussion. The following chapters would then disseminate my findings, and discuss any resulting actions that I consider could be taken, as well as exploring the policy implications of my research findings. Within this discussion, proposed suggestions for practice would be made and recommendations for future research would be touched upon.

My ongoing literature search has become an historical search for clues, which has provided me with supplementary evidence to support my findings, claims and any assumptions. Some findings have come directly from my own research base, while other evidence, which supports my research, has been provided from this ongoing literature search. This range of data collection has allowed me to question and examine my own results in the context of other works and to embed them all in one holistic analysis to determine what exactly is happening in the foster placement in relation to literacy development. It was time to seek deeper meanings behind the more objective facts and findings of the survey results.

Individuals react differently to different situations and conditions; the volunteers' responses in the survey may be different to those in a face-to-face encounter. I had to consider the ethical implications of these encounters and the dynamics surrounding them. When faced with someone in the flesh, there is the possibility of becoming tongue tied, especially if status differentials are perceived or felt. I had to understand that individuals behave differently when they are being studied directly; therefore I would have to ensure that my own responses and reactions did not heighten bias or affect my respondent's responses in any way. People may differ from what they say in a questionnaire to what they do in reality. I had to be aware of this too, and realize that my interaction in a face-to-face encounter might alter my own responses as well.

> The researcher is a 'variable' in the interview process in several ways.
> Researchers bring their own life experiences to their research, and
> they structure what the research is about. Therefore the topics are
> legitimately up for discussion and analysis – however unstructured the
> interviews are themselves…interviewing is an interactive process…
> their stories are slanted by their perceptions of (myself) and the research'.
> 'Subject to 'double subjectivity,' that of the respondent and that of the
> researcher.

Edwards (1993:18)

I was going to use an ethnographic type of approach: an exploratory design, in that I was now expanding and developing my first initial findings by going into the social setting of the foster placement and attempting to describe the literacy lifestyle within it. To become non-threatening I would have to blend and merge into the surroundings, as best I could, to allow the research field to remain as natural as possible.

Edwards (1993) made me aware of what she termed 'double subjectivity'. This meant that I had to be aware that I was not just 'a recording instrument through which subjects are able to make visible their personal experiences.' I was an integral player: one that had to be aware of my own preconceived notions and attitudes that I had to keep hidden. I had to respect the position of being nearly a complete stranger in my respondents' homes. We all have our own intentions and expectations, and researchers are no different. I would have to at least look as if I knew what I was doing by being confident and knowledgeable.

Interview sample

Access to most of my respondents had already been established, because they had willingly volunteered to participate in this next stage during the survey phase. I had initially recruited seven volunteers but more were needed in order for the interview to be a viable methodology. I was able to conduct a group interview and to ask the respondents to undertake follow-up interviews in order for me to speak to each one individually.

Conducting an initial group interview allowed me to widen my opportunity to recruit new volunteers to participate in the interview schedule. This took place in a Foster Association office in the Midlands. In a group interview information received can be enhanced because a range of response is elicited.

> There are practical and organisational advantages
> (of conducting a group interview) the group interview
> can bring together people with varied opinions...
> people who have a common purpose.
>
> Cohen & Manion (1994:287).

Aull Davies (2001:96) identifies that in solo interviews respondents can hold back information or feel inhibited, and 'individuals are not able simply to provide uncontested knowledge about the social world.' In a group interview respondents can challenge and reflect on another's response; however, it does make for difficulty in transcribing individual responses. Therefore I asked each respondent first to fill out a personal profile, and then gave each one a handout of the issues I was going to explore in order that they could make bullet points against each one, if they so wished. I would only use the group interview to give me a glimpse into the responses I might expect in my individual interviews later. The total now rose to ten because three more volunteers were recruited from this group session.

I felt I still needed to increase my sample; therefore I wrote to a further five social service departments and independent fostering agencies asking them if they would be willing to participate in my research and encourage their carers to participate as well. I was only able to recruit two more volunteers, bringing the total to twelve. I had waited approximately six weeks for their replies, and even then I had to write again to each one to get this small result. This had now become a regular pattern, and it did not surprise me when two from the original cohort dropped out. I was now back to ten and getting giddy. In desperation I

phoned a local group of foster carers trying to recruit two more. In the end I would need to make a judgement and decide if ten would be sufficient to meet my research objectives. I had already conducted a survey eliciting some very key findings, and the projected interviews were going to add depth and breadth to those findings. Even with only ten volunteers, I felt this would give enough additional information for me to form an analysis and arrive at some conclusions. Now that I had made my decision, it was time to get to work on the second phase of my research, the first interviews.

It was my hope that I would be able to recruit volunteers who would reflect varying local policy practices and practical interpretations across the nation, so was fortunate to be able to draw one volunteer from the Southeast, three from the Southwest, five from the Midlands and one from a London Borough. This meant I would have a cross section of differing local interests and practices. During the accessing stage I phoned each volunteer personally, and outlined my research objectives and intent, and the theoretical basis of my study and its broad aims. My intentions and remit were made clear and specific: I would visit their home at their convenience, provide a letter of authorisation to visit from my supervisor, and show I was a creditable researcher and fit person by providing evidence of a recent advanced police check. I had to show I was in a position of control over the research process, but not an authoritative figure that needed to be feared. I had to avoid putting my respondents on guard, which might subsequently alter their natural responses. I had an obligation to the carers to be friendly, accessible, diplomatic and sensitive; otherwise, my visits would be disruptive and intrusive. I was hoping to 'tune' into my respondents during the first meetings to ensure their continued support and participation in subsequent interviews the following year.

Interview objectives based on survey findings

The survey had established three things for me:

- It had provided incidences of literacy events, opportunities and practices.
- It had established the distribution of these occurrences.
- It had enabled me to look at the relationships between these things and how carers perceived themselves as educators.

I now needed to deepen my understanding and apply richer meanings to the findings obtained through the survey by exploring the findings within the social context of the foster placement. I also needed to be involved in the 'living experience' of these respondents who would hopefully provide me with a rich source of data to develop grounded theory. These key informants were the ones who had 'inside' knowledge of the foster placement, and together we could be reflective individuals having the time and space to corroborate my findings or challenge them. I was hoping by this approach they would provide greater insights into the literacy world of the foster placement. So who were these important people who had so willingly volunteered to help me in my research quest? I now had ten respondents and, although more would have been ideal, I felt ten was an acceptable size to gain a good impression of the personal attitudes and motivations of foster carers in relation to literacy development within the foster placement.

The respondents

Volunteer A is 48 years old, married and she has been fostering for twenty-eight years. She loves children and this is her main reason for fostering. She has eight adopted children of all ethnicities: black, white, and mixed race. Her current placements are two boys aged seven months and seven years respectively, and she also does emergency cover. Since the follow up interview her placements had changed. During the year she had two emergency placements of two weeks duration, but still had the younger boy, now aged nearly two, who is Muslim. This respondent works for a local authority in the Midlands, and receives an allowance and a fee for her skills. She has also undergone in-service training and is a level three carer, in addition to having hotel and catering qualifications.

Volunteer B is a 47-year-old married woman. She has four children: two natural and two adopted. Her current placement is a boy of six years of age, whom she has had for two months. The two adopted children still live at home. One of the adopted children has special needs and attends a special school. This respondent lives in the Southeast of England and works for a local authority. She is a full time housewife and has been a foster carer for seventeen years. Fostering is what she has 'always wanted to do' and her longest placement has been two years. This respondent has undertaken training at level 1 (now disbanded in her county) and receives a monthly holding wage.

At the follow-up interview this respondent told me she had quit the fostering service. The child she had the year before had left the foster placement after seven months, and had not been replaced by any other child. During the break the respondent had enjoyed the freedom this brought and, deciding that after eighteen years she had had quite enough, sent her letter of resignation. Her recognition for her long years of service was an email from a link worker saying 'thanks for your help.' She said she had felt upset at the time because the Fostering Manager had not bothered to phone her. 'I now have time for myself. I couldn't go out without calling my daughter around, because they are so quick to accuse. With them you're guilty, and you have to prove you're innocent. I have no aggravation anymore.'

Volunteer C is a 47-year-old divorced woman who has fostered since 1999. She lives in the southwest, but has also done some private fostering abroad. She has one daughter aged twenty-six years, who does not live at home. Her current placement is a boy of twelve, who has lived with her for four years and is long term. She gives this as her reason for fostering: 'I love kids and I can give them a better life.' This respondent works for an independent non-profit fostering association that has charitable status, and works closely with the local authority to seek the recruitment of foster carers from the same social group as the majority of its clients. She receives a fostering allowance and a 'little something for myself.' Out of the allowance must come holiday costs and out-of-school activities. 'It's D's money, not mine.' Her fostering training includes an initial in-service training at the time she was recruited, and she is now working towards the NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. This respondent holds RSA 11 in typing and computer certificates 1 and 2. The personal details given at the first interview had not changed by the second one. The placement she had then was still with her and making very good progress. He was in the top bands at his local Comprehensive school and had hardly a day's absence, except for things like a dentist appointment.

Volunteer D is a female, married, and aged 47 years. She has fostered for fourteen years, and her two current placements at the time of the first interview were a boy and a girl who had been with her for over two years (short term) and five years (long term) respectively. At the time of the follow up interview the long stay placement had broken down and the family were awaiting the removal of the child at any time. A young woman, aged seventeen, was now being Looked After by the family. This respondent has no natural children, but has one adopted daughter, also aged seventeen, who does not live at home. This respondent is a

Christian and 'as a Christian I was led into fostering.' This respondent works for a local authority in Middle England and is paid an allowance plus a fee for her skills. She has been involved in induction training and holds the appropriate care NVQ level 3. She also holds a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree.

Volunteer E is a divorced man in his late forties. His motivation for fostering was a need to help others, and currently he has a boy of sixteen who had lived with him for just three weeks at the time of the first interview, although his longest placement had been four years while he had been married. He has only fostered for his local London borough local authority for a few weeks, but earlier he had worked for a neighbouring one for over twenty years. He was very happy with the practices and policy decisions of his current local authority and said, although they scored badly on the performance ratings, significant improvements were being made. An evaluation of those improvements can be made on the next visit. This is his second stint of fostering since his divorce, and now he fosters adolescent boys only. Respondent E's highest qualification is an advanced diploma in psychology of children with special needs, and he works as a teacher in a local school. He receives a fostering allowance.

I contacted him the following year and found his circumstances had changed considerably. When it was time for my follow up interview, I wrote my customary letter requesting a follow up interview, only to be told that in five days time this respondent was packing up and going to live in India. Happily, (for him, though not for me) he had been reconciled with his ex-wife and had planned a new life overseas. I had already encountered difficulties in gaining my sample and here was yet another one abandoning my cause. I cheekily decided to phone him, apologised if he was up to his neck in packing cases, but could I request a telephone interview? Fortunately, he agreed and I was able to develop my questioning from his original responses in the first round. I decided this telephone interview would be of the same quality as a face-to-face interview, because I had already engaged in a more in-depth exchange of information with him in the first round, and had also exchanged a letter and email with him. The follow up interview was only to add further depth to the original responses, which could be fulfilled through the telephone interview.

Volunteer F is a 50-year-old woman, who is a social worker married to another social worker. She has been fostering for thirty years and her reason for doing so is because, 'I

141

wanted to do home-based caring, a kind of rescuing role, I suppose.' This respondent has eleven children, seven adopted and four natural. She identifies that 'there has been no major emotional outcome, but emotional scars.' This respondent worked for an independent fostering agency at the time of the first interview and was waged, but at the time of the follow-up interview she had transferred to the local authority, and now only received an allowance. Her reason for doing this was there was a change in agency regulations prohibiting her to work for the same agency as her husband, who had continued with that agency. The placement at the first interview was a girl of seven, who was still with them at the follow-up interview, but who was now on a Residence Order. In addition to this child they had now been joined by a boy of eight, who was on a Bridge Placement, and had been with the family for seven months.

This respondent lives in the West Country. She stated that some private agencies do not recruit carers who do not hold a professional or academic qualification, and she herself holds an MSc in Applied Social Studies. 'Fostering is my prime career, even though I am also a social worker. I foster, but not all children fostered go on to be adopted. There is very little opposition to adoption following fostering.'

Volunteer G is a 58-year-old married woman who has fostered for ten years. Her current placements are a boy of sixteen and a severely disabled girl of four who have lived in her home in the Midlands for eight years and three years respectively. This respondent has two natural born sons who are grown and live elsewhere. G's reasons for fostering include a love of children, having now the spare time to do such a job, and she has abundant skills to offer. G works for a local authority, and receives a fostering allowance for the children and a fee that depends on skill level. She is a level two carer and continues to undergo in-service and on-going training. She is a qualified nurse and midwife. She had some strong views about carers' perception of their responsibility towards their Looked After children, feeling that some carers viewed their role in more of a business way, rather than having a caring nature as a primary motivation to foster. She also voiced the opinion that carers needed to perceive themselves differently if they were to acquire the same professional standing as social workers. She felt it was now time that local authority carers were salaried, and received the same level of support that foster carers had when they worked for independent fostering agencies. She declared, however, that during the past five years she had seen notable differences, big improvements, in the practices of her local fostering service.

142

Volunteer H is a 50-year-old married woman with two natural children: one lives away from home, which is in the south, while the other studies away at university but still lives at home during the holidays. This respondent has fostered for seventeen years and her current placements, removed a week before the interview, had been two boys: brothers, aged 10 and 9 respectively, who had been both physically and sexually abused. These boys were her seventh placement and they had lived with the family for three years. The removal of the children had been a surprise, and the boys had not been prepared for their return home to their natural family. It was unexpected and quick – too quick - in her opinion; her family had expected them to remain in the family until they were eighteen. There had been no rehabilitation plan, and she felt the reason for their return home was a monetary one and had more to do with balancing the budget than the real interests of the children. As it was, the mother only wanted one of the boys back. Since the children were removed the foster husband has been accused of violence, and the boys have become abusive and resentful of their foster home. The foster family know they are being unofficially investigated and now they no longer have access to the boys.

This respondent went on to say that the boys were dirty and destructive when they first came, and it had taken three months before they could be encouraged to express feelings; this was done through art therapy and other creative experiences, and were starting to do well in school. They had participated in numerous after-school activities and were beginning to function as boys of their age. She added that she had a very close relationship with the boys' school, and felt that all the work she and the school had done had now been 'rubbished, with three years down the drain.' She declared that their mother did love them in her own way but valued possessions more. In the foster home the boys had travelled widely, and, while the mother was all right about that, she did show some animosity towards the carers.

This respondent works for an independent fostering agency and receives a wage. She was receiving £640 per week for this placement. Her fostering training included six weeks of two-hour sessions per week of in-service training with the option of further ongoing training. This carer is dissatisfied with the current training programmes on offer; therefore, with others, she has become a training provider. The highest educational qualification held by this carer is an MSc in social studies. She is also a counsellor and trainer. When we met for the follow-up interview, this volunteer had two young men, aged fifteen and sixteen, who had

been with the family for just a few weeks, staying temporarily until a court decision decided their future.

Volunteer J is a 52-year-old married woman who lives in Central England. She has been fostering for ten years and her current placement is a three-year-old girl who is long term. This respondent works for a local authority and receives a fostering allowance and a fee for her skills. She has undergone induction training in addition to short courses that include HIV/ Aids Awareness, Behaviour Management, Care and Control, Life Story Work, Loss and Separation, and First Aid. Her highest educational award is one A level and a level three award from the Institute of Management. This volunteer is a registered childminder and combines this role with her fostering work. The reason for fostering is because she wanted a home-based occupation. At the follow up interview there had been no change in the family structure, and the long-term foster child that she had the year before was still with the family, but she was now hoping to get a Residence Order made to allow her to keep the child indefinitely.

Volunteer K is a middle aged married woman, aged 57 years old, who only fosters babies or very young children. The babies usually come direct to her from the hospital following their births, or very soon afterwards. This lady lives in central England and has fostered for eighteen years. Her current placements are a boy aged three and a girl aged five, who are brother and sister. They have been with her for three months. Her placements during the previous year had been two babies who were with her only on very short-term basis. This volunteer has three natural children who do not live at home. She is a level three carer.

The training that she has received is sufficient for her needs, she states, and feels that she doesn't need any further training. 'I get enough support.' Her interest in supporting literacy development obviously centres on the needs of babies and young children, so we spoke about book schemes for babies, amongst other things. Every new mother is given a 'bounty box' during their stay in hospital, and is introduced to the 'Books for Babies' scheme through a health visitor, which gives every new mother a book and related materials in a bag. 'The babies didn't come with any of these freebies,' she said, but she was able to access books from her local support group. When we met again at the follow-up interview, this respondent had no placements at the present time, but was still available.

The interview process: The first approach

The main issues and themes that had arisen from the survey to form the categories had now become the material for the interview topics. Therefore, now that I had some loosely defined categories to work within, it was time to decide the framework I would use for the interviews. The interviews in the first round were going to be more formal than in the second round, which would be more like an informal conversation. I did not want my results to convey any preconceived attitude or impression that I might be harbouring, so I decided that my findings from the survey would be read to the volunteers in the form of statements in the first round of interviews. A statement is *a simple declaration or remark; the facts on which a cause of action is based* (Webster's International Dictionary 1971). In my case this was the survey results.

Seeking responses about each finding in this way meant that I was not asking a direct question or leading the respondents to expect a distinct response from me, but merely stating a fact, a fact that had been elicited from the survey. Since the statements were not in question form there was no leading edge, emotion or clue attached to what might be expected as my own view. The statement was purely a fact that required a spontaneous response from my respondents. Asking a question directly imposes an attitude that suggests the answers I might expect, especially if the questions are not skilfully structured. By reading a statement, which has no implied expectations other than the fact, means that no clues or cues are given about any desired response. The respondents can assign their own interpretations to it. Obviously, the statement is still conveying a message.

The Statements

Training:
- 42 carers did not receive training about the importance of supporting education in the foster placement.

Educating role:
- 31 carers had not been made aware of their educational role.
- 22 carers felt they were not responsible for initiating reading events.
- 37 carers perceived themselves as having an educational role.

- Some carers felt their educating role was only related to matters of the school.

Books: Personal and Specialist

- 31 foster placements had no specialist books for their foster children.
- 28 foster placements had children who had no Life Story Book.
- 23 foster placements had children who did not own any personal books.
- 27 foster placements had children who did not bring books with them to the placement.

Extra allowances:

- 45 foster placements had children who did not get extra allowances to cover the cost of books, specialist books and/or out-of-school leisure activities.

Information sharing:

- Important documents related to educational matters are not being circulated. 45 carers had not received any educational guide or booklets.

I asked each respondent to respond to each statement with whatever thought came into his or her mind. If a respondent is given time to reflect on the statement once it is read, or there is discussion about it first, then the initial response is not authentic. A first response is usually an honest and truthful one, because there has been no time to think of an alternative answer. If there has been time for reflection, then the response can be open to other interpretations. Of course, once a response is obtained, it can then be developed to deepen understanding and used as a springboard to build up more data. Only after the initial response can there be time for reflection of the statement and deeper thought assigned to it. This method of address also protects my own integrity, for it allows no leeway for indicating my own response to the statement or what might be expected as my response. From the interviews I was hoping to establish the reasons behind these facts.

The use of a statement in the first instance would set the scene and tone for the continuing conversation and for a fuller response to be developed from it, and in turn this would lead into a free-flowing conversation. This non-directive approach would allow the respondents to express their feelings and opinions spontaneously: to develop their responses as they see fit. I

would have to judge my own degree of informality once the initial responses had been made, and then I would have to be sure that I did not interrupt the flow of ideas, or get too involved by taking the lead once the conversation had begun to flow. Non-directive interviewing is:

> A particularly valuable technique because it gets at the
> deeper attitudes and perceptions of a person being interviewed
> in such a way as to leave them free from interviewer bias.

> Manion & Cohen, (1994:288)

Considerations on interview process

The type of interview technique is directly related to the kind of response that is wanted. Decisions on how structured or unstructured an interview should be rests on what information I wish to obtain, what it is I want to impose (should that be the case), or what I should leave to the responses of my respondents. All these factors needed to be thought through thoroughly long before I set foot in any doorway. As I already had information about the areas that needed to be explored, an unstructured informal interview framed within an initial statement seemed the most appropriate technique to use. As Aull Davies (2001:94) argues, 'direct the conversation with the research in mind, without imposing much structure on the interaction.'

The categories have evolved from the findings of the survey. This means the validity of the research is increased, because a measure of response has already been elicited. The next step would be to ensure the areas of concern are being readdressed in the interviews, when again a comparison can be made between the responses of the survey with those from the interviews. These two sets of measures would now converge, and if the results on both measures agree, then we can be sure that the response, opinion and findings are genuine, which should give the research even greater validity. In addition, it would help to reduce any bias or misinterpretation of the final results by the researcher.

The first interview is very important in setting the scene and tone for subsequent meetings; therefore I had to prepare myself thoroughly to ensure it went smoothly. If a rapport is established quickly, the respondent would be relaxed and uninhibited. In this very first encounter they must be assured by the researcher's behaviour that there are no status

differentials. The closer the researcher is in class and cultural norms to those of the respondent, the more the researcher can identify with the known reality of the respondent, and this can enrich and deepen the interaction. Likewise, the respondent can feel more at ease with the shared identity and cultural norms of the researcher. This first encounter would establish a relationship between us. This can either go well or be disastrous; it will seal future encounters and ongoing interactions. An outline of the research goals (its practical value in understanding the importance of literacy development in the foster placement) is to be given and also my reasons for using an interview approach. Before the commencement of the interview, each respondent will have undergone a life history profile related to their age, gender, fostering career motivations, the length of time they had fostered, how many children had been placed with them, and the locality in which they lived. Each respondent would be given a code letter to ensure anonymity, and strict confidentiality would be assured; therefore no names or pseudonyms would be used.

Cohen & Manion identify that the interview serves four purposes:

- It is used as a principal means of gathering information, which has a direct bearing on the research objectives.
- Makes it possible to measure a person's knowledge in a specified field.
- Helps identify variables and relationships.
- Can be used in conjunction with other methods to follow up unexpected results or to go deeper into the reasons for responding (as respondents did in initial survey).

I now had to consider my recording practices. I had already decided to transcribe speech, but this would now depend on whether the respondent was willing for me to create an audio record on tape. I am no shorthand typist. I could use video, but whatever methods I employed I had to seek permission, for it was not for me to make these decisions on the respondent's behalf. I could summarise his/her responses, either during the interview or at the end, but both approaches would have their drawbacks. Note taking during an interview can prevent the exchange from being free flowing and uninterrupted, and if I were to postpone the recording of the responses until the end, then I might leave out important information. I decided to use both approaches as unobtrusively as I could with the aid of an assistant who would help to catch the responses that slipped past me. The impact of the

assistant on the interview process was kept to a minimum by careful preparation beforehand. During my initial telephone contact I asked permission for the assistant to be present, and in the initial introduction we all enjoyed an informal chat over a cup of tea before the interview began. This relaxed everyone and ensured the atmosphere was not tense. The assistant would assist only during the first round of interviews, and her only contribution would be to take notes for me. She would not ask questions or comment, and would be not involved in the interview in any other way. She would not be present at the follow up interviews because this phase of the research was only required to fill in the gaps in my knowledge and deepen my understanding of the issues under discussion. This would keep the integrity of the research intact. After each interview I would code and score only the major responses to help me with the analysis. Speech would be transcribed and verbatim quotes recorded. The involvement of an assistant was made explicit to my supervisor and the capacity in which she would be involved.

Conduct of interviews

The first hour of the first interview was a 'getting to know each other' time without probing or delving too deeply. That was to come later. Each interview lasted approximately three hours and, surprisingly, this would remain consistent over all the interviews. The intended outcomes of this first meeting were, as stated earlier, to ask for a brief life history, a statement of fostering intent, and to gain responses from statements elicited from the initial survey. Few prompts were needed during the interviews and I relayed the statements in a non-directive way. As the categories were clearly defined by now, there was no confusion or misinterpretation. I did wonder, on one or two occasions, whether the statement format was a good idea after all when there was an initial silence before a response. Were they reflecting on what I had just said, or were they finding it all too boring? Once a response had been made, it opened up a flow of responses, and then I would hear the personal voice of the respondent rather than the more objective response of a questionnaire: carers could now speak as they wished, could use their own language, and, as I did not want any interruptions, I could keep my own responses to a minimum until all the statements had been responded to. Afterwards, I would encourage them to reflect on what they were saying by a word or comment here and there.

After I had noted down the original responses, I then had the opportunity to probe more deeply. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents and, of course, I had a prompt sheet to keep the conversation fluid should I need prompts to ensure there were no silences or pauses that might interrupt the flow of responses or thoughts. The viability of this research was dependent not only on the willingness of the respondents to talk to me honestly about the issues under discussion, but in my ability to direct the course of the research that would eventually answer the research questions. This meant I was not to go off at a tangent or to follow avenues of thought that veered me from this course. This was often the case, because many of the foster carers took it as an opportunity to express their feelings about specific issues that caused them concern. This can happen and can be difficult to avoid when the interview setting is relaxed.

It was during an initial encounter with one respondent that I learnt to read covert signs. The atmosphere appeared to be very negative and the respondent was moaning and complaining. It took me a few moments to realize that her grievances were not in relation to our meeting, but concerned the practices of her local social services department. She was very disgruntled and disillusioned with the system, and it seemed as if this interview was being used as a platform to complain about all that was wrong with the service. Once she had been given the opportunity to voice her opinion, she became relaxed and the rest of the interview went smoothly. I felt that my interest in her, and in her fostering practice, provided a welcome opportunity to voice a very personal view about her working conditions without the fear of retribution. This same experience occurred again, and I grew to understand that other dynamics can impact on the interview patch, and must be allowed for, if only to prime the interview atmosphere and to make the respondents more receptive to me once overarching concerns had been addressed first. An intuitive researcher must be able to detect signs of how a respondent is feeling in relation to the interview setting, to the interviewer, and to him or her self. The researcher must be able to read and then adjust, or modify, the situation accordingly. The first few minutes of any interview can be precarious, especially when messages can become mixed.

Time and distance between both sets of interviews would see if there was a replication of responses between the answers in the first rounds and those that come later in the second round. Had there been any further development of them? As I was addressing the same

topics in both rounds of interviews I would be able to see what the changes were. The second round would add new knowledge, deepening and broadening my understanding. It would be interesting to see comparable responses and gain new insights. If there is concordance between both sets of responses, then we can be certain the responses are authentic, bearing in mind, however, that any changes might be as a consequence of the restructuring of the fostering service or provision within it that was taking place at the time. Either way, I could assess whether any change was to the advantage of the foster carer and the fostering practice, or to their detriment. The following responses are a synthesis of the major points that arose from both rounds of interviews.

Key findings

- Generally most carers see themselves as having some kind of educating role. Some see themselves as 'educators' in the teaching of life skills only and not as 'academic' educators (providing knowledge-based teaching and learning opportunities), while others perceive themselves as equal contributors in the drive to raise the educational achievement of this group.

- This perception does vary according to the expectation that is placed on them by the placing agency. If the agency expects a carer to fulfil an educating role then the carer perceives his or her self to have such a role.

- The carer's social worker and/ or link worker will also influence the perception of this role. If social workers place a value on educational effort and believe that the children in their care can achieve, and if, in addition, the carer can be an enabler in this, then the carer will be the more encouraged in their efforts to raise achievement.

- The perception of the carer's educating role is also related to perception of what the fostering role is and the belief they had in what the role required of them. If the carer perceives that one of their tasks is to support education in the home, then it will be their responsibility to ensure that literacy-based opportunities and events do occur in the foster placement. If they place no such expectation on themselves, then they do not perceive a duty to ensure this happens. Their role is still to help with homework, support the school and teach life skills.

- The perception of their educating role is also closely related to the carer's own educational accomplishments, home background, confidence in his/her own basic

skill level and in the ability to perform such a task. If a carer is confident in relation to his/her own skills, the more confident s/he is in stating that one of their roles is an educating one. The higher educated a carer is, the more confident they are in stating that supporting education is one of their key roles. This does not mean that the least confident is the least able to perform that role.

- Foster carers do recognise the importance of specialist books in the home and of their importance in helping them and their children identify with others in a similar situation, but they do nothing about getting them on the bookshelf. There is nothing in place to facilitate the buying of such books, and carers are expected to buy them (if they do buy them) out of the fostering allowance.

- Reading was considered to be the duty of the carer, but responsibility for this depended on the perception the carer brought to his/her role. If one of the carer's roles was an educating one, then the responsibility was his/hers to ensure reading events took place. If the carer did not assign this role to him/herself then it was not his/her responsibility or duty to encourage reading.

- It was the perception of the carer's role as to whether s/he placed importance on children owning books. If s/he did not perceive an educating role, it was felt it was then the responsibility of others to provide children with books.

- Fostered children did have books purchased for them, but all of the carers stated that book sharing with others in the household was more the norm. Generally, the children shared the books of the household, communal books for everyone to access, and children might have one or two that were personally owned. Some children did not own any books. Any really treasured or favourite books would usually stay in the child's bedroom. It was not common for children to bring books with them when placed, but they usually went away with the ones that had been bought personally for them. If children had come straight from home into the foster placement, it was unlikely that books would be brought with them.

- Life Story Work is a recognised practice for building and maintaining lifelines, and many authorities have this vital work in place, but it is not a regular practice and training in its use is not compulsory.

- It is assumed that any leisure pursuits or hobbies should come out of the fostering allowance, although some authorities or agencies will fund a one-off activity. Many

carers pay for their children's hobbies, pursuing an interest, out of their own pockets, and this has also included private tuition and therapeutic interventions.

- The perceived training needs of the carer are related to her existing qualifications and how they view their fostering role. The higher educated a carer is, the more likely s/he is to want a thorough training for carers, but exemptions made for existing relevant qualifications. The least qualified in my sample actually felt the need for less training.

- Carers want recognition for the task they do in supporting education in the home, though many are not prepared to undergo further and more intensive training, other than an initial induction course and any on-going training courses or workshops.

- It depends on who has the information/guides in the first place as to whether they are cascaded down to the carer. The carers have to rely on a link worker, or social worker, to share information or be given advice on any new legislation or changes to policy and practice. This information or advice was mostly not forthcoming, and many felt 'in the dark and not in touch with current thinking.' Foster associations or family centres were the richest sources of information for leaflets and guides associated with fostering.

The findings relate very closely to the results I found in the survey, with these exceptions: in the survey carers claimed to have interagency support, were involved in planning and felt part of an interagency team. I did not find the same responses in the personal interviews. But overall, the results from the survey were congruent with the responses from the interviews. This was pleasing, because two different methodological measures and approaches had been used to generate my data; as neither of the instruments showed a wide discrepancy of opinion, I felt this strengthened my results.

The research design now resembled an inverted pyramid, which meant that the process of data generation had been one of discarding the less important issues until; finally, key areas of concern had evolved and became prominent. The key findings from the survey that had been further developed in the interview schedules and other areas, (not directly related to my research questions but broadening my understanding of the research field) had now been discarded, but only after they had been thoroughly disseminated and discussed. Over two years, on two separate interview occasions and supplemented by email and letters, I had

generated some very useful data and built up a respectful relationship with my respondents. I felt that for some carers the opportunity to talk with an independent listener had been a very valued experience, and also for one or two social workers I had encountered along the way. This exchange of information meant that I could clarify a point if a response was ambiguous, or develop a fuller response that would then deepen my thinking.

Now that I had reached some firm conclusions about the contribution carers make to literacy development, according to the foster carers sampled, I took time to review my research questions again. I had to make sure I was reaching my research objectives and addressing exactly what it was I had originally wanted to find out. I had to hope I had not veered off course. Handling a lot of written matter over so many years makes the task a difficult one if the researcher is not organised and on top of the work. Fortunately, for most of the time, I was. The research questions sought to establish the educative role of the foster carer: what they were actually doing in relation to literacy development, and how they perceived their role as an educator. This is not to assume foster carers could be teachers, but to find out what contribution they could make to raise the educational standards for these children. Hopefully, now that I had completed both the survey and interview phases of the research, I was now reaching the stage where I could begin to answer those questions.

CHAPTER 6

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION

The interviews elicited for me deeper understanding of the findings from the survey, where I was able to explore in greater detail the key themes that became known. This also included the development of new insights that evolved over the course of two rounds of interviews. One was the perception that potential carers would be *frightened off* if recruitment training included supporting education in the home; other perceptions concerned the relationships between the carer, social workers, schools and placing agencies, and the impact of social and cultural influences. Carers' ability to perform an educating role was also further explored.

This chapter now analyses my findings to evaluate the specific contribution carers make to the literacy development of their foster children in the foster placement, and the perception they have of themselves as an enabler in that development.

The verbatim quotes of the respondents have been grouped together according to the theme discussed, and have been subsumed within the following analysis. There has been no distinction made between the quotes attributed to each individual and this is to protect their anonymity. This way the reader can gauge the response of the cohort by the strength of the responses, but will be unable to identify individual responses. Sometimes the same theme has been advanced in different sections throughout the chapter. Any similarities will be essential to the context in which it was made at the time: the same point appearing in a different sub-section and about a different care issue, or the same point being made but related to a different respondent.

The time had now come to answer my research questions, but first I had to clarify my definition of literacy development within the context of the foster placement. *Development* is the unfolding of a process that will result in change and growth. *Literacy development* in the context of the foster placement means to provide an environment that promotes the potential to acquire and mature a literacy competence. It is moving the individual from the known and the raising of awareness and achievement to engender more expansive thinking.

Development can only occur very slowly if there are no literacy events, practices or opportunities.

Literacy practices are the habitual behaviours or usual patterns of behaviour that improve or exercise literacy forms. This could be using the library, the giving of books as gifts, encouraging the writing of 'thank you' letters, and reading bedtime stories to younger children. Practices are the common-place literacy processes that are repetitively performed and which create a literacy ethos. There were good practices in place in the foster placement, and this included participating in out-of-school leisure pursuits with space allocated for being quiet and for study.

Literacy events are activities that are literacy based, such as encouraging and providing reading and writing opportunities. The carers claimed they interacted with the children in shared and paired reading activities, and special times that the child and adult spent together. These were regular activities that ensured attention from an interested adult. Of course, I did not see these events happening and have to take their word for it. Library visiting occurred, but this was not a regular event and I did not get a sense that this was actively encouraged. Library use should be part of standard practice and it should be strongly recommended by the placing agency that the foster family join a library, even if some fostered children are not yet ready to access such a facility.

Literacy opportunities are the circumstances and experiences that are favourable to literacy awareness and development: circumstances that create an environment that promotes learning for a particular activity or action. Carers need to have this awareness made more explicit because I am unconvinced that all use foresight in creating new literacy opportunities other than the habitual practices that already exist in the home. Some carers do not see the opportunities there are in the home and community that can assist in raising their Looked After children's educational game. In the survey not one carer mentioned playing board games, doing puzzles, having family quizzes or enjoying family outings together as contributory factors in literacy development; only one carer mentioned them in the interviews.

Raising awareness of what carers could do would be the first step in helping them to understand the concept of literacy development in placement, but it is not clear that all carers

have the knowledge of what could make for more positive action, even though there are a number of literacy-based activities and opportunities provided and given. 'Most homes do not have a raised thinking process', argued one respondent.

Educating Role

Foster carers' perception of their educating role

One of my research questions was to find out how carers perceived their role (if they did) of being an educator. The survey result had shown that most foster carers do see themselves as having some kind of educating role. The result identified only fifteen carers who felt they did not have an educating role. Now the time for the interviews had come, I wanted to investigate more fully this perception. Did the interviewees perceive foster carers as having an educational role and what did the term 'educator' mean to them?

> 'Some [carers] have the attitude of "I'll feed it, look after it, and nothing more", while another will offer assessment, reports, and good record keeping.'

There were similar responses from others:

> 'There are carers who don't feel they have an educating role. Child is placed and only care, hygiene and school is discussed.'

> 'Some [carers] are rigid in their approach, while others are flexible and willing.'

> 'I am not educated, but I draw on my life experiences.'

'Caring has to be the primary responsibility of the carers,' one respondent argued, 'because carers are carers first.' This remark appeared significant of the way most carers felt: that caring came first, and supporting education, both in the home and at school, came a close second. Caring must be one of the first priorities of carers: to make sure children feel secure and stable. One respondent felt strongly that with all the new demands placed on carers nowadays, the caring nature of the service would be threatened. She worried that, with the drive to raise the educational standards of both carer and Looked After children, there could be a move away from the caring nature of fostering to one where the carer was more pre-occupied with providing educational opportunities in the home. She felt sure this would be met by resistance from some carers. 'Are we going to be more of an educator than a carer?' Instead of the home being a place where a child could feel secure and safe, there would be an

expectation of fulfilling some external criteria to show that carers were being pro-active in this area.

> 'I think it depends on how they have contributed to their own children's education',
>
> 'If they are persistent middle-class parents like us, they will keep on knocking on doors until they get the sort of support they think they need for their LACS in the classroom.'
>
> 'Some local authorities treat their carers very much as volunteers.'
>
> 'Some foster carers would not want the extra demands and expectations (report writing, etc) placed on them, but the extra money from an agency means extra responsibility and this means closely liaising with the school and other agencies.'

Many children are disaffected by their school experiences and should see home as places to rest not study. 'When I did home tutoring, I even had to turn the pages of the book the child was reading from.' This child did not want to do any 'school' learning at home. This respondent recognised that home had to be a safe place: one where there needed to be little pressure, but where children were encouraged to do as well as they could. If education was to be provided at home 'it didn't have to be in-depth education.'

The perception of a carer's role rested on what they felt the fostering role was. Where they felt that one of their roles was to support education in the home and to offer and provide literacy opportunities, it became their responsibility and duty to make sure this happened. If they did not think one of their fostering tasks was an educating one, no responsibility was recognised and the task was left to the school.

> 'It depends on their motivation and reason to foster.'
>
> 'Carers from IFA's are very much involved in planning, child protection and education.'

One definition of the educating role appeared to be related to the *expectation* of the placing agency, and this also influenced how carers viewed their specific roles. If the placing agency expected them to perform this role, they would undertake it, and, in doing so, would perceive themselves to have such a role. If there had been no such expectation (because it was not within their remit nor had it been made explicit) then carers did not perceive any duty to provide such opportunities. Their specific *educating* role was only to teach life skills, help

with homework and support the school. These were duties recognised by all carers. The *task-related* role was therefore influenced by the expectation of the placing agency.

'In some local authorities there is no expectation to support education at all.'

'...the perception of the carers' themselves.'

There is an expectation by many independent agencies that carers should provide an educational service and an awareness of that role is made explicit to them, whereas, many local authorities did not yet appear to be making this so explicit to their carers.

'The agency views you as part of the team working towards the best interests of the child, and education is a major part of that.'

'Agency has its own training consultant and it is something they intend to develop.'

'It's because they are better funded, and can devote themselves to their carers and offer them a better deal.'

It should be remembered that independent agencies do not have the same competing priorities as local authorities. Nevertheless, it is a situation that is apparent to respondents, even though I was told by one social worker, 'There are some very shoddy agencies and they should be closed down.' However, as my respondents still informed me,

'The agency has higher expectations than local authority.'

'Agency carers are higher qualified.'

'Most agency carers are professionally qualified.'

'I work for an independent fostering agency and we are professional.'

Not only did some agencies have expectations, but the carers from independent agencies also perceived themselves as educators in their own right and not merely as a support for the school. The higher expectation of independent agencies appears to directly influence carers' perception of their role. The role of these carers was to engender motivation, skill and knowledge acquisition through literacy based activities and events in the home and in their community, and the agencies for which they worked made them aware of this.

'At one time education was seen as the province of the school and only the school. It's commonsense to work with a child.'

159

These carers saw their specific educating role as offering knowledge-based teaching and learning opportunities, in addition to teaching life skills. This last group perceived themselves to be on an equal standing with teachers in the drive to raise the educational standards of this group of children, and saw their role as distinctly different from merely supporting the school.

> 'The carer has to be the primary educator until you can integrate them.'

> 'We should provide a curriculum when a child is excluded.'

> 'Children should be given an intensive boost when they first come into care. This could be done at home.'

One respondent did not need to be told about her role or status as an educator. She felt supporting education (and teaching) was a crucial part of fostering and in some ways more important, because they were looking after other people's children. She had a natural assumption (belief) in her educating role, and believed (and hoped) that all carers felt the same way too. She assumed her capacity to provide and the provision that she made 'was a class thing.' In her world she automatically provided, and supposed everyone else did too. However, the only real advice she had been given in relation to education was: 'You might want to tell the school they are looked after.' This respondent worked for an independent agency, and we may see from this remark that not all independent agencies advise on educational matters. She admitted that her perception might be different from others. 'It might be a middle-class thing,' she added again. This is obviously not the case because other carers, who had little or no education and who described themselves as very much working class, were very good enthusiastic educators to their Looked After children (see page 161).

Some carers felt their educating role was only related to matters of the school.

One of the insights to evolve throughout this research, both from the survey and then explored more fully in the interviews, was that some carers felt their educating role was only related to matters of the school and this role again rested on their perception of what they thought their fostering role was. Some carers saw themselves as 'educators' only in the teaching of life skills, helping with homework and in supporting the school.

> 'Education in the home is only about life skills.'

'Many carers think school is enough.'

'Education is about everyday skills.'

'Foster carers don't have an [recognised] educational role.'

Some local authority carers in my sample felt they needed more support to become more professional and these were views of those who wished to perceive their educational role in the same way as those perceived by carers working for independent agencies.

'Carers must be trained, salaried and professional.'

'…need more of a support network.'

'We need the same level of support as independent agencies.'

Most of the carers who worked for the local authority felt that training and a carer's role in supporting education should centre on supporting the educating role of the school: helping with homework and in the teaching of life skills only. It should be added, that those local authorities sampled appeared to place little value on educational input in the home or little expectation of their carers fulfilling any other educating role. 'Some LA's do mention support in the home but seeing self, as primary educator. Well, that is still a long way from being achieved.'

'It's the school's job, but they need support. I go to the school immediately if I want to find out something.'

'It's what we can do to help the school.'

'Some carers don't want to do anything at home.'

Liaison with schools

I asked why some carers opposed the notion of having an educational role. 'I do not think it's the fact of carers not being made aware or opposing this kind of role [supporting education in the home]. I just think that many carers, like many birth parents, cannot be bothered or have the time.' This respondent felt that, because of all the other challenges these children face, they had to *feel good about themselves* before really worrying about educational achievement and providing education in the home, and that carers, first and foremost, 'had to accept a

child for what he is and be careful not to put pressure on already emotionally damaged children.'

I asked about sharing information with the school. One social worker told me that schools 'still treat Looked After children like crap.' There was more support for this assumption when others added that:

'Some schools see education as their prerogative.'

'Some schools feel the level of achievement doesn't justify the time and effort they have to expend in challenging behaviour.'

This last respondent added that the same would not be said of a child that was not English. She felt some schools were resistant and she sends her own foster children to five different schools in order to meet their individual needs and abilities. She asserted, 'It takes time to win them [schools] over.' In a follow-up interview another respondent suggested there was a close relationship between school expectations and disruptive behaviour, and that foster carers (and schools) had low expectations of children who were disruptive: an indication that carers have to tread softly with schools in order to gain admission for their foster children.

Another respondent, who had strong links with the school, liaised regularly and had been closely involved in her child's PEP and with his designated teacher. She was proud that her foster child had been with her for four years, saying, 'He's only had *one day* off school.' Her pride in her child's achievements is centred on what the school has done for him and she took little credit for her contribution in this success.

Interviewer: 'Was your educating responsibility the same as the schools?'
Respondent: 'Academically, no. I teach life skills, but I help with homework.'

This respondent underplayed her involvement in the child's education, but was enthusiastic, motivated and eager that her child was succeeding. The respondent, a carer who does not perceive herself as an educator in her own right, and has no qualifications, asserts that she has to give support to the school, her only perceived role in supporting education. She is nonetheless completing her NVQ, while feeling it should not be a mandatory requirement for all carers and that she can do a professional job without it. She felt that life skill training was

162

more important than providing any other educational input. 'Homes don't seem to be as strict as they should be. That's a major factor in school as well. I stopped X getting bullied.' This respondent's concerns centred more on bullying and behaviour than on learning, although she had complained he had skipped lessons and she had not been informed. It was five weeks before the school let this foster carer know that her child had been missing his English lessons. She had been visiting the school frequently before they did anything about it, and she felt this was because there was little concern about his educational progress.

> 'Some carers never go near the school, or go to any training meetings; just take the money and run.'

> 'When placed, only told about school, designated teacher and any special programme.'

> 'Carers are concerned with care and safety fundamentally. When we began fostering, I cannot remember discussing education at all. When a child was placed it was up to us to find a school.'

Other carers felt the same. For respondents from my interviews who only saw their educating role as supporting the school, any further intervention (or interference) would be carrying the role of educator too far.

Most carers feel equipped to assist with homework and this appears to be a common practice. There is involvement with the school by regular liaison and attending school functions.

> 'Very few foster carers would not help with homework, but some don't do enough sometimes because of lack of understanding, lack of confidence and lack of skills.'

> 'We are told to help with homework - that is all.'

> 'They told us about helping with homework and checking reading.'

> 'We have to help with homework.'

> 'Told just to maintain school plans and review date.'

There are small rumblings that carers are now also being paid extra for looking after excluded children, instead of the child going to a pupil referral unit or buying in a tutor. 'When children are excluded, a support carer is paid an hourly rate to look after a child. I am allowed twenty hours a week to look after an excluded child.'

Interviewer: 'What do you have to do?'

Respondent: 'Nothing really, but I took her to the museum.'

Interviewer: 'Has specific training been given?'

Respondent: 'I'm doing the work without any training. When I do support work, I am not told what to do or what to provide.'

Interviewer: 'Does the placing agency view this role as an educating one?'

Respondent: 'Well, it's to occupy them when they're out of school.'

It is possible that some agencies are beginning to identify the crucial role carers can play in raising the educational standards of this group by giving extra pay, albeit unsupported by additional advice on training, particularly when children are excluded.

Although I found quite good relations and close liaison with schools in the survey results, there were still some issues of concern and one centred on the difficulties of securing a school place. One respondent identified the shifting of responsibility to ease workloads. A carer, who was pro-active in securing a good school place and, demanding that the school give her fostered child every help, said this: 'The social workers just seemed grateful that one job was done which they did not have to do.' In the survey, 36 carers felt it was their responsibility to secure a school placement, but what was not revealed was the fact that there were accessing difficulties.

'You need to reassure and build a partnership with the school.'

'It is not about foster carers just supporting the school, but supporting the child in school.'

'You do need support in how to approach the school.'

This last respondent went on to say that she felt she needed help in negotiating with the school initially.

'Sometimes the school can be apprehensive.'

'At first there can be poor communication. It was not a working partnership and systems were not in place to ease the process. I did finally manage to have strong links with the school and now I liaise with the head teacher regularly.'

Although carers identified the difficulties of accessing schools and interacting with them, feeling they were not being treated as equal partners, some less-educated carers had felt no threat from the school at all. The carers who were the most qualified appeared to be more ill at ease in accessing the school than those who perceived themselves more as carer than educator. The less educated carer appears less likely to pose a threat to the school authority or status where educational matters are felt to be the speciality of the school. This could explain why a school could feel ill at ease when discussing educational matters with well-informed carers. Educational matters have traditionally been the speciality of the school, and bodies such as The National Teaching And Advisory Service for Looked After children have recognised this in their publication *Education – A Carers' Handbook* (2003:3)

> It is easy to lose the will to battle through the jargon and professional language that creates a barrier between schools and users. It is tempting to leave it to the "Professionals" but evidence shows that the more you (the carer) know about the system the more likely you are to support a child in your care.

There appears to be an uneasy relationship between the school and some carers, and is perhaps one of the reasons why some less informed foster carers prefer to leave any educating role strictly to the school.

Some carers, however, did not appear to be influenced by any expectation of the placing agency or social worker – or the school. Their specific role rested on the *belief* they had in their own responsibilities as a foster parent, and what the role required of them. Whenever a carer had an intrinsic belief that it was their duty to perform an educating role, this is what they did, even though this specific role may not have been made an explicit part of their fostering remit. This belief system did not appear to be greatly influenced by social workers or the placing agency, because it appeared to be inherent in some foster carers that they had to do what was best for Looked After children, irrespective of their role as perceived by their placing agency or external agents.

> 'I have my child's best interest at heart. Some are in it for the money, but I want my child to blossom and bloom.'
>
> 'It's about commitment to be a parent and a professional.'
>
> 'Carers have to be both a professional and a parent.'

It was this belief carers had, and not just the expectation placed on them, that led to one carer moving from a local authority fostering service to an independent agency, and this occurred because she had then received specific training on supporting education (and much more). The local authority had only expected her to do what she could to support the school.

'Learning starts at home, life skills, and foster carers have lots of skills. '

'It's no good believing in education; you have to believe in the children too.'

One respondent had very rarely encountered a Looked After child who had not suffered educationally from being in the care system, and therefore felt it was the carer's responsibility to be the primary educator: to build basic building blocks until other forms of education were in place. 'There needs to be more specific training on education that can be done in the home.' She said it was essential not to confuse the child by using different methods; therefore, close school liaison was very important and essential for Looked After children because her youngest foster child had not yet caught up with her peer group. 'There are gaps in knowledge. They have to unlearn negativity. Big areas that foster carers are better at than schools.'

Interviewer: 'How do you mean?'
Respondent: 'Exploring learning styles and learning processes. The process of learning needs teaching and developing.'

Foster carers not made aware of their educational role
I put it to this last respondent that despite major initiatives to raise awareness of supporting the education of this group, carers are still not being made aware of their specific contribution. 'I think it is just assumed that carers will support education. I have always given education a high priority and made sure that the children know I will support the need for their education.' It can not be assumed that all carers will feel this way. Training programmes are expensive and many boroughs tend to do a lot of in-house training. There was no educational component in this respondent's training, and perhaps this is a subject in which they (the boroughs) find hard to get the balance correct.

It would appear that carers are not made aware of their educational role because social workers and agencies – notably local authorities - do not perceive carers as having such a

role. Some carers felt that social and link workers did not see carers as educators, not even in life skill training, and this made it harder for carers to see themselves as supporters of education in the home.

> The improvement foster carers most frequently called for
> was to have their views listened to and respected more by
> social workers.

<div align="right">Padbury and Frost (2002:xiv)</div>

The carer will have difficulty perceiving his or her self as having this role if the social worker and placing agency does not, but if the expectation of the social worker is for the carer to fulfil some kind of educating role, the carer is more likely to identify with that role.

> 'I have an expectation of them, but they have none of me.'

> 'I said at my review, "It's them and us." They pull rank. If my view were different from social workers my view would not be valued. It would be their view that would be carried forward.'

Social workers/ placing agencies' perception of carers' educating role

Another influence on how carers view themselves in relation to their educating role was the value social workers (and social workers' co-workers) placed on education themselves and on educational achievement. If education had a value for them and they also had a belief that the children they cared for could achieve, then this enthusiasm was usually transferred, motivating more interest within the carer. However, education did not appear to carers to be a priority with link workers and social workers.

A significant insight to emerge was related to the low status placed on carers by the placing agencies and training providers. If carers felt they were not valued, no matter how educated they were, they would feel subordinate to the others in the fostering team. 'We all have our own standards,' argued one respondent who felt that carers had to take responsibility for dealing with all aspects of a child's care, including supporting education, and that it should not wait to be directed by a social worker. I responded by saying that not all carers took their responsibility as seriously as she did, and we could not assume that they did. 'Well, they should,' was her reply to this.

There was not one carer in my interview schedule who could say they felt an equal member of the fostering team, yet the results of my survey showed a very different view. Out of fifty-two responses, forty-four foster carers had felt part of a team, and forty-four were involved in planning the care of the child. Forty-eight foster carers identified that they received support from their placing agency. However, being supported is not the same as being equal. The discrepancy between the survey result and the interviews begged an explanation.

Although the survey questionnaire had been anonymous, I had to consider whether carers felt that in some way their responses could still become known, and acknowledging something as sensitive as 'not feeling part of a team' or 'not being supported by the agency' was to expose too much. By the time of the interviews I had built a strong, safe relationship and my respondents trusted me to keep their responses anonymous. Secure in this, it is possible they could be more free and honest in what they told me. All of this raises questions about the authenticity of responses and the inadvisability of using one methodology in any research design. Fortunately, the interviews were able to draw out this anomaly and readdress any ambiguity.

'The limited vision of some LA carers may be a direct result of the limited vision of LA social workers who are briefing their carers according to their own script, with little opportunity to pause for thought or expand the horizons of either carer or kids,' said one respondent; while another said, 'Social worker didn't have a clue what was right for the boys. I say there's something wrong and they say no. They are reluctant to accept that carers are as valuable as they are.'

> The vast majority of link workers and social workers,
> plus a sizeable minority of carers, do not believe social
> services managers are well informed about foster carers' views.'

> Padbury and Frost (2000: xiv)

Regrettably, there was often no expectation of equal partnership placed on the carer by the social worker and placing agency.

> 'They never ask me for a report, and my contribution is not even included in
> reports. There is a feeling your view is not wanted.'

'Still a lot of labelling going on.'

The last respondent had supported her own children's education and had naturally supported her foster children's education as well. She went on to say that many fostered children have problems with school and, in order to help the carer help the child, there appears to be (in her borough) an increase of co-operation with those departments concerned with keeping children in school. However, this has come about through the support centre the carer attends and not through social services. 'Local authorities try to shift responsibility which is rightly theirs onto struggling carers,' said a respondent who continued to say that her local social services department had made her feel guilty when she did childminding, 'Especially guilty by the social worker and when they [social services] feel like it. We are professional, but we become unprofessional when we state an opinion that does not matter to them.'

She felt aggrieved that her knowledge and expertise were not valued and that her views were given little weight if they contradicted the views of the department. 'Most of the time I feel undermined.' Another four respondents reiterated this opinion of the social worker's perception of their role, a high proportion in such a small sample.

'We are put down; they don't know how special these children are.'

'We are the cleaners and they [social workers] are the management. It's a hierarchy. We clean the kids up and put up with all the crap.'

'I have seen such bad practice amongst social workers that I feel equal if not better than them. Some social workers dismiss your opinions, or don't even ask for them Carers' views are more important than someone who sees them only every six weeks.'

One respondent voiced the view of most of the other respondents when she said, 'Social workers are driven by financial imperatives and we are unlikely to be consulted or listened to if we raise our voices. In that sense our status is lower.'

'There is a financial implication to changing the perception and status of carer. It costs money to train carers, and money for giving them a better deal.'

A third respondent brought up monetary issues again.

'I said to my LA, "You give me £500 a week and I'll have him." [A child who

needed placing] The LA was paying a private agency over £1000 to place him out of town and I said pay me half and I'll have him. They said no. We are treated like crap. They take the fucking piss. We are supposed to be treated as equal, but the door is always slammed shut.'

This agitated carer went on to say, 'They are the social workers and we are the mere foster carers.' She later apologised for her outburst.

The will is there in all carers to upgrade their service and provide educational support, but there is no motivation towards more professional training, especially when the perception of the placing authority, social workers and schools undervalues the contribution of carers and their status as equal partners. The low status of their position, and the lack of proper remuneration for their fostering task, contributes towards the disempowerment of many foster carers. Doubt is cast over whether extra curricular activities are adequately resourced. The placing agency has its own restrictions, and carers felt that budget constraints were a major factor. 'The private sector offers higher remuneration and recognises that their expectations of carers may involve quite considerable expenditure.' This respondent's foster child went on the go-carts, had climbing tuition and was involved in a Karate club. 'We could not afford to do this on the payment the LA used to offer.'

Carers are the principal architects in the development and growth of Looked After children, but even at the closure of my research and after major childcare reform (especially in relation to the educational attainment of the children), carers continue to be the least informed and least consulted by social workers and teachers.

> While managers are quite positive about the influence foster
> carers have on services, most foster carers, social workers and
> link workers feel foster carers have very little influence.
>
> Padbury and Frost (2002:91)

Social workers' (and others) perception of the role and status of the carer has to be urgently addressed if societal attitudes towards carers are to be changed. 'Social workers are not knowledgeable at grassroots.' Carers appear to be working to the agenda of the social worker rather than in partnership with them. A carer's perception of his/her role as an educator is

significantly influenced by the behaviour of the social worker. There is much work to be done to change perception, attitude and confidence.

Although carers are providing a range of literacy based activities and proclaim that one of their roles is an educating one, I am unconvinced that all believe it, especially those who work for local authorities. This perception relates very closely to the expectation placed on the carer by the placing agency, and the importance and significance placed by the department or agency on supporting education. Carers from independent fostering agencies appear more convincing but, with the considerable difference in treatment and the higher expectation placed upon these carers, this is not surprising.

Carers' perception of their ability to perform an educating role

> ...even if they themselves don't read or write with ease...
>
> Barnes (1999:11)

One other development of this research was the finding that a significant factor in helping to improve the life chances of Looked After children is the ability and confidence of the carer to assist in that improvement. Supporting education in the home is closely identified, not only with the expectation of the placing agency and the belief foster carers might have in their responsibility to provide an educative environment, but it is also dependent on the carers' perception of their own ability to fulfil that role. That is to say, it depends on their baseline of literacy competence and whether they have confidence to fulfil that role. It is invariably influenced by background, and there are quite distinct differences in the way carers' value education.

> 'Some carers have less confidence due to their background.'

> 'I definitely see education as the way forward.'

Others saw things quite differently.

> 'I hate exams.'

> 'I hated school.'

'I hated exams but carers should be penalised if they don't attend training sessions.'

Expectations placed on them can cause a carer to assess his or her own abilities. Even though they may believe they are capable of providing such an environment, the expectation of an external agent may undermine their confidence in fulfilling it. Three carers expressed this worry: namely, if too much emphasis were placed on providing an educative environment, they would not be able to cope or feel they were up to the task.

'You only have to mention training and they want to know what's involved first; they're fearful.'

'You mention the NVQ – there is no way I could do it.'

'Because I've got no education I wouldn't be confident in taking on education.'

Other respondents supported these claims:

'Some carers won't go to training in case they have to write.'

'Some carers have low literacy problems and will not come forward.'

'There is a fear of the unknown - schoolroom fear - when training was mentioned. They don't want to be seen as naff carers, second-class citizens.'

We are now well versed in what research has told us: Griiffiths (1999); Morris (2000); Bald *et al.* (1995) and Jackson (1989) who have all proclaimed that carers are uneducated or ill equipped to provide an educative environment. My findings dispute the fact they are ill equipped despite the fears expressed. Even though some carers are anxious about their own abilities, most are eager to do their best for their Looked After children, and the responses showed that it is not their inability to perform an educating role that inhibits them but their confidence

The authors cited have given examples of carers having poor literacy skills, how they have been left out of important decision-making and have little knowledge about the educational process. 39 respondents out of 52 in my sample had some form of professional or academic qualification, and at least a GSCE grade C or above. This is still higher than research suggests. Almost all of the carers were actively involved in providing literacy materials and activities for their foster children, even those who had lower levels of education. Triesliotis *et al.* (1998) asserts that foster carers leave school at sixteen and 70% have no qualifications

at all, but this is now changing. 'There is a broader kind of carer nowadays.' Since the introduction of the National Standards foster carers may be more able than ever before.

> If either parent [foster parent] had high level academic
> qualifications, the children performed better on reading tests.

<div align="right">Jackson and Martin (1998:581)</div>

Confidence in supporting an educational task appeared to be the inhibitor, not how well educated a foster carer is. My results show that if a carer is confident in his or her own abilities then they have the confidence to state that one of their fostering roles is being an educator to their Looked After children. These carers, irrespective of whether they worked for a local authority or independent fostering agency, appeared to be more confident in stating that supporting and promoting educational opportunities was one of their roles as a foster carer. Those that were less confident felt they could not perform that role, or were not clever enough to take on that kind of role even though they were ably doing so.

> 'The thought even scares me. I could not cope with doing the NVQ; I just could not do it.'

> 'I'm not a secretary or clerk.'

Those carers who were less confident stated that their role was in teaching life skills and supporting the school. Those who were more confident would be (or were) educators in their own right and, if need be, could teach the children themselves. Their role was not merely supporting the education of the school, but to have a significant role themselves in educating their foster children and, usually, they had the belief that they should provide education in the home too. It was more usual for confident carers to have good qualifications also, and to be registered with independent fostering agencies. There were exceptions to this. Confidence can come with having a good standard of education, but not always. One respondent appeared very confident in her skills to support education, yet she had very little education herself.

Other carers, however, who held good qualifications, but who worked for a local authority, did not seem so certain and assured of their specific role in relation to education. This was because they saw their *status* within the organisation in which they worked as being lower

than their co-workers, and this was reflected in the way they perceived their role, although it did not affect the way they worked with their fostered children. Independent fostering agencies pay a wage or salary, and so demand (and expect) a higher service from their carers, who appear to have a raised status as equal partners.

Previously mentioned is the argument from other commentators that the educational level of the carer does not appear to make any difference in raising the achievement of Looked after children, even when the carer is highly educated (Osborne & St Clair 1987; Lucey & Walkerdine 2000). It has also been shown that it is not the material affluence of a home that makes a difference to future educational success. In addition, A. Heath *et al.* (1989); Jackson (1994) and others, have demonstrated that underperformance of this group is not because there is lack of attention by the carers, and this research has also found this to be true.

'To be a mum you don't have to be a brain surgeon.' Surprisingly, it is none of the above that will significantly raise the educational achievement of Looked After children, but the presence and attention of an interested and enthusiastic adult who has a belief in the child and their capabilities. This does not necessarily mean, therefore, that the least educated cannot have a very important educational role to play in the literacy development of Looked After children, or that they are least able to perform that role; it means only that the attention given by the carer to the Looked After child should be of the kind that will benefit the child.

Those carers who were 'worried' about having an educating role were eager, motivated and enthusiastic about helping their Looked After children, and felt they still had something to offer. And they had. They might be concerned that demands on them might be more than they could fulfil, but all stated that reading a story or encouraging a child to write a letter was well within their capabilities. 'She [social worker] expects me to read and write in a professional manner. What if I'm doing it wrong?' One respondent argued that if carers were registered and assessed as competent to foster, then they should be given all the help to meet the national standards. It is the expectation, not the reality, of being an educator that worried them, because they were already performing an educating role by encouraging reading and providing other literacy based opportunities. It appears that most agencies (local authority and independent) support their carers in their training needs.

'We sit by those who can't do it.'

Other respondents agreed:

> 'The training isn't hard; it's easy to do because they [the trainers] help out.'

> 'I have heard of two carers who are illiterate but who are apparently excellent carers. The organisation therefore does a lot of the record keeping for the carers using audiotapes. They also have a social worker that supports any written task, or whatever, and can act as a scribe.'

> 'It's up to the skill of the social workers to help carers.'

> 'Fostering is one of the very few professions where those with no paper qualifications can do a good job – and sometimes better than those with bits of paper. You can be too good, too educated; it can be a bad thing. It can create a barrier.'

This respondent expressed concern that a greater expectation or pressure can be placed on the child to achieve when the carer has higher expectations due to their own educational achievements. There may also be an impact on the fostered child's self esteem if they cannot rise to any demands, or compete with the standards of achievement of natural born children. One respondent identified that carers who could not write were 'faultless. The NVQ is just a bit of paper.'

> Educational background of foster carers should be a major factor in their selection, and not only for children already perceived as being particularly able. Many foster carers do already see supporting looked after children at school as a key aspect of the task, but it needs to be made an explicit part of their brief.
>
> Jackson and Martin (1998:581)

Educational qualifications may not need to be a necessary requisite in recruitment, despite what Jackson and Martin suggest. It is very easy to become idiosyncratic in relation to one's own knowledge. What may be far more important than having highly qualified carers is a desire to undergo the training that educates the carer in the role of an educational facilitator and to learn ways of promoting literacy based opportunities that can develop literacy competence in the home. Some carers do not give enough of the right attention through lack of understanding, confidence and lack of skills, and it is these that should be developed. 'If some carers had poor educational experiences, they can't see the possibilities,' said one respondent.

'Would an expectation of performing an educational role have an effect on recruitment and retention of carers?' I asked my respondents. I was told that it would scare them off and might even threaten recruitment. I suggested that much could depend on how the information was communicated and how the training was delivered. Removing specific words that provoke a response such as 'education' was suggested as an answer. Three respondents voiced the opinion that carers would not come forward if they felt their own literacy competence was being challenged. They considered that many carers would not feel confident about supporting education because of their own perceived limitations. I learnt that some care agencies use experienced carers to deliver their training to their own carers – a practice that was felt to be less threatening.

> 'Agencies don't want to scare away carers by having expectations about education.'

> 'Any educational emphasis has to be subtle.'

This suggests that when a computer is put in the foster home or the carer is given a fostering library ticket, then any advice or information concerning the value of these resources should be given 'in situ' – and at the time the resources are put in place - rather than exploring their advantages in a classroom or training situation. The support given to educational matters must be covert, according to this respondent, and must not be made explicit in training. 'In regular homes, most parents don't perceive themselves as educators.' This respondent went on to add:

> 'Foster carers have different levels of education. If recruitment drives emphasised the need for carers to provide educational support then it might affect the number of carers coming forward if they had low level of literacy themselves.'

In the follow-up interview this respondent's opinion had not changed, reinforcing yet again that recruitment would be affected if carers were expected to provide an *educational service* in their home, but added the view that any educational support must be given by encouraging literacy opportunities such as reading and by being interested in reading themselves.

Because of the heterogeneous nature of carers and fears of scaring prospective carers away, it was felt that at the fostering recruitment stage it was unwise to go into too much depth about expectations of educational involvement, or the training that might be needed. It was clear from the responses received that the perception of carers' educational role was closely

related to their own literacy ability and confidence. There has been extensive research on the intergenerational effects of poor basic skills, with children underachieving because the adults in their lives cannot transmit the literacy skills because of lack of skills themselves; it is therefore very important that foster carers have a solid literacy base (ALBSU, 1994).

Training in educational support

> Not all carers receive training on children's educational
> needs or support to meet those needs.
>
> SEU Report (2003)

A major finding was the fact that supporting education in the home was not made part of a carer's remit in training. Training was not providing an awareness of what carers could do. There should be increased demands made upon carers to become more professional because more skilled parenting and training is required to meet the complex needs of Looked After children. It is no longer just about welcoming a child into your home and treating them as one of the family. How closely a carer identifies with a specific role within his or her fostering remit will not only depend on the agencies' expectation or educational level of the carer, but is also closely related to the level and type of training the carer is prepared to undertake. In addition, the perception of their training needs will depend on the training a carer already has, and the type of training they have already received.

Carers generally want recognition for the task they do and want to be seen as a professional body of workers, but many of them are not prepared to undergo further, more intensive training other than what is in place at the moment. There are those carers who do not want intensive training to a professional standard, or for training to be compulsory. Conversely, there are carers who are so well qualified they feel they do not require training at all, but are prepared to undergo a thorough training if existing qualifications are not relevant.

Some carers perceived themselves as being adequately equipped for the fostering task without the need for further training. 'Social services have limited resources,' one said. This seemed to be saying, 'Why waste your precious resources training me up when I am already qualified?' I pointed out that training would be levelled at the fostering task: an area where,

as a new foster carer, she might not have had any expertise or hold any fostering qualification. She felt training was more centred on safety and hygiene, and added that training should be planned from an experiential therapeutic perspective, recognising that Looked After children have emotional challenges that need to be addressed as well.

Respondent (who did not want to undergo any further training): 'well, training is technically voluntary.'
Interviewer: 'Was there any educational component in your initial training?'
Respondent: 'No, no, no, it's just the basics. They might touch on a bit of it. I can't remember now.'

Other respondents agreed:

> 'No education module or advice recently.'

> 'We've had this argument with agency [the fact training isn't compulsory] but there's laws coming in about training', said another.

> 'Special unit lady spoke about it a bit – has asked for all information on exclusion procedures – pushed X to have the grammar school test, but didn't get through. But he went to the best school.'

This last respondent went to all the training on offer because she wanted to, and this has included Drugs Awareness and Challenging Behaviour. In addition, there is a foster group, which meets regularly in her local school, dedicated to looking at the education of Looked After children. She felt education was important whether the child was one's own or in care, and that the initial induction training and short interest courses were adequate training for her. It would appear the NVQ course, Children and Young People, the accredited vocational course designed for foster carers, is not user friendly in structure and presentation, and help is needed in first understanding the language.

> 'The language of the award is not friendly. The course is also lengthy and does need commitment.'

> 'The NVQ is couched in too much professional jargon.'

> 'If they made the NVQ compulsory, they [social services] would lose carers.'

One respondent who had experience of both a local authority and an independent agency, felt training with an IFA was better than with the local authority. This respondent added that

some carers did need help in using the training resources but, 'because of the professional training other carers had received in another field, the fostering training these carers needed would not have to be so intensive.' She felt that for carers with no relevant qualifications, the training needed to be thorough. What was needed, she assured me, was to look at training that was related specifically to the fostering task, irrespective of other qualifications.

My respondents commented on the differences in training between local authority training with that provided by independent fostering agencies. In one independent agency the induction course was residential. This training required the carer to attend a first aid course, health and safety, and sessions on Child Protection, Sexual Abuse and Behaviour Management. 'If you are paying a lot of money for the care that is provided then you want the best possible package for your LAC – and that includes educational input.' This respondent felt that as she had good qualifications she didn't need to complete the NVQ3, and added that many carers who held professional qualifications, 'got paid more for having them.' 'The standard the Government is working towards is still quite low. Private agencies have higher expectations.' Other respondents added,

> 'Historically, things are changing. It might be because I work for an IFA and
> we are a professional team and are more respected [than those working for a LA].'

> 'I think LA's find it quite difficult to recruit carers.'

> 'They are very much less involved in case planning - just about providing basic
> nurture, and foster carers are not included in meetings with schools and social
> services.'

> 'Why should we all be paid the same if there are such differences?'

It was noticeable that those carers in my sample who had little educational accomplishments did not need feel the need for further training, and those with higher qualifications felt that a more thorough training should be mandatory for those without relevant qualifications. 'We don't need any more training,' argued one carer who had only undergone the initial induction course and one or two in-service courses.

I found only two carers who had actually undergone some specific training on education. 'I've supported education and attended a course on it.' 'We have to undergo training that places specific emphasis on education that can be done in the home. Where can I get some

educational resources from that help carers in the home?' I had to declare that I knew of no resources that were directly aimed at the carer, but would send her some resources she could draw from that were specifically designed for training purposes or for schools to access. One respondent argued that training was not sufficient to raise awareness of providing educational opportunities, and what was needed was for them to have a heightened appreciation of what the home could offer in encouraging literacy development. This indicated that training should include awareness training without actually emphasising the carer's responsibility for providing educational opportunities.

Although my research shows that carers are not receiving training on the importance of education, many are aware of its importance. Educational support was not made an explicit part of the fostering role: findings that were consistent with both the survey and interviews. The A. Heath *et al* study (1994) state it is the skills the foster parent possesses that will make a difference to a child's life chances, yet it would appear carers are not being taught these particular skills. The studies by Neuman (2000) show that it is the *active interaction* of an interested adult that promotes literacy development and this means that it is not enough to put resources in the home, but that it is also necessary for the carer to actively engage with the fostered child.

'I haven't a clue', stated a respondent, when I enquired why training providers were not emphasising the importance of supporting education in the home. 'How are you supposed to go to all those training things anyway when you've got kiddies?' I asked her about the specific training opportunities on offer. She replied that she held a level three certificate in Care, indicating she had created the opportunity for this training, but some carers feel the time needed to take up the different training offers is much too difficult to arrange, and one respondent asked, 'What are you supposed to do with them [children]?' Another respondent asserted, 'I hold the NVQ level 3 and some carers don't like it.' This remark was representative of the clear disparity between carers in their training outcomes and perception of training.

'NVQ's are about existing knowledge, not about developing knowledge.'

'There is no gain in doing the NVQ. There is no recognition in having it.'

Some carers only having undergone an in-service training would often go on a course when it was offered, though they would not enrol on the NVQ course, feeling the short courses were quite sufficient and more satisfying. A common response was to say that carers' lives were too busy to attend intensive training courses, but that many enjoyed more informal meetings.

It was felt that targeting specific aspects of fostering such as behaviour management, bullying and the reasons behind such behaviours was much better in bringing to the fore the real dilemmas faced in fostering, than time spent filling in performance criteria in NVQ that had no relevance to their real life situations. Training needed to be related to practical, real life experiences, and scenarios played out in order to practise what a foster carer might do in a specific situation. Workshop-type training with 'hands on' approach was felt to be more valuable than any qualification that did not reflect what is actually happening in the foster placement.

Important issues that need to be seen as part of a foster carer's role for supporting a child's education in the home and at school must be part of a carer's role and may need to be made explicit in training. Since the National Care Standards commission, there has been an increasing demand for all carers to undergo the NVQ level 3 fostering qualification. Foster homes are also inspected now to gauge the effectiveness of their environment. At present, however, there is no uniform training specifically on providing educational support in the home. This apparent shortcoming in awareness of the pivotal role carers play has meant there is no standard mandatory training. The different views held by foster carers regarding what type of training should be mandatory may be a result of this.

> 'In my LA there is no expectation to support education, although it might be a vague expectation.'

> 'It is not written anywhere.'

> 'It's not compulsory to attend.'

> 'Informal training on supporting education, but slanted towards schools.'

> 'My agency does not insist on carers completing the NVQ, but they strongly encourage it.'

One respondent said that her agency did not at the present time insist on carers completing the NVQ. They were rewarded by an extra £25 per week per child if they did so. If carers had qualifications that were not actually to do with fostering but were in the social science field, they too were rewarded. Another carer felt the award at level three was pitched too high and expressed her view that life experiences counted for so much more. This respondent cited their experiences of training Learning Support Assistants and said that, although many could not do the training required, their work practices were excellent.

'Do you think some carers would refuse to take the course if it became mandatory? I asked another respondent. She replied, 'At a fact-finding meeting, I was subjected to a torrent of bad feeling from a husband and wife who seemed to think I had indulged in something totally irrelevant and that I ought never to speak of my award again. Their main argument was that industry was moving away from using NVQ's in general and it was a redundant qualification.' This respondent did feel that the course content and relevance to their actual practice needed to be updated regularly and added that the husband and wife's hostility really settled on the same argument that had been voiced by other carers: they did not feel capable of achieving the award. 'Many carers do find written qualifications difficult and fear failure.'

There were some carers who wanted to get a professional qualification and would complete the award. One respondent had enjoyed taking the NVQ and felt that, because fostering can be a lonely activity, she had actually derived great benefit from it. 'I liked discussing practice with other carers and getting to know each other.' She added that the award should not be made compulsory. 'There will always be people who go against anything compulsory. It should be put forward with the highest recommendations and carers given as much support as necessary. Anything that is accredited and nationally recognised could only improve the service.' I asked what accreditation meant to her, and the same question was put to my other respondents as my results in the survey had been ambiguous. Did the carers know what accreditation meant? Only two respondents were unsure of the difference between the terms *accreditation*, and *preparation* and *on-going training*; otherwise, accreditation was thought to mean the award of a certificate such as the NVQ, where the work that required achieving had been standardised against national performance criteria. It is only because most of the respondents in the interviews were familiar with educational language they showed awareness of the term, but further research would be needed to clarify if most carers really understand the difference.

There continues to be two or three tiers of training in some localities where the level of training undertaken is directly related to the level of remuneration, and while this continues there can be no parity of esteem between carers. In other regions this form of multi-tier training has been abolished altogether.

> 'Some carers were getting paid for extra skills or receiving a wage, but this is for the skills of caring.'

> 'Foster carers are paid different levels.'

> 'If you don't do the training you can't get to a higher level.'

> 'Why should carers get the same money as me when some do not even attend training or meetings? It's not unreasonable to expect a higher reward.'

Another respondent declared, 'In my borough they've abolished payment for skills because it got too complicated. We are all paid an allowance and that's it. Not much information on training. No ongoing training. If I wait for them [Social Services] I'll wait forever.' This carer has no educational or vocational qualifications, leaving school at 15 'with nought' but still felt that it was necessary to be trained, even though 'nothing much in relation to education is available in my borough.' I asked how much training she had actually had during her years of fostering. 'In the beginning it was quite a lot. Graded carer training was 11 days for level 1. It was 18 days for level 2. Now all that is abolished.' Another respondent said, 'I think the problem is [caused by] those who receive a wage and those who don't.' Conversely, this brings a different set of observations from respondents concerned.

It was those carers least qualified who, feeling their training was sufficient, did not want to see payment related to skills. They protested that all carers were professional and skilful, even without training. It was also these same carers who did not want training to be made compulsory. If no one is expecting them to undergo further training, they will not avail themselves of it, because they think they are qualified enough and argue that their level of payment should not be influenced by any qualification they might hold.

There could be a claim made that if an individual is suitably qualified in another field then these skills could be transferable to fulfil the fostering tasks. One respondent said that the different strata of training posed problems for some carers, especially if it was related to payment for skills. Other carers agued, that, although their expertise was not reflected in a

qualification, they were nevertheless highly skilled, professional and experienced, in both fostering and another profession. 'They are anti-NVQ because it correlates to level of payment.' This respondent felt it was necessary to do the NVQ because the knowledge she gained was related specifically to the task she was now doing. These were the different perceptions of training requirements found in this small sample. There is no universal remuneration package to reward carers for their professionalism, but only an arrangement between carer and agency that rests on which part of the country a carer lives, whether they work for an agency or local authority, how qualified they are, and whether their skills would be reflected in monetary reward.

In the last few years there has been an increasing demand for 'professionalism' in the fostering service. This appears to be happening, but it is yet to be supported by high quality training and adequate remuneration for skills and knowledge. The demands placed upon 'ordinary folk' are greater than ever, and many are not equipped to deal with the disturbed behaviour of many of the children. The Children Act emphasises supportive measures to enable children to remain in their own birth homes. Where this has not proved tenable, it is often the case that children who have remained in care have more disturbed behaviour; more complex special needs, and are usually older (Hayden 1999). Changes are coming with increased inspections by the Care Standards Commission and with them the drive for foster carers to undergo the NVQ 3 Caring for Children and Young People. For this reason it is likely there will come a time when this qualification, or its equivalent, will be seen as a minimum requirement to practise. In order to meet the increasingly challenging needs of Looked After children, and with increasing accountability and child protection requirements in the forefront of policy-making decisions, it may be necessary for foster carers to be highly skilled.

Some carers want to be viewed as a professional body of workers without the training and do not want any training (other than the induction sessions) to be made compulsory. There appears to be a perception that registration, rather than training, confers the status of being 'professional'. However, the process of registration does not mean a carer is acting in a professional way. Registration signifies that a carer has fulfilled specific criteria in order to practice as a carer, such as having suitable premises and is a fit person, meaning one who is healthy and suitable. This is not the same as acting in a professional way. Registration does not confer professional status until that person has undergone a thorough training that can be

put to professional use, has acquired specialist knowledge, and the practical application has been assessed by others. Training confers a professional status. Many carers perceive themselves as having an educational role, but do not want the training that must come with professional status. 'You get no extra for having it [NVQ].' Carers receive approximately only one evening a week induction training over six weeks, which can be supplemented by other short courses or workshops that are ongoing.

'I would suggest that foster carers be required to pursue training in some form or shape, but that the particular limitations of an academic course should not be allowed to exclude those who would otherwise make excellent carers.' Some carers in my sample had only attended an induction course; two held the appropriate level three qualifications, while others were professionally qualified to degree level or held vocational qualifications in other fields. Training in supporting education is not mandatory and does not yet feature in many fostering training programmes. When courses are provided attendance is poor, because they are either perceived as not important or uninteresting. Timing of the courses could also be a real factor, since some of the carers have questioned how their caring duties interfere with the opportunity to attend courses.

This word *professionalism* was constantly referred to throughout the two rounds of interviews. One respondent felt that other carers in general had low self-estimation of their abilities, and really did not see themselves as doing a professional job in the same way they perceived the job of a social worker. 'But if people don't see you as a professional person - like the social worker, that you do a professional job - then any view is turned back on you; it's only your opinion.' This reference to the undermining of the carer's viewpoint was made on four separate occasions by four different carers. It is a significant remark if carers are ever to gain parity of esteem as equal partners in the caring (and educating) task. Carers knew they were doing a skilful job and wanted recognition and status for their skills, but they did not want the extensive training that would make excessive demands on them. There was difficulty finding babysitters to enable those who wished to attend courses. Not all carers wanted to attend courses.

Many carers baulk at the idea of more intensive training, although a thorough training programme could effectively help to raise their status. Trained to the same standard as social workers and teachers, they would command the respect that is due to that training. At present

there is no universal, standardised, accredited, mandatory training across the nation for carers, nor is there any mandatory training on supporting education in the home. Carers, especially long-serving ones, are resistant to undergoing an accredited mandatory course. Increasingly, local authorities are designing training pathways and some courses that were once elective courses are now mandatory. 'The NVQ is optional but might not be optional soon.'

No carer mentioned that the NVQ should be the minimum qualification for a fostering practitioner, although some carers said there should be encouragement to complete it, and one suggested that younger carers might be more willing to do the course than older ones. Without a minimum standard of education for carers, young people in care who are expected to gain five or more GCSEs, could perceive an inconsistency when those who care for them do not have the equivalent. To expect our Looked After children to succeed academically, is also to expect those who care for them to be, if not academically qualified, then at least educationally aware.

One respondent explained that carers in her hometown were invited to attend specific training events led by the Looked After Education Team. Carers were also offered basic skill support as well, but there was no mandatory requirement to attend any of the courses except for Life Story Work. Recently the LA had gained some funding to provide computers that could be loaned out to carers 'which I feel is a step forward.' But she felt, 'Standards in foster care would not improve until care of the carers improves, so children looked after get a better deal. Ideally, we need a similar support system for carers that are given in the private sector - are we second best?'

During the follow up interview she told me of a new development that had taken place in her hometown during the year. This was the development of a 'training pathway'. This was a programme of training opportunities for each carer for updating and refreshing their knowledge of fostering. Some courses were mandatory and had to be attended within a given time-scale, and some were optional for the carer's personal and continuing development. During the previous year there had been opportunities for experienced carers to participate in training programmes for new recruits, and they could receive training for their involvement in this area. 'Last five years a big improvement in training,' but this respondent also explained that the emphasis was more on the behaviour of the child than giving a child a

more productive environment. She went on to say that home reviews were undertaken from time to time to assess fostering practice, but they were not very useful. Her borough had planned to improve the system once they had more staff. 'As fostering is seen as a more professional occupation I am sure that inspection [education] will come, but it would be good to keep a "homely" atmosphere – to maintain the best from the past, while being aware of the accountability of the future.' In a follow-up interview, another respondent was able to tell me that during the past year there had been increased inspection, and there were suggestions that the borough she worked for intended to introduce compulsory training. She suspected, too, that an Education Worker had been employed 'as someone phoned me up asking what X's school results were. '

The amount of training already undertaken, or the carer's need for more training influenced the way s/he perceived his or her educating role. If a carer was well qualified, the need for training was felt to be less, although training was still undertaken. If a carer was poorly qualified in addition to being less confident, they would not be pro-active in seeking further training opportunities. If a carer were poorly qualified but confident, then they would embark on on-going training, always providing the course structure and content were non-threatening.

Books: Personal and Specialist

It is now well established that literacy is almost as essential to living as breathing, and although the foster home provides a range of literacy opportunities, and although carers take an interest in literacy development, for many Looked After children books were not personally owned or brought with them to the foster placement. How did my interview respondents respond to the findings from the survey? Three threads emerged from the responses. If children came straight from home into the foster placement it was unlikely that books would be brought with them. It was usually the current foster placement who provided them, with children leaving the placement with books that had been bought for them while in the placement.

Again, it was the perception of the carer's role as to whether s/he placed importance on children owning books. If s/he did not have an educating role then it was felt the responsibility for providing children with books fell upon others, notably reading books from school. For all carers this responsibility was tied to their perception of their educating role as

a whole. If they saw their role only as teaching life skills, then the responsibility for initiating or encouraging reading was not perceived as being within their remit. It was more to do with *school* education.

Foster children did not own any personal books.

Happily all the respondents interviewed identified that their Looked After children owned some personal books.

'You get them for normal children don't you?'

'Isn't it a natural thing?'

'I buy books and they also take their favourites from my books.'

'It's disgraceful that some children don't own books.'

Other respondents offered these comments:

'They have books in bedroom. They have their favourites.'

'They have their own books and play books, and have access to household books.'

'They have them in their own bedroom.'

Despite the fact that some foster children did not have personal books, they did have access to communal and the household books that were suitable and age appropriate, and in all the foster placements interviewed there were plenty of comics read. It was usual practice to share books with the other children in the household.

'Many children in foster placement share books.'

'She must be prepared to share with others or take them to her room.'

There is a reading culture within most foster homes.

'I buy him comics.'

'We read books.'

Some of the children would only read reference books such as computer books, or books that had a particular interest for the child.

'Mine likes to read reference books. He likes to show me what he's reading.'

'It's mostly computer books now.'

It appears that comics may replace books as the main reading material and may account for the fact that some foster placements had children who, perhaps not owning their own books, were still reading comics and other reading material. Perhaps the choice is to read and own comics and magazines rather than books nowadays.

There are exceptions to the way carers' value book-reading. Two respondents argued thus:

'We have too many tasks already.'

'Some parents don't buy books, so it follows some carers won't.'

These respondents were signifying that book buying or ownership was not an important issue for them.

'I am not a reader and don't read, but I buy comics.'

Two other respondents said:

'I do a bit of reading,'

'I do no reading.'

One carer did not read stories at bedtime. She felt that stories worried children before they went to sleep. 'Never had one yet who's had a bedtime story. They must have something nice in head rather than worrying.' It was difficult to appreciate the logic of this remark and I commented that not all bedtime stories left bad thoughts.

Foster children did not bring books with them to the placement.

When bringing books to the placement the responses were different again.

'If they have a book it's probably because they came straight from school.'

'Most children come without a pair of drawers. I can actually say though, that he came with all his toys and books, but most come with nothing.'

'Probably books weren't important. Didn't have treasured books or the carer didn't give it a high criteria.'

'They never came with any but they possibly had books at home. When they come from another carer they might have books, yes, but not from parents.'

'It is more likely children will bring books from another foster home than straight from home.'

'It makes a difference if a child comes straight from home as to whether they bring books. It's not common practice to bring books from home.'

It was claimed by the foster carers that many children came with nothing at all, not even clothes.

'Quite often parents won't part with anything. That's the mentality of the people you're dealing with. Instead of thinking what can the children take so they have their own bits and bobs around them, they are more likely to say, "Up yours! You're looking after them now," and send them in with nothing.'

Children might not bring books with them into the placement from home or even from another placement; nevertheless, the respondents generally accepted that if children did have books bought for them they would then leave with them.

'They've always left with books or at least their favourites.'

'I give them books from here.'

'My child was eight months in the previous placement and never brought any books but lots of clothes.'

Most carers, however, did appreciate the importance of book ownership.

'They don't come with books, but I buy them.'

'Well, they always leave with books, but none came with them.'

Foster carers felt they were not responsible for initiating reading events.

In most of the homes in my sample there did appear to be a book culture, even though a small minority felt it was not within their remit to encourage reading, or to read with, or to, their Looked After children.

I asked respondents what might be the reason for this?

> 'Role and responsibility is reflected in training and payment.'

> 'I know some foster carers do it for the money and feed and clothe them, but that's all.'

> 'It isn't their job.'

> 'I suppose some carers see toys as important, but not books. Don't see books as being relevant.'

> 'Will buy lots of toys but give no thought to buying books.'

I asked one respondent why some carers would feel this way:

> 'This is shrugging off their responsibilities if they [carers] don't do it. You have to separate development from just caring, from just meeting just the basic needs. Responsibility is separated. It becomes a dirty word.'

Another respondent asked, 'Wasn't it a natural thing to do?' and added that it is the quality of care offered. 'If you have too many children, then there is less attention given.'

On four separate occasions my respondents reiterated that responsibility or lack of responsibility for initiating reading events was closely related to carers' own perception of how they viewed themselves:

> 'If they felt they had an educating role, then the responsibility would certainly be theirs, but if it was not, then it would not be down to them to perform that role.'

> 'I suppose if it isn't their child, it's not their responsibility.'

This was a very interesting finding and again pointed to the roles carers assigned to themselves.

'It depends on the motivation of why they [carers] foster in the first place.'

'Some carers don't like reading.'

'If they have no confidence and then they have to read to a child, they won't want to.'

'Carers have to do a professional job.'

Others felt the responsibility belonged to the school and did not see it as their role to encourage reading:

'It's all to do with perception of role. For some foster carers, book reading is not their role.'

'It depends on the degree of attachment what you do.'

The same two respondents who felt buying or owning books was not that important were not surprised by the finding that some carers felt it was not their duty to encourage reading or to share reading events,

'In a normal family it isn't. Why should carers when natural parents don't?'

The other one said, 'There is the library and other ways to access books and they destroy them.'

Others stated:

'Not all carers read to children but might be forced to do so now.'

'If it's just a job then they won't feel it's their duty to read with them.'

'Some carers would feel it is the responsibility of the school to provide them and will not feel they have a responsibility - in the same way that some parents don't.'

'The caring task only is emphasised in training.'

The importance of reading, of story telling and sharing storybooks in the home is now undisputed, as is the beneficial effect of experiencing the close, personal interaction of an interested adult. Being read to is the bedrock from which a love of reading can be engendered.

'We look at books all the time.'

'I never read except bedtime stories.'

'They have their own [books] in their bedrooms but lots of books down here. Look, there are videos and computer games.'

In this last carer's home the place was awash with books, games and videos.

Home literacy development is one of the first foundation stones of learning and the carer (or parent) the most influential teacher of it; therefore, being placed with families who value education (and reading) can have a stimulating effect on children who may be unmotivated. All carers must know it is their duty to make sure reading events happen.

'I suppose the use of the computer has cut down the need to read books.'

'The computer changed it for everyone.'

The computer will be a welcome addition, although it is not something that replaces the value of book reading.

Research shows that children need a stimulating, interactive, literate environment, and, although carers in this study provide this environment to an extent, knowledge and skills are also needed to initiate literacy opportunities and awareness of what more can be achieved.

'Foster carers must have a value in education. They believe in education for their own kids. You have to value education.'

'It's no good just believing in the children…we have to believe in education too.'

This recognition does not appear to be presenting at institutional and government levels either. 'We get no funds for books; we have to buy it all.' This lack of provision will not motivate unmotivated carers to encourage reading opportunities.

One respondent claimed that social service staff would focus on books if it is seen as politically correct to do so. 'I had a child whose family came from Afghanistan. The independent reviewing officer came and said I had to have books on Afghanistan, cultural books for him. Where the hell can I get those books suitable for a two and a half year old?' I

asked if this officer had given this respondent any book outlets that might have such books and was told, 'He only ordered that I got them and that was that. There aren't any picture books about Afghanistan. [The child] does have his own books though, and there are communal books in the lounge.'

> ... ways of taking from the printed word and
> using knowledge are interdependent with the ways
> children learn to talk in their social interactions
> with caregivers. Ways of taking from books are as much
> a part of learned behaviour as are ways of eating, sitting,
> playing games, and building houses.

S.B. Heath (1982:49)

Reading and writing opportunities were in many cases as much a part of the home as the television and the other furniture. 'We read; we play games. I buy books for the children and they take them away with them. I think books are wonderful and I am always saddened by the careless attitude that children seem to hold for books. My own treasured books are ripped and fought over.' All carers have to be more compassionate towards literacy development and become more intuitive and responsive. This compassionate attitude is one that I detect is slowly happening, especially for those carers who see education as being the vehicle to improve the life chances for this group of children.

Specialist books and Life Story Work

The Choice Protects Fund is to improve the fostering services and some 'can be used to help foster carers to support children's education' (SEU Report 2003). Yet not all of the respondents in the interviews were familiar with current funding streams and were surprised that any was to be used to improve fostering services, particularly to support children's education. They were not aware that some of the money should be set aside to improve the training and provision for carers. There was no policy in place in any of the authorities or agencies that recommended or advised carers on how to access funds, or even to purchase books.

Extra funding was seen as no use to carers if they cannot 'support children's education' through the provision of suitable books, etc. 'We are not aware of anything, of any money floating about. What can we draw? I know there are funds out there, but nobody knows how

to get them.' None of my respondents were aware that funding was also available to draw on, via the local authority, for outdoors or leisure pursuits, but one respondent asserted that, 'All my children have the same chances, no matter what the cost,' even if she had to pay for it out of her own resources - which many of them did.

Specialist books

When my survey findings became known, I sought to look at the specific value certain books would have for Looked After children, and indeed, for their carers too I realized, to help develop his or her practice. I developed this theme in greater depth with my interview respondents. Why was there an absence of essential reference and specialist reading books in the home? Could I be placing undue emphasis on the importance of them in addition to my concerns that provision for out-of-school pursuits was not being met by the state? These questions and the neglected practice of Life Story Work led me to explore more fully the value of all these practices. Given the focus on reading standards and book projects within the home, coupled with the continuing underachievement of Looked After children, it appears that nothing was being done to equip the foster placement.

My findings show that the value of specialist books is not recognised by many of the carers or the placing agencies. The difficulty then, is that funding is not made readily available, although it would appear that independent agencies take into account the extra funds needed for provisions such as books and pay carers accordingly.

> 'We are well paid and any extras covers cost.'

> 'Agency takes into account extra funds needed.'

There is a poor perception by local authorities and agencies of the importance of specialist books, and a lack of knowledge by carers of funding streams. This is because there has been no importance placed on book provision during training sessions, and most carers from local authorities did not even realize that such books existed. Only one respondent stated that she knew of such books: *Finding a family, Separation, Contact and Adoption* (See appendix 4). This lady worked for an independent fostering agency, but others only had a vague awareness of their existence. Local authorities appear to be less informative or forthcoming when it comes to advising about book buying.

Having access to books that can help a child understand their unique situation could be essential for building a sense of identity and resilience for coping with their experiences. Reference books for adults would increase the carers' knowledge of the range of experiences these children undergo and enable them to learn strategies and techniques, which they can refer to when difficulties present themselves. Specialist books for both the child and the carer can only increase the understanding of the needs of Looked After children.

'They send out edicts to get them, but no information on where to get them.'

'No allowance for books or toys, just a clothing allowance.'

'Comes in clothing allowance.'

'Nothing for books, only clothes, travel and hygiene.'

Books in the *home literacy library* that could help a child make sense of his or her foster care experiences have to be bought by the carer if they want to obtain them. Reference books that a carer could refer to, to develop their understanding of a specific need or problem a child may present, have usually to be bought by the carer.

'Never had advice about any special books.'

'Got to buy it all; no funds for books.'

'We have to buy them ourselves from the association.'

'Haven't got any specialist books.'

Because of the poor response to the use of such books, I asked if they had any real value and did carers really appreciate their importance? 'Yes,' replied one respondent, 'there is, to look back on and for identity, and they do have a value.'

Other respondents agreed:

'Going to a book helps as well with difficult questions or situations.'

'I think they should be in the home. A book can explain what I can't.'

'Have to have books that deal with emotional baggage.'

But other respondents were not so certain,

> 'They are valuable to a degree.'

> 'They are inappropriate for some children.'

The overall impression given by the respondents was that specialist books were a good idea to have in the home, but there was little knowledge of what they were or where they could be purchased. Carers did have an awareness of their importance, but that was all, and there was not much effort made to stock the home library shelf. One respondent felt vaguely that she had been made aware of specialist and reference books dealing with the complex issues of being Looked After, but had not purchased any. Other respondents felt the same. 'We are encouraged to buy them, but social services do not fund them.' This remark was the same from most of the respondents.

> 'I get no advice on what to have and get nothing.'

> 'It depends on child; it's an individual thing.'

> 'I can borrow books from the office.'

> 'They should give us a range of books, but they don't.'

This last respondent agreed that extra allowances should be given for buying books, but cited an example of how extra allowances are used. She felt that valuable resources were not going into mainstream services, but into more specialist services. 'Brazilian child is given a translator. Do you know the cost?'

'Why weren't authorities providing carers with a range of books to help these children to make sense of their experiences?' I asked.

> 'Fostering has never been a service with a lot of money, and it has never encouraged carers to spend with the hope of being reimbursed.'

> 'Books were items that would have been included in the equipment that the carer bought for their home.'

> 'There are books published these days which cover subjects that are within the fostering remit, but, if authorities cannot help with ordinary books, there is no chance of getting reference ones.'

'Some of those which relate to fostering would be great.'

It is through fostering associations or family centres that resources like reference or specialist books can be bought or loaned. Two respondents belong to an association, and it is through this avenue that they are able to borrow books or other learning and teaching aids. The centre acquires the books through various funding bodies or charitable organisations and they are then loaned out to members through a loan-library scheme.

'The ranges of books have been hit and miss.'

'Previously books were a rarity and only available via social workers.'

'In my experience books are out of date, too technical, and too difficult to understand. Books for Looked After children are non-existent and public libraries were the same.'

'Recently the local library service have been involved with the association, giving talks and presentations, and advising about appropriate books.'

'Carers should be willing to invest in their leisure time as well as educational in order to learn self-control and discipline, but resources are not a bottomless pit. Invest in your pleasure!' This respondent had no specific books on fostering (or fostering stories) in her home, but she regularly goes to the library and chooses books with the children, nor did she need to be told to take them to the museum, etc. 'Carers have to be child-centred, not school centred, in how they support their child's educational needs.' She had bought a variety of children's books and this came out of the allowance. Another respondent, who had worked for more than one local authority, claimed there were usually no toy libraries unless a carer instigated it, and, which she argued, should be available for every carer to access in every locality. Another respondent claimed, 'There's a £37 settling-in grant, but you have to ask for it. Sometimes it's not given and I didn't get it.

Life story work
Children of the state need to read books or use materials that would help them identify with their unique situation, and carers needed reference books to develop their understanding of the children's situation. This may be particularly relevant to the development of Life Story Work.

'All agency carers have opportunity to do Life Story Work.'

'It's mandatory to attend course.'

'We've had training on it.'

'We are expected to attend Life Story Work eventually.'

'Did Life Story Work from own impetus.'

One respondent scoffed at the idea of her foster child having a Life Story Book. I asked why the child had not begun one since he was now accumulating information and artefacts about all aspects of his life while in her care. 'Been in care for three months and no decision made... nothing started because mum thought she was having him back....' This respondent also mentioned that reviews were not always taken during out-of-school time, and this again, she pointed out, reflected the lackadaisical approach to putting a child's interests first when setting in place procedures and processes for meeting his needs. 'Most of the ones [reviews] I have been to, have definitely been before 4 o'clock. They don't care; they haven't got to miss school.'

'All carers have opportunity to do Life Story Work, but they are not expected to do it straight away - but eventually.' One respondent's youngest foster child did not come with a Life Story Book and was doing it now with her social worker and the foster carer. She was building up a memory box and a scrapbook of things they have gathered while the child is with her. This carer described how a Life Story Book has to be 'a working tool to keep memories alive.' She also mentioned that regular hobbies were not funded, but the new agency that she now worked for had provision for reflexology, art therapy and aromatherapy.

The children in one respondent's charge had enjoyed a range of activities, and she had stated that she was 'very well paid anyway because experience and qualifications count.' She added that she could afford to do everything they wanted to do, but identified that appropriate training had to be given to carers on the use of Life Story Book because of the risk entailed 'in opening up a can of worms.' While it needed to be controlled, the work also had to be fun and the child had to be comfortable with it. This respondent's agency had not instigated the work but, because of her background and knowledge, she had put it in place. She recognised that 'children come with problems, multiple placements, disruptions.' She had paid out of

her own resources for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for her troubled Looked After child.

It was in relation to the potential dangers of Life Story Work that another respondent stated: 'In the wrong hands this can be dangerous.' Another said, 'For some children or young people, Life Story Work wouldn't be appropriate. Many wouldn't want to do it.' I was to learn that, because of the sensitivity of this kind of work, in some authorities the responsibility for conducting it rested solely on the social worker, while it was the role of the carer to gather the information and materials such as photographs and mementos of specific events and experiences. It was then the role of the social worker to work with the memories and artefacts to explore in greater depth the feelings behind the events and experiences. It appears there are differing perceptions when describing this work, and, depending on who is conducting the work, the depth to which it is explored.

Life Story Work is already in place for many carers, but it has yet to be a universal practice, and not only undertaken by social workers; otherwise, we are claiming that social workers are more skilful in this area than the foster carer. This type of work could be incorporated within a broader writing paradigm in the foster home. Writing, through the use of Life Story Work, other writing opportunities and with the active participation of an interested adult, can lift the habitual defences that hurt children can build. Creative writing, telling tales and listening to fairy stories can give expression to unconscious and hidden thoughts in a safe, nurturing environment. Reading books, especially designed for children in care, can provide a channel to learn about their strengths and what needs to be worked through. Through this means, the knowledge that children and young people are able to acquire helps them to identify with others in the same situation, and gain comfort that they are not alone.

Children in public care have a great deal of emotional investment in the experiences they have already had, and the experiences they continue to have. Fletcher (1997) identifies they receive little help with their feelings, or about the feelings that came from separation from their birth families. She recognises they have to cope with significant losses, including their identity, and have to live with unpredictability and uncertainty.

My findings become especially significant since the latest report from a major children's mental health charity *Young Minds* showed a dramatic increase in the mental disorders of

this group. It also showed that strengthening resilience through outdoor and leisure pursuits could actually help to reduce and combat problems of poor mental health. 'Nearly a quarter of adolescents looked after by local authorities could be suffering from major depressive disorders,' Collyer (2002:6). 'A high proportion of looked after children have extensive mental health needs,' Ward *et al.* (2003:9).

An article in the *Young Minds* magazine, June 2003, described how GP's were now prescribing books to patients suffering from mental distress that enabled them to read about topics relating directly to their experiences. This scheme could be extended to young people in care if the scheme proves successful. Slowly, as funds are becoming available, other therapeutic initiatives are springing up. A London fostering agency plans to train carers in dealing with traumatised children, because, it argues, 'Carers, who are with the child 24 hours a day, are better able to heal children than a once-a-week therapist.' *(Foster Care, 2003, issues 113).* This supports my assertion that carers could be equipped to undertake fully the task of Life Story Work.

Carers could be equipped and highly trained to support Life Story Work, not as therapist or teacher, but to aid all internal expression that is indirect and does not exacerbate existing difficulties. Reading and writing within the known literacy practices of the home, encouraging personal stories and deeper self-knowledge, allowing exploration of feelings in a safe non-threatening environment: all these may allow children to cope better with the rigours of school and life in general.

Extra allowances

> Involvement (in out-of-school activities) can also encourage
> young people who have experienced problems at school
> to re-engage with learning.

SEU Report (2003)

Gilligan (2000) showed that leisure activities actively promoted the development of resilience. There are plenty of 'out of school' leisure pursuits being enjoyed by the children in the foster placements sampled, but they are not suitably funded and usually come out of a

fostering allowance, or the carers' own money. 'If there is anything on offer then you have to wait months and months and months.'

> 'I wanted to take X to Turkey, but local authority said he'd have to go home to birth parents instead.'

I had asked this respondent if she could draw on any funds for leisure pursuits or specialist help and resources. 'I waited over a year for CAMHS for X. Thought about getting X art therapy, but they wouldn't cough up. Then they were going to remove him, because financially it was more viable to send him home. It's a non-profit organisation so it might be money related. I even got the Children's Director involved.' Any expenses incurred through leisure pursuits are incorporated in the fostering allowance, including expensive holidays. Another respondent stated that her agency would not pay for extra resources for the child, even when asked for. 'The extra income that agencies pay takes these extra expenses into account.

> 'They [LA] would also fund one-off activities or course.'

> 'In LA's they withdraw their support too quickly and any request has to be put in early.'

One respondent described the leaving care policies and how, with the Leaving Care Act 2000, things might now improve. 'All foster children need support into adulthood and beyond. Monetary decisions are not always in the best interests of the child and LA's are quite upfront about it.'

Other respondents offered the following:

> 'Out of school activities very often are more expensive.'

> 'We have approached the LA about this, but generally it has been found out of allowance or our own pockets.'

> 'Holiday allowance is another issue as on occasions it's totally inadequate.'

If a carer belongs to an association there is often petty cash carers can draw from. Many LA's will pay for a one-off activity. 'It's true to an extent [no extra allowances available] but my LA sometimes pays for out-of-school activities.'

Interviewer: 'What about extra allowances?' I asked another respondent.

Respondent: On a day-to-day basis it is best to assume that everything a child wishes to do comes out of the fostering allowance.'

Another respondent: 'It is only on rare occasions that extra money would be available and certainly not on a regular basis.'

Information sharing

'It is true that important documents related to supporting education are not being distributed.' It was difficult for another participant to find information about the health and educational needs of the children who came into her care. She didn't receive comprehensive information from her LA, but she was able to get more general information about fostering issues through her fostering association. If a foster carer does not receive regular bulletins from the placing agency or local authority, s/he cannot keep pace with new developments in practice. It also sends out the message that s/he does not need to share information, or is in any position to receive important documents related to education.

Carers stated:

> 'It's the link worker's responsibility to tell us what is going on. She's the one who oversees everything, to call if we need help.'

> 'They don't want your opinion or ask for it.'

> 'Don't want to discuss what I'm saying. I'm just the carer.'

It was because of this distrust between the social workers and carers that the sharing of information or the circulation of educational documents was prevented.

'I got some leaflets and X gets a magazine. I haven't seen any of those.' This carer was referring to a range of books I had brought with me that were specifically written for Looked After children. The books, guides and circulars were ones that had been published specifically for foster carers to advise them of the contribution they could make to raise the educational achievement of their fostered children.

In an effort to find out why so many carers had no knowledge of the literature I was showing them, I contacted the organisations concerned to find out about their distribution methods.

The Fostering Network, who published the leaflet *Education, a guide for foster carers*, told me the guide had been published in 1996 under the Fostering Network's Signpost Series, but it was now unavailable, being updated, and the new publication date was unknown. They informed me that all new publications are usually advertised on the website or in their magazine, and then it was up to readers to purchase them. Alternatively, some fostering agencies may have a policy whereby they purchase the guides on carers' behalf, with responsibility to distribute them. The informant also told me that, whenever a legal change in fostering policy occurred, they usually updated the information and sent it directly to their members, since, she stated, it would have a significant impact on carers. This organisation obviously felt that a guide appertaining to education would not carry the same impact; therefore, it would not be distributed free of charge to their members. By 2006 the new, updated version of the booklet had still not been published.

The Who Care? Trust, a national charity that seeks to improve the conditions for children and young people in care, publishes and distributes the *Who Cares? Magazine,* and the *Who cares? About Education,* an educational action guide for young people. The Trust told me that local authorities subscribe to the magazine and then distribute it. The Trust cannot do this directly due to Data Protection legislation. *The Who Cares? Education guide* is a free publication that can be obtained directly from the charity or from The Department of Health, and can be ordered in large quantities. Although it is not regularly distributed, they told me, it is easily available, but that it is down to local authorities or independent agencies to request the items.

I sent an email to the Department of Health to ask the same question about distribution of their guide: *Education Protects: Summary for Foster Carers.* I received a reply a month later. The Senior Communications Manager informed me that one hundred and twenty-five copies of the booklet were sent to all Directors of Social Services in England, with a circular for onward distribution to carers. There was provision for further supplies to be requested. The National Literacy Association, who publishes *Breaking their fall,* did not reply to my enquiry.

A respondent identified gaping holes in the sharing of information (which matched my own findings) and stated that information passed on depended on each circumstance and the knowledge available at the time.

> 'Obviously there are huge holes in the information and a lot of guesswork when information is lacking. Some information gleaned comes from the child, which totally inappropriate.'

> 'If a child is unable to communicate it is, and can be, a minefield. How this can be remedied and improved is an enigma.'

> 'As a childminder I get loads of information; as a foster carer I get none.'

The circulation of literature concerning the education of Looked After children is still scant even when the fostering agency is a private one. Both my survey results and interviews revealed that important documents are not being cascaded down to the key worker. One carer scrutinised the books, reports, leaflets and guides that I had brought to the interview and told me she had not seen any of the literature on any of the educational projects until today. She stated that she tries to gain an insight into the children's behaviour and the reasons for it, but information is difficult to obtain and training does not cover it. 'I give child-focused training. If you can understand the underlying reasons for behaviour you can forgive it.' She felt this was the type of information that should be circulated in addition to other childcare concerns and initiatives.

A more positive reply came from one respondent who told me that on most occasions she received the information she required about the Care/Education plan(s), and was always kept fully informed of any changes to the health and educational needs of the child. I wondered if this good state of affairs existed because she fostered babies, and it was vital that information was shared by all parties to prevent any risks being taken. Another respondent, who tried to reassure me that sharing information effectively might actually be happening, remarked, 'These days information is shared. At one time information was scarce, but now things are better, although this could depend on the social worker allocated to the case.'

Some responses were less positive. Other respondents told me that sharing information and receiving important documents relating to the needs of the child (not just educational needs) was still ad hoc and still needed to be greatly improved. 'I get books through my own

instigation like *My Book About Me*… fostering and adoption books… talk about books like family splits.' This respondent went on to say that her borough 'had a well resourced Basic Skills unit' but complained that distribution of resources was at the wrong ends: more resources going to adults than children, who needed it most. 'Information and resources are not distributed as the norm.'

The entitlement of the Looked After child to have access to the best educational chances that we can give him or her could be sabotaged if they do not have access to a range of published resources. My findings showed that the majority of my sample had not received (or known about) a range of educational documents specifically written to enable carers to help in the raising of educational achievement. Although foster carers are ably providing an environment that is conducive to learning, their task is not being made easy because important information and resources are being withheld. Perceptions and ingrained attitudes are hard to change, and it would appear that carers are not perceived as equal partners in the caring task; therefore, are not entitled to (or kept up to date with) current research or given guidance, on what resources are available.

Children's Rights is enshrined in the Children Act 1989. Children are active in the decision making process, participating in the choices that need to be made. Their views are now considered, but they are not fully furnished with all that is around to really empower them. The argument for 'joined-up' services has always been in the forefront of political debate, and it was Fletcher (1990), amongst others, who explored the fractures in working relationships between departments and agencies. Lack of active collaboration was a finding that accounted for one for the reasons for educational underachievement of Looked After children in the first place. The infrastructure of social service departments does appear to be improving, but a direct channel to the carer and, more importantly, to the Looked After child, still seems to be blocked.

Dissemination and sharing of information is in short supply. It would appear that important documents written specifically for certain groups are not being circulated. There seems to be differentiation between those who receive publications and those who do not. For example, the document *Believe in me*, published to assist designated teachers to help and chart the educational pathway of Looked After children in school, had a very wide circulation; in fact,

there was a concerted effort to ensure that every designated teacher received one, but the same effort is not made to ensure that carers receive the publications earmarked for them.

McCurry (1999:20) identifies how 'often social services don't have the same software, don't have the same information, and don't share data.' There does appear within agencies to be improvement in collaboration, but the dissemination of information, action guides, current research findings and circulars are not reaching the carer at the grassroots level. A small but significant observation occurred on two occasions during the course of this research that showed sharing of information is not even happening within the same office. On these occasions another had opened post I had addressed to a specific person, but the information within had not been relayed, and only after much searching were the documents unearthed. On another occasion, a letter I had written had done the rounds through many departments, before finally arriving some weeks later for the intended recipient. This is perhaps an indicator of the way the sharing of vital information that would increase the knowledge base of the carer for improving and promoting educational opportunity is lost.

Commentary and summary
The home is the seat of all future successful learning (Wade and Moore 1996). The opportunities and some practices for developing literacy are slowly evolving in the foster placement by some enlightened individuals, but much more could be done in order for all carers to contribute fully to the educational success of their Looked After children.

There is certainly much development occurring in the foster placement, but the fundamental perception, attitude and the general poor belief that some foster have in the contribution they can make at home, and in relation to the school, will continue to make change difficult. The perception of their role is clearly tied up with their own notion of competence, and what they believe their role to be. Although some carers do have a heightened awareness of the importance of supporting education, there are others who still see this aspect as 'providing toys' only and not as a contribution they can make in their own right. There was a fear amongst these foster carers that they might not be able to meet the challenges of an educational role.

Carers who see they have a role to play in supporting education, but no more than helping with homework and teaching life skills held this perception of role: namely, although they do provide literacy opportunities, they do not feel it is part of their fostering remit. This perception of role is also influenced by the carer's own educational accomplishments. It was found that the higher a carer was educated, the more rigorous they wanted the training to be. This was because they were more confident in their own abilities to undertake it, but what the less educated lacked in paper qualifications was usually made up by being enthusiastic, interested and motivated in helping their Looked After children. This means that all carers have a valuable contribution to make, and now training needs require that a course of study is found that reflects the skills and knowledge carers can acquire, and meets the learning needs of all carers, well or less well educated.

Those who have the greatest influence on a vulnerable child appear to have the least training of any other 'professional' body. If the educating role of the carer is not made explicit at the recruitment stage, and is not reinforced in training, it is to be expected they are not aware of their own potential in this area. It does appear, however, that the standard of education of carers is getting higher, and most of the foster carers in the sample had kept their knowledge current by attending regular training sessions and workshops.

Despite this dual perception of their educating role, books are read, books are shared and books are bought. Also provided are writing materials, comics and magazines, although a small number of children did not own their own books. Additionally, although forty-six carers felt a responsibility for providing reading and writing materials, and forty-two were involved in reading activities, twenty carers said they did not have a duty to promote reading activities. More opportunities could have been made through Life Story Work and reading specialist books in order for children to identify with their situation and to make sense of their experiences: to develop a sense of belonging.

Education does have a value in the foster placement, but my findings indicate that the carers' educating role is not clearly defined, especially for those carers who work for local authorities.

'Basically, it's about changing attitudes.'

'There should be better collaboration between social services and education.'

'The status and role has to change.'

The actions and the perception of the carers' roles therefore appear to rest on how the social worker perceives the carers specific role and the expectation of the placing agency and its personnel. If one of the agency protocols is to support education at home, carers see it as their duty to do this. Where agencies believe the carer's role is to promote learning opportunities, they expect carers to do more than merely assist with homework and see their role as an extension of the school, but also to act as equal partners with teachers.

Financial constraints can be involved. 'Decisions are made that are driven by financial imperatives and we are unlikely to be consulted.' Many carers promoted negative images of other carers, which does not help to promote a united front. 'I do know foster carers who do it just for the money, that's all.' This type of remark was made on several occasions. Carers have very differing views, even towards each other, and they are not always supportive or protective of their colleagues.

Even though all carers in my sample had received in-service training and some held accredited qualifications, some carers felt the initial induction training was quite sufficient. However, the current training opportunities do not equip them with the skills and knowledge that would raise their awareness of how they could promote literacy opportunities in the home. At the Government and institutional levels, their contribution to raising the educational level of this group is still not being recognised and continues to be undervalued.

I discovered that many carers felt the NVQ in Caring for Children and Young People a complete waste of time. Some carers are *too busy* to attend training courses. It could be argued, therefore, that a thorough training should be substantial at the recruitment stage and any further workshops or training courses would have more to do with personal and professional development, rather than being seen as filling in gaps in knowledge once a carer is registered and practising.

For the carer, the perception of the fostering role to support education in the home appears to be three-fold: if supporting education was a *task,* and the *expectation* of it was imposed by

the placing agency, this task would therefore have to be performed by them. 'If carers feel they have an educating role, then they will do more.' 'Some local authorities treat their carers very much as volunteers.'

If carers *believed* it was their responsibility to perform an educating role, even though their specific agency was not actually encouraging them to fulfil this role, then they would perform it, with or without training. If the carer perceived a loss of *status* from the organisation in which they worked, irrespective of whether they held good qualifications, they were less self-assured in stating one of their roles to be an educational one, even though they still performed this role.

It seems likely that carers will only see themselves as equal partners when they feel truly professional, and are paid for their knowledge and expertise. Other agencies too, such as schools, contribute towards sustaining attitudes and preconceived ideas about the role of the foster carer. This is not helped by low expectations of Looked After children. Although carers recognised their contribution to literacy development and felt equipped to support their foster children educationally in various ways as part of their fostering role, many felt their main responsibility was to support the school instead of valuing their own contributions in their own right. However, it should be noted that most of the liaison with the school continues to be centred on behaviour problems rather than on educational issues. This perception was different for carers who were highly educated. Significantly, those carers who worked for independent fostering agencies saw themselves as having more of an educational role in relation to literacy development, and this was because of the greater expectation placed on them by agencies.

Many carers who worked for local authorities perceived their educational role as more related to the teaching of life skills, although there was a merging of views if the local authority carer was highly educated; crucially, it was belief in their own ability to perform this role and not whether they worked for a local authority or independent agency. Two additional factors could help to raise the achievement of Looked After children: firstly a belief in carers by social workers and teachers and by the agencies carers works for; and secondly, that carers have the training that will allow them to command the same status as other professional workers. The recognition of the carers' educating role also waits to be

acknowledged by this government, for as David Bell, Chief Inspector of the watchdog, OFSTED, asserts:

> teaching must start in the home. Parents need to
> get involved in children's learning rather than leave
> it all up to the school.

Daily Mail: (5th February 2004; 39).

CHAPTER 7

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**The traditional ways of delivering foster care
do not adequately meet children's needs.**

Fostering for the Future 2002:3

Now is the time to generate a discussion based on my research findings and to assess the policy implications arising from them. This chapter allows me to explore further the development of literacy in the foster placement and to determine if the principal carers of Looked After children are pivotal in this development. After all, research as early as 1964 showed the significant effects of parental interest on later school attainment (J.W.B Douglas 1964). It was surprising; therefore, it was predominantly the school that was focused on to improve the situation, and not the foster placement, when the present government set about improving matters for this group in the late 1990's. In 1986, Rutter found that by having at least one significant person throughout childhood made a substantial difference to the life chances of a Looked After child, so again it was surprising that it was the designated teacher in school who was seen as the person to change things and not the significant carer of the child.

In this chapter I determine what more foster carers can do to support education in addition to improving their own development and raising their professional game, for my results show that carers have to develop their own literacy too. This includes the type of training that is actually required to carry out the fostering task professionally. I also put forward recommendations for Good Practice. The recommendations have evolved as a result of my own findings and from reading extensively around the key issues that have emerged. My respondents have also been given the opportunity to speak out. It is my hope that policy makers will take notice. (Again, there may be an overlap of responses in different sub-sections due to similar responses by different respondents at different times and in different contexts)

The recommendations from other research projects are also included. They are seen as necessary and important, but they do not appear to have been implemented. This does not help me to feel confident that any notice is going to be taken of my own. Bald *et al.* (1995:34) recommendations have not been implemented. He recommended that local authorities should give children opportunities to choose and buy books on a regular basis and to encourage Looked After children to become regular users of the library. 'As part of their role as "good parent" in relation to the education of young people, local authorities should take active steps to promote literacy and encourage reading.' He went on to suggest that all new social workers and carers should be aware of the importance of literacy and that 'local authorities should provide training and guidance in providing support for reading.'

The *Equal Chances Project* (1999) wanted local authorities to adopt a policy where they provided a range of books in each placement, and encouraged library use and book buying. The project recommended that children should undergo a baseline assessment to gauge what extra and appropriate resources could be put in place that would also include the implementation of 'catch up' schemes. It seems only the provision of the designated teacher is in place.

The Code of Practice (1999) called for the status of carers to rise, and it has not. The *Right to Read* (2000:2-3) recommendations stated that 'Local authorities must demonstrate their commitment to the value and importance of accessing books in the home', arguing for a centralised strategy for children to have books of their own in order to improve access and literacy. This has yet to be common practice, and, nearly six years after the project recommendations were made, we are still waiting for this to happen.

Morris (2000:54) asks, 'What gets in the way of getting the most out of their [Looked After children's] education?' I have already identified the contribution carers are making to the education of their Looked After children, and now we have to assess how their contribution can be improved by identifying the factors that would impede or promote progress in this area. I can now identify three overarching concerns that could create barriers to strengthening this aspect of the fostering service: namely, that of developing literacy in the foster placement.

- Barriers to changing the role and professional status of carers in their role as potential educators are created at the institutional and government levels.

- Cultural, social and emotional influences may inhibit the development of literacy in the foster placement.

- The perception of the carer has to change if they are to see themselves as equal partners in raising the educational performance of their Looked After children.

Barriers to developing literacy in the foster placement

> Local authorities should change the way that they view the role
> of the foster carer. I am certain that staff in many local authorities
> could be doing more to treat foster carers with respect and make
> greater use of their expert knowledge they have about the children
> in their care.

These were the remarks made by Jacqui Smith, as Health Minister, speaking at the Choice Protects conference in January 2003, and quoted in the Foster Care Magazine (issue 113:2003:3) This was a common cry from my respondents who felt undermined and undervalued, and who felt that social workers gave little regard to the experience and knowledge they had about the children they cared for.

> Judgements made about foster carers resemble those made
> about step-parents in reconstituted families.
>
> Hill (1999:2)

Professionals who undertake to look after disadvantaged children, and who should be supporting the education of children in foster placement, need to change attitudes, remove pre-conceived ideas, and avoid stereotyping of other co-workers. This particularly concerns attitudes of social workers towards carers and between carers themselves. Social workers (and teachers) have yet to view foster as equal partners, and they view them even less as potential educators. Currently, the specific role of the carers in providing an educative environment within the home is seen as less important than supporting the school, and this needs to be addressed. This is not really surprising when their role is still based on the notion of voluntarism.

It is important that perceptions change, because my research has shown that if social workers particularly value educational effort for themselves (as social workers) then the motivation of the carer in this area is promoted. There is, however, evidence that, in addition to not viewing carers as equal partners, social workers have little faith in the advancement of educational accomplishments of Looked After children too; accordingly, until they do, change will be slow.

It does not help matters when there appear to be two fostering services: one delivered by the local authority and the other by an independent agency. One of the other barriers to improving the educational role of the carer was the lack of status felt by them, especially those who worked for a local authority. Status within the organisation was fundamental to how carers viewed themselves and was affected if carers thought the job they were doing was less important than other co-workers. Many local authority carers claimed that their role in supporting education was not made explicit, if mentioned at all, while in the case of most independent agency workers it was.

The status of those who worked for an independent agency was raised because those agencies had a higher expectation of their carers and valued the work they did through providing appropriate training and remuneration. If some local authorities do not perceive their carers as equal partners, then the carer will not believe they have the same status as other co-workers, creating status differentials and undermining the way carers interact with them. If there were uniformity in working conditions and in the pre-requisites to become a foster carer, then the status would rise for all. Status differentials between co-professionals including teachers, seriously limits the ability to put Looked After children's needs first.

I have identified how there can be difficulty accessing a school place and that schools have been reluctant to engage with the carer. It is also believed by carers in my sample that schools do not value the accomplishments of Looked After children, nor view the foster carer as a co-professional. Accordingly, it has been cited by my respondents that school personnel have been resistant in sharing information with the carer, or viewing them as interested parties who should be given such information, especially if it was perceived by the school that the carer was an educated professional like them. The teachers may have felt more secure in their own roles when they felt the role of the carer was merely to support education by the school. It could be that the presence of a highly educated carer threatens the

status differential teachers may have deemed to exist between themselves and the foster carer.

School personnel may take the view that it is only they who have authority and knowledge when it comes to educational matters. Could it be that the school felt less threatened by those who perceived themselves as being a carer first and foremost? When confronted by a highly educated carer who now claims an equal partnership in the education of their Looked After child, school personnel may subconsciously retreat from the threat by conveying to the carers their presumed superiority.

Joint training has to be developed further, specifically exploring the contribution each member of the team (carer, social worker and teacher) can make to the educational success of this group. This would help to unify working relationships, in addition to learning how learning occurs for children and for themselves, and what creates barriers to learning, but my respondents identified a 'them and us' mentality between social workers and even between themselves.

All carers and other personnel must learn ways of developing literacy in the placement by utilising the materials of the home and acting as facilitators in this. This has to be taught, to be made explicit, because it cannot be taken for granted that carers already do this, or that social workers and teachers encourage it. Any literacy intervention that does not involve an interested adult will not raise literacy competency. This makes the role of the foster carer even more important in the development of literacy acquisition than the role of the social worker. Skill and knowledge alone is not enough. It is the motivation of all caregivers to want to help that is the key, and this has to be aroused in training. Therefore, it was unfortunate that the foster carers in my sample did not want to undergo an intensive thorough training programme that would bring them in line with the educational qualifications of other professionals: a profile that would enable them to extend and develop their practice, and help other professionals to perceive carers as partners.

All carers should be prepared to undergo a thorough initial training in order to practice (and before they practice) in the same way a teacher or social worker has to train before practicing. A common training for all eliminates the disparity between those who are highly qualified, who feel they need little further training, and those who feel they need no training

at all other than a brief induction course, even though these carers may have no other relevant qualifications. It would also avoid the low uptake by carers for courses designed to broaden their knowledge, due to the difficulty of arranging alternative childcare. It should also be enshrined in policy that if a carer develops her own practice by undergoing further training, it should be common policy s/he will be rewarded for doing so. However, it has also to be recognised that training needs have to be suited to the different learning needs of carers.

The current two or three-tier system of training does not help the cause of the carer or make for a coherent service. The Utting recommendations and the subsequent National Standards were attempts to introduce unified trained personnel, a trained force that has expertise and is paid for their services. It has yet to happen. Doing a professional job demands a professional wage in addition to an allowance for the Looked After child.

The National Fostering Network recommends training for all carers, yet statement 8.14:30 of the Fostering for the Future Report (2002) revealed that 'gaps or delays in completing annual reviews often hampered the training and development of foster carers.' The Department of Health funds courses leading to NVQ qualifications, yet many carers complain that the content is not really addressing what is needed. In-service training is given at local level and delivered by some carers in some authorities. This was felt by the carers themselves to be an encouraging development as it made the sessions more relaxed and less threatening. Many authorities 'buy in' training and independent training packages, and providers deliver them, but there should be one national unified training system, not an ad hoc, patch (and patched up) service by individual agencies and local authorities.

Cultural, social and emotional influences

Current thinking leads to a view of literacy as a social and cultural practice rather than as a set of discrete skills that must be learnt irrespective of the literacy context. There has been a shift from viewing literacy in isolation to one where the social and cultural ways of the family and community determine the way literacy is used (Comber and Cormack 1997). If we view literacy in this way, then the literacy practices of the foster placement become even more pivotal to the literacy development of its foster children, and it means that particular literacy practices of the home and community are now seen as counting as the preferred ways of developing literacy competences.

Cultural and 'family' based literacy practices are therefore vital for literacy development: practices that are embedded within the child's wider social world, rather than school based practices. The acquisition of literacy continues to be equated with school literacy, yet we begin to understand that mainstream school literacy practices are secondary to the importance of acquiring home-grown literacy skills, skills that are learnt in a known and familiar family setting.

Research has shown that the ways we learn and the ways we interact with learning material are intrinsically linked to our social conditioning; it has also been identified that family socialisation processes are very influential in establishing specific ways of learning. Cohen (1968) and S.B. Heath (1982) both contend that one of the reasons for educational underachievement is the mismatch between the learning styles of the home and that of the school.

School literacy can be an unknown literacy practice for children who may have had very little positive experience of school. School literacy practices may only transmit what needs to be taught in order to fit a specific agenda, and one that may not fit the agenda of the Looked After child. Schools tell parents what is to be taught, and this informs the literacy practices to be learnt, but it should be the home that informs school literacy practices to enable a smooth transition from home to school. Culture and socialisation processes inform literacy practices. Socialisation processes form the mindset, form the way we learn and consolidate information.

> If children are to be freed up to think and reflect,
> to explore and learn, including at school, to make
> choices in their lives as they get older, then they need
> to be given the experience of available, sensitive carers,
> to enable the child to experience themselves as lovable
> and adults as available.

Schofield *et al.* (2000:12)

We also have to be mindful that the literacy standard of Looked After children may not be comparable to their peers in the general population, but may fall within the normal realms of their 'own' reality. However, the children's own literacy 'standard' may not actually be a failing one. This 'situated literacy' perspective should enable us to see that we cannot think

of 'one' literacy (traditional, mainstream, school) as the only literacy that is recognised and has validity. There are as many types of literacy as there are intelligences and, if the government is really genuine in creating a personalised children's system, then it will make sure that the needs of each Looked After child is individually tailored to include the promotion of a literacy that meets that individual need, which includes appropriate books and resources (Gardner 1985).

We could also say that the known literacy of the child, developed in the socialisation process of the home of origin, may be a different literacy model from a foster placement that aspires to be, or is, middle class. Osborn & St Clair (1987) have identified that most children who enter the care system are not middle class. Cohen (1969:828) asserts,

> each style affects the carrier's ability to deal effectively with
> the alternate kind of group process requirement.

So here we have a dilemma. When we think about developing literacy in the foster placement, we not only have to direct our attention to the Looked After child but to the foster family as a whole. Both the foster family and the Looked After child have to deal with differing backgrounds: family structures, different expectations and with a whole range of differing cultural and social influences. The background of the child (and literacy practices) may be very different from the family background of the foster family, although we hope they would have been closely matched. The foster family has to care for children from diverse family backgrounds and interact with a range of adults involved with them; therefore, not only do fostered children now have to cope with a school literacy that may be alien to them, but they may be placed with a home literacy that is also unknown.

Consequently, the child may experience a 'class' or 'culture' clash in the foster placement – and then have to deal with the demands of the school too. As my results have shown, many carers have to develop their own literacy as well. Therefore, we must now explore the influences that would impede the development of literacy in the foster placement for both the carer and the Looked After child. This makes the development of literacy all the more difficult to achieve in the foster placement.

In addition to the influences described, my own findings have outlined the discord that can be created between a birth family and a foster family, identifying that placing a working

class child into a middle class environment may not be in best interest of the child, especially if there are contact arrangements with the birth family, or the child is to be returned home. It will certainly impede educational progress and development of literacy in the foster placement if a child is straddling different cultures. Some foster homes, however materially advantaged or educationally aware, may not be the known culture of the child and could actually be a barrier to integrating within the foster family. It may even inhibit learning because of the different processing styles. It does appear that the younger a child is, the easier it is for them to assimilate into the new family, because the socialisation process of that child into the family of origin is less entrenched. The older child, as described by a respondent, has more difficulty in accepting the norms, values and mores of the new family because the older child already has been socialised into different patterns of living and may not be able to fulfil the aspirations required or desired by the new family.

I was told of children 'pulling away' from their family of origin as they shared new family influences and experiences with the foster family. This could mean that the children's norms and values become more like the foster placements as they draw away from their birth family. One of my respondent felt that adoption was better than fostering: 'Otherwise children are drifting between two cultures.'

> What should a substitute care system be trying to provide
> for those children whose parents are unable or unfit to look
> after them? There can surely be no question of attempting
> to reproduce the circumstances in which they were previously
> living or what would be the point of providing care in the first
> place?

Jackson & Martin (1998:48)

We should not reproduce the home of origin but, if the foster placement is close to the social and cultural norms of the birth family, then the chances of culture and class conflicts are lessened, for, as one other respondent identified, her foster child's life expectations had grown culturally further away from the birth parents' values, and she pointed out that this had its problems when visiting the natural mother. The fostered children of yet another respondent had become abusive and angry, and claimed abuse by the foster father when they were returned home to their birth parents. These children were older and had supposedly enjoyed a very nurturing and stimulating environment in the foster placement. They had

made excellent progress in school, but after being removed from the foster placement the children had very quickly reverted back to the cultural patterns of the birth family and had then become hostile and critical towards the foster placement. The carers were later told by social workers that the progress made by the children in school had now been undermined. It was interesting that three respondents identified what they considered to be a 'culture clash' between the birth family and the foster family.

Jackson and Martin (1998) found the powerful influence of birth parents *stretched across time, distance and long separation*. They found a distinct relationship between the encouragement birth families gave to education and the attitudes of the child towards education, and described how children continue to want their parents to be proud of them even when they are separated. Perhaps this strong influence should be harnessed more? Given this powerful evidence, it is therefore surprising that no major research study places any responsibility on the birth parents to promote their children's educational interests.

> The higher their level of education, the better they [the children]
> are able to understand their parents' difficulties and retain a degree of
> affection for them whatever their shortcomings. Enabling children
> to remain in contact with their birth parents does not mean confining
> them to un-stimulating environments or limiting their
> educational chances.
>
> Jackson & Martin (1998:54).

Should not the onus be on the parents understanding the difficulties of their children, because it will seriously affect the educational chances of their children if the interactions between them are not positive? It would appear, however, that the more aware a child is of his or her family circumstances, the more adaptive the child is to settling in a family that is socially and culturally different from their own. Two respondents claimed this to be true in relation to their own bright fostered children. It could be these children have a greater insight into their own family circumstances, and some may actually see their situation improved by being with a family that has a different set of aspirations and standards, with opportunities given to them they might not otherwise have had. A recommendation would be to encourage birth parents to support and take a keen interest in their children's educational progress.

To this day there are natural parents who check
their children in and out of care like a piece
of left luggage.

Kenny: The Mail on Sunday (Oct 20:2000:16)

Another recommendation, ideally, would be to make sure the child's known social conditioning is also as close as possible to that of the foster placement, especially if there is to be contact with the birth family and we are to look towards the foster placement for developing literacy and raising achievement. This should now be happening under the Choice Protects initiative, where foster carers are more closely matched to the background of the Looked After child.

Bebbington and Miles (1990:22) identify that recruitment from a restricted cross section of society will hamper efforts to increase the supply of foster placements. If, however, carers are recruited from a social grouping that is culturally and socially different from the social grouping of the Looked After child, may this account for the long term decline of educational progress of these children even though there may be short term gains at the beginning of the placement period? This has implications for the recruitment of foster carers.

Another recommendation would be to develop this area of research in order to establish whether social class and cultural differences between the child and the foster placements could indeed be a causal factor in underachievement. This would be highly significant in furthering our understanding of the factors that contribute to underachievement and to developing literacy in the foster placement in particular. The foster family may not be the ideal setting after all, especially if the foster family has different *ways of learning* from those experienced by the Looked After child in his or her own birth family. My own research threw up this contradiction.

There is now accumulating evidence that socialisation processes also have an impact on the transition between primary and secondary schooling, showing that there is a decline in progress through the secondary school system for some children. Pollit (2001) argues that the effect of the transition from primary school to secondary school is always greatest for the lower ability pupil, and asserts that the decline in progress may be a sign of pupils being required to tackle the challenges of using language in different ways. Pollitt goes on to reveal

222

that the less able child has difficulty when dealing with whole texts. He suggests the transition between schools may just be too much for some children and, because of the increased demands placed on them, less able pupils have difficulty grasping these new but basic concepts of secondary school literacy.

Frater (2002) states that some pupils never fully recover from this setback and identifies there is little improvement in the years between 11 and 14. National Curriculum test results show that some pupils actually go backwards in their first year at secondary school. Interestingly, Frater reasons that the decline rests on the move from the single classroom and one teacher of the primary school, to the much larger secondary school where children have to deal with many teachers. Problems with adolescence and puberty are also cited, and that schools reflect a middle class culture, but there is nothing to indicate how the different learning styles may impact on learning in school that may be due to different socialisation processes.

Other researchers: (Osborne & St Clair 1987; The Children Act Report 1995-99; A. Heath *et al.*1989; OFSTED/SSI Report 1995 and Aldgate 1990) have all claimed that as Looked After children get older their educational progress deteriorates; yet it appears this is also true for a good many other children too. Could the educational decline in middle childhood of disadvantaged children, as I have described, be because the literacy of the school is not their known literacy, and because their socialisation process (and therefore social class background) has made them learn in ways that are counter to the ways of the school, when we can see that provision in schools may be based on a narrow conception of literacy development, and may actually be a deficit model of literacy development for Looked After children?

> Apparently secure, long term foster placements often seem
> to falter when children move into the more important and
> demanding atmosphere of a secondary school.

> Jackson (1988:7)

Barriers to changing the role and perception of the foster carer

There are differing perceptions of how carers are perceived and how they see themselves, and different again are their individual responses towards each other. Carers are not a

223

cohesive force and are sometimes highly critical of one another. Carers do not feel a sense of camaraderie or kindred spirit amongst their own ranks. Having mainstream and specialist fostering schemes can cause division, resentment and hostility. Solid networks of support cannot be built up if all carers are not treated as equal professionals and have respect for each other. It is not acceptable that some carers are hostile towards each other because some have undergone different trainings, even when those foster carers who do object are not prepared to undergo the training themselves.

I identified earlier that there appears to be two fostering services and two main types of carer: those who saw themselves on an equal footing with other fostering personnel and who saw their role of carer as offering a full service, including offering knowledge based learning opportunities; and those carers who only saw their job as subordinate to other co-workers and who were only able or willing to teach life skills and help with homework. This second group saw any other educational role as strictly the domain of the school. The specifications of the fostering 'job' should apply to all carers, and all carers should fulfil the same job specification criteria. If carers are expected to keep records, write reports, liaise with schools – and play a central role in supporting education in the home – then all carers must do these tasks. Hill (2000) suggests that foster carers need to be closely involved at every level of service delivery as they are likely to be crucial agents of change in the child.

Confidence inhibits many carers from seeing themselves in a different light, and a further complication arises from this that has emerged from my research: to develop literacy in the foster placement for the Looked After child means to develop the literacy of the carer too. Charnley and Jones (1979) recognise 'the pervasiveness of confidence as a criterion for success,' and argue that 'confidence is the bedrock of all achievement. The greater the confidence the more likely the students (and foster carers) would make greater progress.' They go on to describe how, without sufficient confidence, individuals limit their educational progress. Confidence issues restrict carers from having a positive self-image as potential educators. I have shown it is not necessary to be highly educated, but only to have the enthusiasm and commitment to make a difference in the educational lives of fostered children. Even though carers may be lacking the level of education themselves, it is up to training providers to work on the self esteem and confidence of the carer for believing they are more than a 'minder or carer' of Looked After children.

Other concerns have been the resistance of carers to change and modernise. One respondent argued, 'You couldn't teach an old dog new tricks overnight or change perception. New thinking is gradual, but training will help quicken up the process.' Another reinforced this view by saying, 'Older carers are set in their ways.' However, another respondent, who was middle-aged and did not have any qualifications, went to every training opportunity and was enthusiastic and keen to support her fostered child. 'Knowledge is power,' she said.

The carers' own personal educational journey is therefore very influential in how they perceive their role and how literacy is developed in the foster placement. Protests such as, 'I'm not clever enough,' or, 'I am not educated,' echo Griffiths' (1999) argument that carers can feel ill equipped to promote educational opportunities. One respondent said, 'Not all carers encourage learning.' Although there is much that is happening in the foster placement, there is still much to do. Fortunately, it is only with the fostering organisation that carers appear to lack confidence and not in their day-to-day interaction with the children, although this has now to be improved.

Emotional literacy

> We all must continually learn to unlearn
> much that we have learned, and learn to
> learn much that we have not been taught.

<div align="right">R.D Laing (1976:46)</div>

Social conditioning therefore determines the ways we learn and develops the style in which we learn. This has huge implications for the way literacy is developed in the foster placement for both the fostered child *and* the carer. The child already comes with a learning style that has been determined by his family of origin and he will now learn according to it. If, as I have identified, a child is in a placement that is unlike his family of origin then we need to consider the healthy ways literacy development can now be promoted in the foster home.

First there is a need to value both emotional learning and cognitive learning, because emotions play a very large part in how we learn and in the development of literacy in foster placement. In recent times this aspect of learning has become overlooked. Many Looked After children can recover intellectually, but many never recover fully or reach this stage of

'readiness' to learn how to learn effectively. They may be intellectually competent but emotionally underdeveloped and both must be given the same currency. The emotional problems of Looked After children should not take a back seat now that cognitive prowess is the current emphasis. Jackson (1988:335) recognises the impact of separation and the damaging consequences of it, and shows how this would affect the potential to learn effectively:

> even a short stay in an assessment centre can be extremely
> damaging. As so many of the children have been so damaged
> and disturbed by their previous experiences, that they are
> constantly liable to take offence and react violently
> at some unthinking remark by a teacher or another child.

This quote identifies the precariousness of the child's emotional world. Native ability cannot blossom if there are emotional learning barriers. The foster home can provide a safe haven that allows the child a chance to rest in an environment that is non-threatening and safe, and where s/he can learn to learn and fulfil potential that has been stifled.

So how do we acquire literacy in the first place? I have identified how influential socialisation processes are, but to develop my discussion further is to look briefly at literacy theory. Literacy theory rests on three major models of literacy development. Literacy is acquired and so it must be learnt. The first model – the behaviourist perspective - assumes that learning occurs when associations are made between observable events and objects, such as the relationship between language and print. This model rests on the stimulus-response-behaviour perspective that says behaviour and change results from the impact of the stimulus on the individual. It should include graded steps, moving along a sequential pathway through repetition and consolidation of the previous step, and building on the known, active learning (Sunderland 1992).

The meaning based literacy model identifies that learning occurs through a thorough understanding of the learning material, so that it is not just a mechanical act but recognition of the meanings that have been assigned to the learning material (Meek 1982). If the meanings assigned to learning material are the wrong ones, because the material has not been fully understood, then this too will make acquiring literacy harder.

The social perspective literacy model emphasises the importance of adult-child interaction in creating an enthusiastic learning climate. Many authors have identified the importance of significant adult interest in literacy learning and literacy success, and this has already been adequately explored in this thesis.

If we apply these models to the ways we learn, we will see that positive learning change occurs through a reconstruction of old knowledge building on the new with material that is healthily processed. To learn in ways that are healthy means to learn about our world mainly through three learning taxonomies: cognitive, affective and psychomotor, all of which work towards creating a 'learning climate.' (Bloom 1964; Bruner 1956). The cognitive domain is the 'to know' domain and deals with thinking skills, facts, relationships, problem solving, memory, etc, moving with development to a higher order of thinking, of predicting, inferring, deducing and the ability to think in abstract ways. This occurs by change in the development of thinking from surface processing in the concrete, literal form to a higher order, abstract way, where a more elaborate, conceptual form of thinking is required (Marton (1976). How successful we are at grasping new ideas and concepts will depend on how effectively we can process information and how we interpret our experiences. This domain is the dominant paradigm of the school and the predominant one described by Cohen (1968) and S.B Heath (1982), who has shown it to be antithetical to the learning style of disadvantaged children.

The affective domain brings in the emotional [affective] aspect of learning and is the one that appears to be the most important learning channel for children who have had their learning breached. The affective learning domain concerns itself with the emotional content of what we bring to the learning act, responding to the internal feelings that the subject matter provokes along with the attitudes and values that the learner holds, both of which have been internalised by previous encounters with material.

The last learning paradigm is the psychomotor domain and this is skill based: a practical application to the learning task, the 'hands on' learning approach - procedural knowledge Eynsenk and Keane (1996). It is concerned with practice, recall, rehearsal and gives feedback from the task because all the modalities are used in a multi-sensory learning experience. This domain has the principle that if you don't use it you lose it. This active learning is described by Topping and Wolfendale (1985), Neuman (2000) and Wade and

Moore (1996) and has been shown to improve literacy outcomes in the home. It is the 'how does it work, how do I make it work' knowledge. With repeated practice comes growing independence and autonomy from the simple, stimulus response learning to the learning of more complex skills and tasks.

Every child who has come into care has experienced separation and fragmentation of attachment. They have suffered loss of family membership and their identity has been threatened. Stein (1994) recognised the assault on personal identity that comes from living in multiple placements, resulting in a low level of achievement. Trauma causes inhibition in learning and new knowledge cannot be fully internalised and consolidated if it is built on unhealthy prior knowledge. If hurtful impressions accompany the learning, a learning barrier is formed. If subsequent learning experiences are negative and arouse anxiety, then a behavioural response (a physiological response) is triggered that may colour all future learning encounters, and learning new skills may take longer because negative schemata have been formed. If new learning is not within a safe environment, then learning and mastery is not achieved and it will be all the harder to change the negative attitude towards formal learning and acquire literacy competence effortlessly. The child learns his first hurtful lesson and the capacity to learn has been challenged.

> The early learning of one skill may have effects not only on the later performance of that skill but also on the later learning of other skills. The relationship between early and later learning is one of the most significant aspects of the development of learning capacity.

Borg & Seebourne (1976:91)

Children who experience adversity in their lives may find learning difficult because they have been subjected to a number of risk factors that has affected the development of their IQ. Sameroff et al. (1993) identify that IQ is affected if there is an accumulation of risk factors. It is not the one-off traumatic event, but the build up of multiple risk factors that affect learning function. There is a strong relationship between multiple risk factors and a lowering of IQ. A significant finding from the Sameroff study was that lack of parent interaction and interest carried a greater risk factor variable at four years old than it did at thirteen years, showing again the influence of the home. Loss of confidence and learning inhibition can

228

result, because efforts are no longer directed towards the fulfilment of external goals but, as Laing (1976) identifies, in preserving the child's existence.

In the early stages of a school career children work from the concrete level of understanding, but as they progress through the system more elaborate, higher order thinking is required (Piaget 1963; Gagne 1972 and Bloom 1964). A child may continue to think at the literal level of understanding - at the surface level with a subsequent rote learning style - because a deep approach to learning has been inhibited by emotional factors, by limitations in skill and by lack of appropriate experiences (Marton 1976). Gilligan (2000: 37), in his research into exploring protective factors that increase resilience, found:

> although the qualities of the child are important in
> understanding resilience, so also are the experiences
> that the child encounters and how s/he processes those
> experiences.

An emotionally hurt child can remain at the concrete level of understanding because they simply find it too difficult going from the specific to the general, and from the simple to the complex (Ausubel *et al.* 1968). Fransson (1997) identifies that anxiety produces a shallow approach to learning, producing this surface level, mechanical rote type of learning - and many Looked After children are anxious. 'Worry and self-evaluation over performance can impair performance' (Eynsenk 1979). This can fix them into a learning pattern that causes a decided preference for a rote type of mechanical learning

> Interest and anxiety affects student's approach to learning.
> Students who felt the situation to be threatening, whether that
> was intended or not, were more likely to adopt a surface
> approach. This mechanical, rote learning approach was also
> related to lack of interest.

Entwistle (1997:82)

It could be said that many Looked After children are stuck at this surface level of information processing. This would also fit in with what Jensen claims. Jensen (1970) asserts that cognitive development rests on environmental, educational experiences and the social class of an individual, again suggesting as others do, that social class patterning determines our learning style. Jensen distinguishes between level one and level two processing: level

one processing concerned with associative learning, and level two with more emphasis on analytical reasoning and abstraction. He claims that level one processing is the level (or stage) most working class children work at. Burns (1982); Cohen (1968) and S.B Heath (1982), all claim that children from impoverished, working class backgrounds are unable to think in a deep, abstract way. The pre-requisites for successful literacy development and higher order thinking, therefore, seem to be the transference of thinking from the concrete level to the ability to abstract and acquire a deeper level understanding, and this can only be achieved when there is learning stability.

If this is the case that some disadvantaged children are at the concrete level of understanding, how are they expected to work at the more advanced, analytical level that is required of them at secondary school stage? It is reasonable to presume that progress may not be made and may account for the 'lost years' syndrome - the decline in progress in the middle years of schooling. It is now that the child could experience cognitive dissonance, because there is an imbalance between his levels of understanding and processing of material with the expectations placed upon him or her in the school (Vygotsky 1984; Piaget 1968). Borg & Seebourne (1976:237) suggests that 'developing an ability to learn should be the primary and explicit objective of education,' and we should worry less about these young people gaining a GCSE until learning stability is in place.

> Individuals integrate and extend their knowledge in an
> effort to maintain viability. Viability of knowledge is defined
> as a 'fit' between existing internal organisation of
> individual's knowledge and their ongoing interaction with
> the world.

>   Billet (1998:22)

It was heart-warming to see the revised Curriculum 2000 addressing some of these issues. The new curriculum ensures that key thinking skills are being promoted: skills that require reasoning, enquiry, evaluation, creativity, and information processing. If these skills are subsumed within the teaching methods of the primary school, then children will develop broader and deeper thinking. If left until the secondary school sector, it may be too late and many may still continue to underachieve. Cohen (1969) and S.B Heath (1989) have both argued that the socialisation processes of disadvantaged children have a direct affect on the ability to abstract information. Cohen (1969) argues that if analytical skills are

underdeveloped, then those who develop a different cognitive style could be expected not only to be poor achievers early in their school experience but also to grow worse, comparatively, as they move to higher grade levels. Children's learning potential and capacity to learn develops and matures over time. It can take years for that to occur, especially if a child has been abused and neglected.

> The traumas of being taken into care may have
> depressed their attainment and it may take some
> considerable time before children recover.

A. Heath *et al.* (1989:242)

Such children can seem younger than their chronological age, and behave and act in ways that are much younger, yet they are expected to compete with their peers in national tests. Many are simply not ready to learn at a particular time because the curriculum dictates he or she must. Maturation can take longer in a child who has lived through adversity (Kalat 1995). Immaturity of neural connections leads to developmental lag and late maturity, which is why research has shown educational delay in these children. This is because certain skills are not yet learnt. Jackson (1998) argues that it is 'essential' to know exactly how children's reading scores compare with their chronological age, but I disagree. These children cannot be 'standardised' and compared with children in the general population, because their starting point and rate of progress is usually lower and slower than for children of the same age. Promoting educational initiatives within the school that focuses exclusively on the achievements of Looked After children may, therefore, only serve to compound any learning problems, because they may not be able to compete on an equal footing with their peers. Jackson (1987) has been critical of the importance placed on the emotions in education and argues that this shifts the emphasis away from education: thus undermining the therapeutic potential of learning for enhancing self esteem and as a means of rising above disadvantage. Education is, of course, a means of rising above disadvantage but, if emotional difficulties are not taken into account, cognition will not flourish. The current emphasis on cognitive objectivity focuses on judging a child's capability by external, tangible, concrete 'evidence' and not by a child's own individual baseline of learning.

Jackson continues to argue in a study of high achievers that belief in ability may be independent of the level of self-esteem a learner has, and she is right in this respect, but it is

useless to have a belief in one's own abilities without the courage to surge forward and fulfil those beliefs because of low self esteem. My own results showed this is true of carers who had the belief they were able to support education in the home, but did not have the confidence to think they could provide anything more than just teaching basic and life skills. Jackson asserts that it is a mistake to equate lack of intellectual ability with low self-esteem, but then goes on to say that she recognises and understands that some children can be too preoccupied with personal problems to be able to concentrate on schoolwork. Of course we want to raise the educational achievement of these children and that should be our end goal, but it must be done in such a way that it is actually empowering them to take responsibility for their own learning outcomes. It must be done in a climate that is conducive to effective learning. If a child is insecure, his efforts to learn will be harder, and his view of the world (and his motivations to learn) will:

> be correspondingly different from that of the individual whose
> sense of self is securely established in its health and validity…

> Borg & Seebourne (1976:90)

When a child is in an emotional flux, to expect them to concentrate on anything other than the 'self' is to expect too much at first. Any educational 'commands' must be limited, especially when earlier commands may have accounted for educational failure. To maximise the learning potential, new learning material has to have a familiar feel. 'Literacy of the known' is the most effective way to learn literacy skills, building up a knowledge base with resources a Looked After child can relate to, and this is why suitable books and specialist reference books are so essential. If the basic concepts of literacy have not been grounded in the foundation stages of learning, through appropriate learning opportunities in the home and with familiar materials, then learning new material in the school must rest on shaky ground, and gaining literacy independence will be all the harder to achieve because the sub skills are absent.

> Specifically deficient cognitive strategies and inadequate
> knowledge in certain domains may result from learning-
> disabled individual's inability to selectively encode, compare
> and combine information or automatise information.

> Kolligan & Sternberg (1987:12)

In the early stages of reading and to gain reading confidence, the type of reading book can really matter. Feeling comfortable about books is paramount for reading skills to be learnt in ways that have meaning and purpose, and which reflect the life experienced by a child. Research shows how books that recount familiar experiences to children offer them an avenue in which to understand their world. Learning that is related to a purpose generates more effective literacy growth. The National Health Service can fund 'Books for Baby' schemes for all sectors of society, but Looked After children are not given books to help them make sense of their unique experiences. Through books and materials that make sense of the complexities of their lives and their experiences, it may be possible for Looked After children to translate those experiences into more manageable terms. Bower (1979) found in his study that reading material relating closely to the reader's experience, made it easier to read and less stressful.

> If you describe an interesting psychological phenomena
> to students their frequent reaction is to check it against their
> own experiences

Bower *et al.* (1979:420)

Books that hold attention and are closely related to a child's experience, to the realities of the child, can allow them to go into 'flights of fancy' or to create 'castles in the sky.' If they are scared of what is happening to them and unable to articulate their experiences, other than acting them out in their behaviour, appropriate books and materials may make the incomprehensible comprehensible, especially if those facilitating the process are supported by appropriate training. Getting lost in a book can fire the imagination of a child, enabling it to create a fantasy where he or she can be anyone they want to be, to be bigger, or feel better. Fantasy can help a child grasp ideas that are frightening and make them manageable. In a world where adults make most of the decisions, where movement between adults is commonplace and where relationships and trust are constantly being broken, getting lost in reading can help to dissolve anxiety and uncertainty.

Learning is enhanced when the association between content and mood is congruent and can elicit a change in reading interest. Bower (1981) asserts that emotionally toned information is learned best when there is correspondence between the affective value and the learner's current mood state. Neuman (2000) suggests that the physical proximity of books –

especially attractive, high quality books within young children's sight lines – seemed to have a coercive effect. In any intervention (or investigation) that concerns itself with exploring factors that promote achievement, the relationship between learner and learning material needs to be addressed.

As a child gets older and tastes change, books may no longer provide this safe escape from the realities of life, and comics may become more favoured as my own research high-lighted. Comics have simple plots, lots of adventure, and the accent is more on action. There may even be a move away from paper forms of literacy as new forms of communication and technology evolve through the use of machines, such as the mobile phone to communicate via the text message. But for now, we need to make bookworms of all our Looked After children with every carer pro-active in making sure all of them have regular, enjoyable reading experiences.

The school requires children to read a range of reading material: fiction, non-fiction and reference books, especially in the secondary school sector. There may actually be too many different genres to engage with if basic literacy skills are not solid. Children who are in a constant state of change need a fundamental literacy to use as a springboard to incorporate and encompass the many shades of literacy. Literacy must be a personal tool as well as a social one. Adjustments to new communities (and foster placements) will be easier if there is a sound literacy base. Different social practices (within placements) construct different kinds of knowledge. A child needs to be equipped to modify his or her literacy practices and competence according to the specific literacy demands of each new placement and school.

Now we have another dilemma. If the literacy of the school is different from the literacy of the home, and the known literacy of the fostered child is different from the foster placement, then should we not somehow develop in these children a 'basic literacy' that can be translated to meet the demands of each unique literacy encounter, so enabling these children to 'fit' in with any event or discourse – or even family? Should we not be laying foundation stones in the foster placement from which all these demands can be met? Should we not be providing these children with discrete literacy skills, in order to meet their own unique literacy needs? If the foster placement is close to the social and cultural norms of the birth family, then the chances of learning are optimised. Carers from this social grouping would be capable of reaching a high degree of skill for promoting literacy in the home given the

appropriate training, and given the appropriate type of learning material most suited to this group of learners. They would need to develop and acquire the higher order skills needed to help their foster children. The middle-class carer would acquire skills needed to help children progress by starting with the type of learning that best suits the child's previous learning, and then building on that. Or it would mean transmitting a discrete set of skills that is learnt irrespective of the literacy or social context of the foster placement.

Because the literacy career of Looked After children has been breached in some way, there might need to be a return to direct instruction in the first stages of literacy 'rehabilitation.' It may be necessary to arrange intensive one-to-one help over an extended period, not to enable them to catch up with their peers for external validation, but to equip them with the tools of literacy to give them personal autonomy and learning independence. This is where vocational education may be more appropriate for some children than an academic emphasis. For these children, who can be quite adept at practical skills but do not have the aptitude for more knowledge-based work, this would be the psychomotor learning model.

It may be that the Looked After children do have to learn literacy competence in a mechanical way, not in any relevant purposeful contextual way because of their constantly changing childhood, but in isolation away from any other literacy-learning framework The current emphasis is on meaning before mechanics and of literacy being socially acquired, yet it may actually be necessary to learn mechanically first, a return to the 'drill and grill' type of learning for hurt children in order for them to learn successfully in the future. What counts as literacy for the school is the one that displays the school's version of it, and what counts as literacy in the foster home is the home version, but what counts as literacy for the Looked After child may be very different and require different methods of acquiring it. Different contexts require different negotiation, and each literacy encounter will be interpreted differently by the prior experience a child has.

Promoting literacy in the foster placement
The word 'specialist' is already used in foster care to define those carers who look after very difficult children and young people with special needs. Treatment foster care is also being evaluated as a care facility that provides a more therapeutic environment for our most challenging children. Could this new development be the new foster carer service of the future? It is possible we need to recruit more exclusively in exactly the opposite way to the

Bebbington and Miles proposals (who want foster carers to be recruited from a broader range of people), so making all carers 'specialists'.

In line with emerging research (Barry, 2001) that shows <u>residential care</u> to be the preferred choice for many secondary school-age children in care, small residential homes may be a more appropriate way to accommodate older Looked After children to promote their literacy development, and perhaps for younger children too. These homes would place less emotional pressure on the child than a 'normal' home exerts. In ordinary foster placements a child is expected to conform to the behavioural norms and values of a family the child has not grown up with. 'Special' homes could provide the children with a 'wrap around' service in the same way other similar establishments do: care, education, health needs, therapy and leisure pursuits being provided all under one roof. If emotional demands are lessened, there would be less chance of breakdown if conflict arises, allowing a degree of detachment for the child that does not affect the ability to nurture.

There has to be a service where the emotional investment from both child and foster parent alike is not so great, but where there should be space for the foster relationship to develop without the pressure of competing priorities within a 'normal' family. For example, many in my sample had natural children living at home, and research has shown that the nearer a foster children is in age to a natural born child, the greater the risk of placement breakdown. Kelly (2000) and Berridge and Cleaver (1987), all identify the frequency of foster placement breakdown when there are natural children in the home and where the fostered child was near to the age of the natural child. This aspect of the foster placement can further complicate the development of literacy. This would mean recruiting carers who had no natural children living at home. Specialised homes can devote all their energies to these children without the problems that natural children can complicate.

'Special' couples who are educationally 'aware', educationally 'orientated', and educationally 'trained', with less emphasis on the school, could provide a registered home that is able to deliver the goods in the same way as accredited childminders are able to provide: not only a home-based service for children but education too. Educational input could be integrated into the fabric of the foster home, woven into the pattern of ordinary life, everyday living, and become part of the everyday routines delivered by highly skilled, knowledgeable couples. Literacy acquisition could be treated as a kind of therapeutic

intervention in the foster placement. Walker (1998) asserts that, as part of the Looked After system, education should lead the 'therapeutic' process and not become a casualty of it: meaning that education should liberate and empower, not inhibit a child's development further. This therapeutic dimension could provide an educational input in addition to therapy, until such time as a child is able to integrate into mainstream school. Fletcher (2003) identified that the highest number of young people who were not entered for GCSEs were those who had the most changes of educational placement between Key Stages 3 and 4. These young people were less likely to be entered for exams, and this was associated with the stability of the care placement. It could be up to these 'specialists' to deliver a discrete literacy learning package that does actually prepare them for external examinations. Jackson (1988) has shown that specialist homes of this type 'attract people who are orientated towards educational successes and are confident and successful people.' Children in these homes 'progress better through school when they have knowledgeable and confident foster parents.'

Highly trained, (if not highly educated) carers are vital. It might be more appropriate, when seeking to recruit the right type of people, to provide vocational training that is suitable and desirable for meeting the individual learning styles of the carers, which means they can be highly trained without the academic knowledge-based learning that might be required of other professions. Training must involve developing the skills of the carer to help fostered children (and perhaps themselves) move from concrete ways of thinking to more expansive ways.

Recommendations for good fostering practice:
- A professional foster-caring service giving carers the same status as social workers.
- A professional mandatory training to Diploma level or above. At the time of writing a new fostering diploma was being developed as a modular, long distance learning course that is more in line with foster care practice needs than the existing NVQ. Only time will tell if this new accredited course will be successful. Berridge and Cleaver (1987) found less placement breakdown when foster carers were properly trained.
- Training should include modules on Self Esteem and Self Awareness. There should be ongoing training to update skills and knowledge, which includes ways to train

carers that are not prescriptive or school led but taught in informal workshops that are non-threatening to carer's own literacy competence. It is not uncommon for carers to train carers and this should be further developed. The specific roles of the carer would be explored and disseminated.

- The training must also include a 'Home Educator' module, which explores literacy (and number) development through the use of appropriate materials. The home would be OFSTED inspected.

- It should be a mandatory requirement for all Looked After children to join a library.

- All literacy based initiatives should now be disseminated and the findings woven into practice. All discrete projects must now become one unified framework of practice to include workshops, creative days, and literacy and number clubs. All independent research projects must register their findings on a central database in order for everyone to access, and share knowledge and good practice.

- Every foster care household should be given a computer.

- Every foster care household should be given a 'book bag', in the same way that new parents are given a 'bounty bag'.

- There should be specific training on Life Story Work that is supported by a range of books peculiar to a Looked After child's experiences, and the work should be an integral part of practice.

- There should be access to additional funding for leisure pursuits and for the development of talent in order to build resilience, and there should be the resource and monetary means to buy in other specialist services.

- Every Looked After child should have a designated education worker, not unlike the designated teacher in school, who supports the carer in the home and advises on what the carer can do in the home to promote literacy development.

- A foster placement that offers education and therapy. The support given to carers who work with excluded children could be further developed.

- There should be the establishment of an organisation or pressure group that unifies fostering care and which supports carers in their work. They should also promote their interests at governmental level. The Fostering Network needs to be more robust if it is to continue to champion the interests of Looked After children.

- Every Looked After child is referred to an educational consultancy: to plan, support and co-ordinate curriculum planning for children in their educational placements, whether at home or in the school.

- All carers should keep abreast of all new legislation and know the current situation regarding the Schools Admission Code of Practice. They must know (and my sample did not) that should they have difficulty with a school over an admission procedure, they could contact the office of the Schools Adjudicator and make a complaint, although this recognises that the adjudicator can only investigate the complaint without any jurisdiction over the actual admission procedures.

Verbatim recommendations from my respondents:
- 'Have a system of positive discrimination so that needy LAC is offered LSW's [Link Social Workers] without the usual delays and procrastinations.'

- 'Make sure every LAC has a computer in the home with suitable software (but with all the safeguards!).'

- 'In Utopia, the lower ability/disadvantaged children would have access to the most gifted and inspiring teachers so they see the limitless possibilities that education offers.'

- 'Have a mentor in the school from the word 'go', so that there is immediate accessible support.'

- 'Have a partnership spelt out between carer and school, so that the child sees a more seamless process of development in their lives.'

- Educate carers with individual development plans geared to the educational needs of their children – you need educational specialists for this, not social workers

- 'Need money.'

- 'Keep on dreaming and knocking on closed doors.'

- 'Extra resources and extra help to carers.'

- 'Better collaboration between social services and education.'

- 'Intensive boost' when child is first admitted to care. Bureaucracy is not an excuse for doing nothing.'

- 'Better educated foster carers. It is no good putting more responsibility on carers who can't meet the demands now. Make them feel more valued.'

- 'More bursaries to Independent schools/ small schools/ big schools don't meet these children's needs. Boarding schools are risky.'
- 'Have a specialist carer whose only role is to act as a pre-placement officer. Their role would be to assess the child's entire needs, including educational ones, over a two or three-week period and match child to carers who meet the child's individual needs. This would do away with crisis management.'
- 'With the right planning and matching of child to carer would keep placement breakdown to a minimum. This pre-planning would create a more stable environment to optimise his/her learning efforts.'

What can carers do?

- Provide a book-rich environment.
- Participate in a range of literacy events
- Active interaction with Looked After children on a daily basis.
- Provide an educative service that complements the work of the school and the therapeutic services.

What can the department or agencies do?

- Provide a literacy support framework for the foster placement.
- Improve resource access.
- Provide visiting education workers.
- Address the structures that prevent change.
- Harness the educative potential of prospective carers through thorough training.

What can governments do?

- Implement a systematic national literacy framework for the foster service.
- Fund literacy resources.
- Introduce a statutory training.

What can Birth Parents do?

- Encourage educational success
- Show an interest in homework and school activities.

Recommendations for future research:

What issues have emerged from this research that could be further investigated in future research designs?

- More research needs to be conducted into why children are failing in middle childhood.
- Research into local authority budgets. It would be interesting to know how much money has gone into training carers and into educational resources for Looked After children. We know it has not been spent on therapeutic services, out-of-school leisure pursuits or specialist books, or even ordinary reading books.
- Research into establishing whether social and cultural differences between foster child and foster placement could be a causal factor in underachievement.
- Conduct a comparison study to compare carers against non-foster carers to evaluate how much literacy activity is going on in ordinary homes.
- Conduct a comparison study to compare local authority carers with those from Independent agencies to evaluate the degree of literacy involvement.

Commentary

My research has shown that highly motivated and highly trained carers can provide a quasi educational service, and do provide literacy based opportunities and events in the foster placement. It has also shown that, by developing literacy in the foster placement, the literacy potential of the carers is developed as well. Carers could so easily be equipped with the tools to fully engage with literacy events in the home and become 'home educators'. I have identified in my research that carers are pro-active; they just need to hone their skills.

There has been some overlap of responses between my respondents and a merging of views in some cases, but all accept that much depends now on the carer having a heightened appreciation of literacy opportunities that can be provided in the home, and how this is

offered to the carer in a training package that provides all-round care, including education. This awareness or implementation does not require super qualifications or intensive training, but it does mean good quality training that is appropriate to meet the learning needs and styles of the carers. This aspect of home care has yet to be realized. If a carer is well trained (even if it is not a nationally accredited course) his/her perception of the educating role is heightened. An 'educated foster placement' must now be considered. It must be a place where children can take 'time out' and find new ways of learning that are positive and in accordance with their own baseline of learning, until such time as they are ready emotionally and cognitively to meet the demands of the school. This would be especially important at critical periods in a Looked After child's life, such as the period just after admittance to care. This seems one solution to underachievement.

A thorough training will give carers the additional skills and knowledge to provide a therapeutic and educational service and at the same time raise their status as a professional member of the team. If training is appropriate then the confidence and belief of the carer will not be challenged, and the expectation then placed on them will be one that they will be able to meet.

We all want Looked After children (and the carers who look after them) to be educationally successful, but we must now look at other ways to achieve and record success that is not just through the academic route. There has been undue emphasis placed on academic achievement when a vocational route might be the one best suited to Looked After children. I have identified that the psychomotor learning model is perhaps the best model for learning new skills, especially for children who have had disturbance in their lives. Placing so much focus on the academic route, instead of the vocational route, seems to me to be putting more pressure on children already under pressure.

We also have to consider how the heightened focus on accreditation can lead to intrusive bureaucracy and mounds of unnecessary paperwork, which detracts from the actual time spent and attention given to the child or young person, and we should consider how this impacts on them within the school. Although education and being educated is embedded in a social context we must take account of the prevailing conditions, and it is not always appropriate to worry about standardised assessment if other more important concerns are overarching.

There are many theoretical issues that must be addressed before bold statements are made about raising achievement and setting targets that must be reached, and before we can even begin to think about putting structures in place to develop literacy in the foster placement. We must first understand how learning occurs before we can find ways of developing it in the foster placement.

We can see there must be a combination of all three literacy models (behavioural, meaning-led and social) and the learning models (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) that are needed to create the ideal environment for literacy development: learning that is thorough, graded, practised, consolidated and recalled; with material that is suitable, has meaning and is learnt in a social situation with an interested adult. Our beliefs, values and attitudes, including personality traits, are also moulded from these experiences with our environment, and they too impact on the learning experience to create the learning environment, forming our mental representations of our world (Sunderland 1990).

It is also clear that information that is learnt must be healthily processed for effective development of literacy to take place in the foster placement (and school): learning experiences that are positive and matched to meet the learning and socialisation needs of the child – and carer. We can see the dramatic impact of this learning when the learning material has been negatively coupled with the emotional traumas many Looked After children experience.

> The traumas of being taken into care, or, other aspects of
> children's histories, may have depressed their attainment and
> it may take some considerable time before the children recover
>
> Heath *et al.* (1989:242-250)

This quotation supports my assumption that Looked After children should not be placed in positions where their abilities are going to be challenged, in the same way that some of my own respondents – the carers - did not want their own lack of literacy competence exposed until they were confident and competent to do so. If more attention was given to the ways individuals learn, or do not learn, then we would further our understanding of why some children and adults underachieve. Learning to be literate should be a liberating process.

Looked After children, especially, must not become commodities for agencies that wish to take the praise for their achievement and ignore the process of their development.

Developing literacy in the foster placement is a complex matter and not so clear-cut as it would at first appear. Learning to learn has to develop along with any other skill, and it requires practise and a motivation to succeed. Schools (and the foster placement) should be putting their energies into equipping Looked After children with vocational skills and training that would actually serve them much better in the economic world than, for example, one GCSE; training providers should be designing programmes that equip foster carers with the skills to facilitate this.

For effective learning to take place the learning environment must be healthy and this means that carers must be enthusiastic and motivated to spend quality time with their foster children, exploring a range of literacy events together and providing opportunities for more development. They are more than capable of doing this. Of course, this means that carers must be confident to facilitate this development, and resources such as Life Story Work can go some way in helping with this. Resources such as books have to be appropriate, and, as Bower (1981) and others specify, it is important to have literacy events and reading material that harmonise with the inner world of the child, and this is why books that identify with the child's own experiences are so essential for the Looked After child for making sense of their world and making it manageable. My research has identified that these types of books are not being provided although foster carers recognised their worth.

If children do not have the necessary stimulation before entering care, then it is the duty of the corporate parents to make sure children are given the opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills. This is why children in foster placement need the individualised attention of a caring adult to provide them with an environment that enables the growth of cognition, because once higher order skills are in place the learning process is simplified, reducing the need for constant memorising and the rote learning of the lower level of thinking. It will also mean less adult attention is required as the child becomes motivated and self directed. He or she will also become more equipped to deal with the harsh realities of the school. If the Looked After child does not have a literacy enriched foster placement, then development is compromised. If Looked After children continue to think in a literal way in

middle childhood, when more elaborate thought is required, then they will continue to slip behind and underachieve.

There has to be a complete restructuring of the fostering system and for the main weaknesses to be urgently addressed that prevent change. There appears to be inertia at institutional level and inaction at the level of government, although the Government has significantly improved the lives of children in care by implementing *Quality Protects* and *Choice Protects*. Even so, the needs of Looked After children continue to appear at the bottom of the pot when scarce resources are being shared out, when they should actually be at the top, especially when we consider the serious long-term outcomes if we get it wrong, as shown by substantial research evidence.

It is disconcerting that three out of ten respondents had declared children had been removed from their care solely for financial reasons. One carer had stated that LA's are quite upfront when making decisions on placement choice, saying that financial considerations are considered over and above the needs of the child. Since the inception of this research I have seen millions of pounds thrown at projects, programmes and initiatives in attempts to raise the educational aspirations of this group of children. What inhibits the development of a first class fostering service is not a lack of money, but its redirection and redistribution.

There has to be a major sea change of attitudes towards the Looked After service for children, at all levels. Our society and establishment really does have to change the way we view them and those who look after them, because it is the establishment who is ultimately responsible for the stigmatising attitude of the general public by not providing these children with a first class service. Walker (1998:10) states that:

> almost all research and analysis on the educational difficulties
> faced by children and young people points to the failure in the
> public care system which leads children towards failure.
> Yet we have behaved as if the opposite is true, as if the real
> difficulty with foster care and group care is the degree of
> disturbance these children carry with them in these provisions.

We all fail in our responsibility if we do not help children overcome their behaviour difficulties that stifle their potential to be successful learners. It is too easy to blame the child

for his or her difficulties, yet the failure lies with organisations that continue to disregard the damaging effects of instability and insecurity with their attendant impact on learning. Some of these effects could be ameliorated if the role of the carer and the potential uses of the foster placement could be reconceptualised.

> Generation after generation of the most vulnerable children
> and young people in society have been seriously let down by
> the public care system.

<div align="right">Walker (1998:10)</div>

It is a tall order to provide specialist homes, (or treatment foster homes) with specialised 'parents': carers trained to meet all the child's needs. It is achievable if the will is there, but policy makers must want it to happen too. It is up to people with the power to implement change, and they must do so if things are to change. In the long run it would be more cost effective because these children will not rely on other services in adulthood. You have to water the flowers to get the best blooms.

We have to get it right or we will continue to blight the lives of the children in our care. If need be, the classroom (of the school) must be brought to the home of the child. A Looked After child must be allowed to learn in the known and familiar (or as close to the familiar as can be) and to work on issues other than the pressure to perform within the outcomes-led school curriculum. This would be literacy development in the foster placement.

Decision makers and those who can change policy must think more laterally; they should explore all avenues that promote educational success and educational equality for all. Policy makers seem to be forever changing the goalposts, but Looked After children cannot wait. Priority is given to placement first, while the education system still thinks social services are solely responsible for corporate parenting. Corporate parenting is the responsibility of all agencies and it is therefore a duty of all to provide a quality service to these children.

There is a need for policy-makers to recognise how important the 'home' is in developing literacy for future school success, instead of focusing on the school as the panacea to raise the educational standards of this group. By doing so they may be compromising the learning stability of these children. So perhaps the only way that the educational achievement of this

group will improve and enable these children to deal successfully with the higher school curriculum is for policy makers to look more towards the foster placement, and less towards what the school can do to raise the educational standards of this group.

> Unrealistic expectations might be placed on children and/or blame
> attached to children for not working hard enough, when it
> seemed entirely possible that even to survive in mainstream school
> would be an achievement.

Schofield *et al.*, (2000:29)

CHAPTER 8
REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

A researcher feels like a dog with a bone. A dog gnaws at the bone until every last vestige has been digested. A researcher feels the same way, exploring every piece of 'evidence' in fine grain detail, dissecting and analysing every piece of data, looking for patterns and commonalities, until some certainties evolve and the research questions begin to get answered.

A research project is about starting with an original idea, and then selecting and utilising the most appropriate methodologies to generate your primary data. The researcher, using existing knowledge, draws on secondary data to build connections or to join a missing link. Unconnected concepts can be fitted together that can fill holes, allowing gaps in our understanding and knowledge to be filled even when supporting evidence has to be found from other disciplines. The original idea is thus developed within a conceptual framework, and only after data has been systematically collected, then rigorously sifted, can some findings be generated. This develops theory and contributes towards a body of knowledge in the field. It is the responsibility of the researcher to find and knit those threads together; otherwise knowledge becomes disparate 'bits' of information with no cohesion that does not extend our understanding.

Hopefully, my own research can be placed within this newly developing and emerging research field that will throw light on the responsibilities foster carers should shoulder in raising educational achievement, in addition to recognising what influences get in the way of their own development as potential 'educators'. My research will identify what is achievable if the will is there. It will also identify how educational support in the foster placement can raise the educational standards of this group and, in particular, develop literacy skills in the foster placement for both carer and the foster child.

Over the course of the last few years there have been many recommendations made by others to improve the educational chances of Looked After children, and these I have outlined in the

previous chapter. I had hoped to find recommendations that looked at the contribution carers were making to support education specifically in the home, but found none. I have also, during the course of this research, continued to read widely as part of my historical search in order to stay abreast of all new developments and to keep my feet firmly in the research arena. The major reason was to see if any new initiative addressed the specific contribution of foster carers in raising educational achievement.

Rowe (1984) identified that the main motivating force behind fostering was altruism, but the challenges of looking after children nowadays have never been greater with the expectation placed on carers to keep records, attend reviews, negotiate contacts, and much more. Developing literacy in the foster placement is one more demand, but it may be one demand too many if the carer continues to be perceived as just a minder of children.

Recommendations must be made at the completion of all research in order that policy and practice in the field can grow, develop and hopefully change things for the better - but they can only do so if they are implemented. Only then can the situation for Looked After children in foster placement improve. At the same time, it has to be recognised how difficult it is to come up with firm conclusions (or solutions) because of the heterogeneous and transient nature of the foster placement. All we can do at this stage is to learn a little more about what is happening in this unique family setting that consists of various family constructions and different fostering demands, and from this build up a body of knowledge and theory for the future.

At some point during the research period there has to be a time when the reading stops, the analysis is complete and the research journey at an end, and by this time the research can often be out of date. There may also have been a time during the research period when a researcher had to reappraise the research design and explore new ways of looking at the results; when time and distance has meant that new insights have been formed and new developments become apparent as the research matures and the researcher's thinking is broadened.

Researching any social situation is not a linear process. Human nature means that others will not see this research or its importance in the same way as the researcher conducting the research. This means that respondents will not answer your letters or return your phone calls.

It means you can go up blind alleys or come to a full stop, and perhaps even have to find another route to fulfil the research objectives. It also means the readers may interpret the findings very differently from the researcher, as each brings their own perspective and life experiences to the area of research under investigation.

Whatever the outcome of the research (and most research does not enter the public domain) new knowledge and understanding will have been developed and perhaps a new theory too. It is by fitting new knowledge into a general body of knowledge relating to specific social phenomena or conditions that we hope to learn something from it.

Choice of research area

Research into why Looked After children underachieve educationally has drawn a range of causal inferences: frequent placement change, truancy, exclusion, neglect and abuse prior to care have been shown to account for the low educational outcomes of Looked After Children. There is one thing we can be sure of: and that is, if we do not focus more on what the foster carers can do to raise achievement, then the poor outcomes for these children will continue. The research base exploring this aspect is almost non existent.

I was particularly interested in literacy development in foster placement, because it is the main living provider for Looked After children and, as everyone generally grows up in a family home, a foster home was the closest to that natural arrangement. Research shows that success in school and later academic achievement begins with positive opportunities to learn in the home with interested adults. I wanted to find out how this specific family setting was supporting Looked After children with their education and, in particular, literacy development. The carer's personal contribution to developing literacy was also the impetus for my choice of research field, and I wanted to know who these people were, what their specific contribution to the development of literacy was, and how they viewed their own literacy state. I discovered that carers do provide a range of literacy opportunities in the foster placement, and they do want to contribute towards the educational success of their Looked After children, but that many had also to develop their own literacy with appropriate training, support, respect and remuneration to enhance their service.

I have shown that much emphasis has been placed on education in the school and too little on the education in the home. I have also shown that the school could actually be an

inappropriate institution with its promotion of a literacy that could be of the wrong kind, especially when children who have been hurt need time and space to recover before they can effectively learn and achieve a measurable outcome such as a GCSE in school. As S. Heath and Cohen have identified, the 'school' literacy model may be an inappropriate model when it is shown that the 'family as educator' is the model that should be advanced and used as a springboard to translate the home literacy into school literacy. Paradoxically, it also became clear there was a possibility that the foster placement may not always be the ideal site to develop literacy anyway. Class or culture issues may impact on the ability to learn successfully in the foster placement.

Methodologies

Researching the specific contribution carers make to develop the literacy of their Looked After children, and how they perceive themselves in that role, has never been investigated before. This new field will eventually deepen and broaden our understanding of the unique contribution carers can make in raising educational achievement, but for now I had to choose methods that would suit this 'ground breaking' work.

Dependence on the methodologies employed determines whether generalised statements can be made: that a specific phenomena or social condition does or does not exist, the reasons for the conclusions, and whether further research may be needed to support the current claims. Two main methodological instruments were used to describe, interpret and measure the factors that affect literacy development and the perception carers have of their educational role. The use of these instruments - the social survey and the interview schedules - strengthens the validity of the findings because two sets of measures have been used to find out the same thing.

Employing a questionnaire design and interview schedules met, I felt, the demands of my research objectives. My choice of methodology was determined by the data I hoped to elicit. My research objectives did not warrant a comparative method or a pseudo-experimental design. I was not going to test anyone to find out his or her literacy status, even though assessment tests are now being introduced to assess the suitability of the foster carer. The social survey approach would furnish me with a collection of responses that could be summarised numerically to gain an overall picture. This simplifies phenomena in the first instance. I knew that this method reduced and limited information to a yes and no response,

but for the information that I required this instrument suited my purposes. All I wanted to do was describe common features and common qualities of this given group, and to draw out common patterns. The main purpose of the survey was to show the degree of literacy awareness and activity in the home. The results formed the basis and foundation for an informal unstructured interview schedule, which would deepen the responses and develop the themes. The use of a social survey in the first phase of the project would elicit key issues that could then be developed in an interview schedule.

The interviews added a more human dimension to my investigation, and I was able to establish such a rapport and trust with a few respondents that I felt their responses to my enquiries were genuine and truthful. The assurance of confidentiality helped. My enquiries in the interviews now focused on specific issues relating to the perception held by carers of their specific role in supporting education in the home, and how literacy could be further developed by exploring the development of the carer through appropriate training. This naturalistic approach allowed me to gain a deeper, more personal insight into the dynamics (covert and overt) of the foster placement.

Because my research area is a newly developing field, I decided to adopt a grounded theory approach. This approach has allowed me to utilise the most appropriate methodologies to generate my data as knowledge became known, and provide me with a rigorous, systematic framework to develop my data generation and finally my results.

Strengths and weaknesses of the research design
All research has its strengths and weaknesses and, during the course of the research journey, the weaknesses and strengths of the research design become apparent; also what would be changed if that time could be had over again.

If I had to choose one aspect of this research that gave me the greatest consternation, I would have to say it was accessing the carers. Accessing them was a nightmare: first getting past the gatekeepers and then directly. In order to gain a viable sample I have had to smile like a Cheshire cat, bite my tongue on occasions, grimace like an idiot, subtly persuade, gently cajole, and almost plead, especially with gatekeepers whom I found hard to convince of my honourable intentions

Another difficulty was getting my respondents to reply to my letters, even when I sent a SAE, or an email. I even had to send Christmas cards to remind them to reply to letters I had written a fortnight earlier, although in hindsight I should not have bothered my respondents at this time of the year. Even so, throughout the research I have been inhibited by lack of enthusiasm from every quarter, but notably from the local authorities or independent agencies. I have wasted much time and energy repeating requests for help, but once I was finally sitting in front of the respondents, their hospitality, their open exchange of information, and their eagerness to provide me with all the details I required, was abundant and made all my efforts worthwhile.

The sampling frame and subsequent sample for both the pilot study and the social survey were dependent on the gatekeepers and to whom they decided to give the questionnaire. In retrospect, this was a frame that could be open to selective sampling by the gatekeepers whom I had contacted to distribute my surveys. Accessing carers through agencies and social service departments meant that gatekeepers could select the carers they wanted to participate in the research. No research can claim total representation of the population under investigation, but for completing my questionnaire I hoped that gatekeepers would randomly select from their carers and avoid being selective. I gave this very serious consideration, but, after much careful scrutiny of the replies, I decided that I did have a mix of foster carer responses: even in this small sample I could see the different response patterns between individuals and that distinct comparisons could be made between carer responses. Some respondents expressed themselves eloquently, describing in great detail their contribution to literacy development and the practices that were in place in the home. Others were more restricted in language use and the questionnaires were scattered with punctuation and grammatical errors, and their contribution to literacy development less defined. It was the volunteers who agreed to be interviewed that had initially raised my doubts about my sampling frame. Five out of the original seven respondents who wished to participate in an interview were found to be professional people: teachers, social workers and one psychotherapist. I decided that these would be the very people who would be concerned about the educational chances of their charges and would want to volunteer and make a contribution to my research.

With hindsight, I could have asked in the survey if carers worked for an independent fostering agency or a local authority, and even though their responses in the questionnaire

did indicate this - most acknowledging the organisation they were registered with - I still think the question should have been asked. Again, this omission was due to my being concerned only with literacy practices. It would need to be left for future research to undertake a comparative study to explore how significant the differences were between the literacy practices of those foster carers who worked for independent fostering agencies and those who worked for local authorities. My own research did in fact identify some differences, but a much larger study would need to be conducted to generalise the findings across the fostering services.

Of course, when claiming that something is, or is not, happening in a particular social situation, sample size will significantly determine how representative the findings are in relation to the general population (and mine had been a very small sample). It should be remembered, however, that an in-depth analysis of responses from a few can give a greater insight into the true dynamics of the foster placement than a large-scale objective research programme that might merely scratch the surface. Small-scale naturalistic investigations can reveal explanations for behaviour that in a more controlled environment may be missed (Walford 1991). My conclusions, on a scale however small, may still contribute towards further development and research in the field.

Another challenge was the protection of my respondents' anonymity in such a limited sample, which is much more difficult to achieve than in a larger sample. I had to check myself constantly to ensure I was not revealing identities when describing a response or situation. If I found myself giving clues away, I would rephrase the sentence to avoid this. This is especially important if the research is to be made public.

I also had to consider the validity of conducting a telephone interview when one of my respondents decided to emigrate between the interview schedules, and the only possible way of communicating with this person before leaving the country was by phone. Many Market Research interviews are conducted over the phone, and my decision to interview my respondent in this way seemed a legitimate and valid way of conducting the second interview; I had already had a face-to-face interview with this respondent the previous year.

New lines of research emerged during the course of this research and one of the strengths of my own research design has been that other reports, published up to three years after the inception of my own, were supporting the claims I had identified. Important findings were contained within the SEU Report (2003), which reported a lack of training for foster carers in educational matters and lack of information sharing. This report also acknowledged, as I did, that carers should be made aware of their educational role, not only in relation to homework and their relationship with the school, but towards their own contribution in the home. Unfortunately, this report did not go far enough in emphasising the contribution foster carers could make in their own right, but simply suggested that foster carers support the school by helping with homework.

The construction of a questionnaire is almost like a piece of art; it has to appeal to a wide audience, but, for such a heterogeneous group as foster carers, a standard questionnaire with a standard set of questions will not apply to all foster settings, making the construction of it very difficult. I now recognise that I should have included another response box in my questionnaire design that would allow 'sometimes' to be written down in addition to a yes or a no. I had wanted to keep things as simple and as straightforward as possible, but this omission may have complicated things and may, or may not, have altered responses to specific questions. I had attempted to address this problem by including a covering letter with each questionnaire, explaining to foster carers they were only to answer questions that were relevant to their situation. It should be added that, because my focus was solely on exploring development of literacy in the foster placement, distinctions between foster placements were less significant.

Researching a sensitive and marginal group also inevitably arouses certain emotions in the researcher, especially when the researcher has personal experiences of the field under investigation. It means a researcher has to be aware of this; however, Devine and S. Heath (1999:27) asserts that researchers should not pretend to be neutral for

> regardless of the desirability of maintaining a clear distinction
> between facts and values, critics of this position have actually
> questioned whether this is actually possible to achieve, given
> that sociological research is overwhelmingly concerned with
> gaining an understanding of the operations of the value systems
> within society.

Reflection

The fostering service has somehow to address a failing system. The potential to provide a first class service is in place; now it only has to be harnessed. The skills of the carer have to be developed. It is useless to have a raft of initiatives to raise achievement if the people with the greatest influence are untrained, lack confidence and skills to fulfil the task, and answer to fostering service personnel who undermine their worth. The perception of the role of the carer must change in time as others recognise they are highly skilled professional workers, or will be, if recommendations are put in place.

Looked After children must not be expected to jump hurdles and run through hoops to fulfil the aims and objectives of external agencies, when they have so many other things to think about. If their education is not handled sensitively, it will only result in creating more disturbances. It took years for governments to sit up and make the education of public children a priority. It lagged miles behind Special Educational Needs; in fact, they were not even mentioned in Special Needs literature until the 1990's.Every project, initiative or implementation of policy needs to be integrated into the whole care package in ways that are relaxed and at a pace that children are able to take without disruption. If there is any hope for literacy being developed in the foster placement then it has to become a commonplace practice that will lessen its impact on the child (and the carer). This does not mean undermining a child's potential by depriving them of appropriate educational experiences, because we fear the demands will be too great; it is looking at the total learning needs of the child, ensuring that both his cognitive and emotional requirements have the same currency and are met in ways that are enjoyable, relaxed and informal. We must avoid looking at success as being only of the academic kind, and celebrate the success of Looked After children who are balanced and fulfilled.

Success or failure does not depend on our deficiencies, but making the best of what we have, however limited that might be. Social workers and schools still hold strong perceptions that Looked After children are unable to be successful in education; accordingly, institutional changes will therefore be very slow and public perception even slower. It is vital that carers are targeted before government tires of this area of social care reform - the needs of these children once again falling by the wayside.

Research acknowledges that for some disadvantaged children early educational intervention may be necessary to secure 'escape from disadvantage' (Aldgate *et al.* 1992). Therefore, if children can be 'caught' as soon as they enter the care system, perhaps their chances of acquiring effective literacy skills may still be possible before they are labelled as underachievers, or before they have given the label to themselves. Motivation is an evolutionary force, a drive that can quickly be stifled by inattentive adults and by feelings of insecurity and loss. Given the right tools, training and resources, carers could become this stabilising, motivating force for Looked After children.

The family, and therefore the foster family, is a unique setting where children can begin to take charge of their own life: can begin to make their own decisions and be provided with literacy opportunities for them to become autonomous and independent learners. If the foster home is to remain the main, preferred living arrangement for Looked after children, then it is up to governments to ensure that this home setting is given the very best opportunities to be a success. This is not happening despite all the rhetoric to the contrary.

If carers care for the physical needs of a child, then they must also care for the emotional and intellectual needs. In relation to the disadvantaged child, what inhibits the development of literacy in the foster placement needs to be more fully understood by all. Carers, especially, need to learn how to promote learning opportunities and develop literacy in the home, and one of the greatest inhibitors for change are the carers themselves. They have to have the confidence to believe they can be instrumental in changing things for the better.

By providing these children with carers who can provide a highly stimulating literate (and therapeutic) environment through appropriate training and remuneration, Looked After children can be given the life skills and educational skills to survive their childhood, with or without intervention by governments – or even schools. Carers are the only body of workers in childcare who are not yet strangled by red tape and by a system that is paralysed by political correctness. For the present they are the only group who can really focus on the immediate needs of these children without the endless bureaucracy of form filling, balancing books and budgets, meeting targets, and drowning under an avalanche of other paper work - now the scourge of public institutions made up of skeleton staffs and staff shortages. It is with this group of workers that our chief hope lies. Of course, as carers become more important they will become subject to the same constraints.

Literacy development has to be home-grown, but it has to be in the right home. All learning potential is in place before a child goes to school. It goes on developing, in and outside of the school gates, and we must never forget that. It takes a stable, stimulating, motivating environment with interested adults to raise the educational achievement of Looked After children, and carers have shown they are keen to do this. The formula could be as simple as that. Parental interest and interaction, coupled with a secure and stable home-life will determine what happens in the school and then in adulthood. (J. Douglas 1968). Home background predicts educational success. One must therefore ask why policy-makers are still failing to recognise this and continuing to focus on the school as the educating body that will ultimately raise educational standards.

Social class factors and parental expectations are also main determinants of educational achievement; therefore carers, the surrogate parents, are crucial in the drive to raise the educational standards of Looked After children where the foster placement is appropriately matched to the child. The foster placement has the potential to become a new educational environment, always provided the caring nature of fostering is not compromised and the emphasis of the foster placement is maintained as being a home first and an educational site second. Fear that education would take precedence to caring is why specific roles have to be made explicit in training.

Literacy, and its development in specific domains, must also be free from ideology that promotes certain conceptions of literacy. We must challenge educational orthodoxies that promote the exclusive belief that only 'school' literacy counts. If policy makers want to raise educational standards, and literacy holds that key, then you have to re-form the foster family. There must be an erosion of the thinking that conditions systems to treat carers as volunteers, and a public who continues to think of these children in terms that equate then as troublemakers and failures. There must be new ways of thinking about our most vulnerable children and those who care for them. Empowerment means taking control, and if the state, who is the corporate parent of Looked After children, makes a poor guardian and does not vigorously challenge the conditions under which these children are cared for, there is little hope.

Research demonstrates that we continue to treat children of the state with insufficient regard for their feelings and ignore the damaging effects that mistreatment brings. My fear is that,

with all these initiatives intervening on their behalf, and with the increased focus on the education of these children, Looked After children will have even greater pressure placed upon them - if only to ensure that projects look successful. Devine and S. Heath (1999:30) argues there must be no collusion to make things fit, or to serve a political end. She asserts there must not be a distortion in the process of enquiry or in the selective use of data. Research areas must not be chosen to match a specific political agenda.

You can 'learn' all the literacy in the world, read every page of every book and write on every line, but it is neither the writing on the line nor the contents between the covers of a book that is important. It is what is written between the lines: the hidden struggles these children have to make to keep up when all around there is uncertainty and insecurity. All theory aside, nobody can really know of those struggles unless they have experienced the struggles themselves. The only literacy needed at this time is a literacy that confers the strength to propel oneself forward. The implications for children's future emotional and mental health (as well as intellectual) are enormous. Any 'cognitive' intervention to raise standards will be useless if we do not look at the whole child and cease considering the literacy of the school as the only one that has validity. Unless we do this, we are merely covering cracks and playing games.

The definition of literacy, the processes and practices of literacy development, the ways it is acquired in diverse family structures and literacy settings, across and within social classes, needs to be examined more carefully. There needs to be a national strategy where literacy development is given the same status as primary health care, with the education worker having the same remits as a health visitor: that is, in addition to asking if the bowels have been opened, asking if the books have been opened too. Books and bowels should be considered equally as part of a 'health' package. There are many literacy interventions, many projects and 'initiatives' up and down the country, but what is needed is a unified national service that provides quality assured delivery and gives every child in care the same opportunities to develop literacy competence. Pockets of research projects scattered across the nation, by their very nature, can not give every child the same chances.

It has been shown that government initiatives over the last few years in raising educational achievement for all is slowly paying off, but there is still much to do. This new investigation has thrown light on some of the processes at play in the foster home that promote a literate

environment. Ideas propagate the development of theory; theory promotes policy; policy promotes practice. New knowledge raises consciousness; implementing recommendations improves performance; new theories identify which approaches to specific phenomena work.

One of the outcomes of this research indicates that bald (and bold) statements about achievement cannot be so easily achieved merely by setting a target. The process of learning has to be acknowledged and respected, but the processes of why we do not learn have to be identified also.

I realize I have merely skimmed the surface of a highly contentious area. Gaining a representative sample from an invisible group has its difficulties. I cannot claim that my findings represent the population of carers, although I cannot think there would be wide discrepancies with a larger sample. Good research rests on the assumption that it has validity and reliability and can be replicated. This can sometimes be difficult when studying human behaviour because of the changes in priorities and provision at different periods of time, when different meanings may be assigned and attached. Research findings are always open to re-negotiation; they are always provisional and open to new and other interpretations from other researchers. Explanations that are tied to a specific social condition or phenomena will change as society changes, as people change, and as the understanding of human phenomena deepens.

Researching marginal groups has accessing difficulties, especially when legislation prevents direct access, and data protection inhibits freedom of information to the researcher. It must also be acknowledged that all research involving access to children must also adhere to strict ethical principles. I was amazed there were only three agencies who, responding to my invitation to participate in my research, asked me about my status (police-checked) when I made explicit that I was going to ask for volunteers for follow-up interviews. This is a loophole that needs to be closed.

This research gives a taster of what is happening in the foster home - a lone researcher cannot do much else - but I have worked within a theoretical and ethical framework that promotes a model of home literacy development. I have offered a perspective on literacy development in the foster placement that should add to a specific body of knowledge and fit within a specific field of study.

All new knowledge, however it is generated, must have a chance to influence policy and change. As more knowledge is gained in the field, so new information about an identified social condition will cause the original knowledge to evolve, and this in turn will alter the way we perceive it. Research increases and deepens our understanding of specific phenomena. When new knowledge becomes known, it needs then to be told and acted upon. It is hoped that this thesis has succeeded in presenting a research project that has rigour and a sound theoretical base at a time when the educational achievement of Looked After children is a highly significant issue. Whatever is derived from this research will still contribute towards promoting at least a debate around the issues within this specific field of research.

We swim in a plethora of theories, ideologies and schools of thought on what are the right choices for Looked After children. If the decisions that are made are the wrong ones, we mess up a child's life. It is hoped that the research area that is chosen for study is one that can help bring about change for the better. This means new knowledge must not be confined to a dusty shelf, but widely circulated so that others can replicate the research or extend it. Some researchers draw from a wide range of sources in which to ground their own research; others pull a thread or two from a body of knowledge to explore in finer detail. Worthwhile insights can be gained, or can be criticised, but all research has a value and should be made available.

There can be no universal truths in any research outcome investigation. Research attempts to look at, and take account of, the nature of a specific everyday experience or act, and it opens up debate. This research will illuminate literacy development in the foster placement and remain ecologically valid if the meanings that have been elicited from the research are sustained by subsequent research in the field. This is why a theory is only a theory and nothing more until supported by further research in the field.

Finally, the future health of our society is in our hands. We cannot compromise. There must be an end to the structural marginalizing of these children and young people. They must be an integral part of all care provision and given the very best resources, including the very best people. There has now been a major shift in emphasis on this area of social care, and it must not be allowed to drift. 'Quality can only protect when it is understood, recognised, and then uniformly delivered.' Walker (2001:10). Any reform is only good if it sustainable, irrespective of the economic or political climate. Children get only one chance to grow up

secure and stable – they must be given the best chance. If the wrong policy decisions are made, then many will suffer at the hands of incompetent decision-makers. J.W.B. Douglas (1964) said forty-two years ago that teaching must begin in the home with interested parents. History will determine if, in the next forty years or so, any action has been taken to improve the literacy development of children in foster placement.

REFERENCES

ADSS (Association of Directors of Social Services) (2002a). *Tomorrow's Children.* Malvern: ADSS.

ADSS (Association of Directors of Social Services) (2002b), *Budgets threatened by Increased Spending on Looked After children,* http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2002/02/21/35161/Budgets+threatened+by+increa sed+spending+on+looked-after+children.html October 2003.

Alasuutari, P. (1998). *An invitation to Social Research.* California: Sage.

ALBSU (The Adult Basic Skills Agency) (1994). *Adult Basic Skills Research.* London: ALBSU

Aldgate, J. (1990). 'Foster children at school: success or failure?' *Adoption & Fostering,* 4, 14.

Aldgate, J.; and Hawley, D. (1986). *Recollections of Disruption: A Study of Foster Home Breakdown.* London: NFCA.

Aldgate, J., Colton, M., Ghate, D., and Heath, A. (1992). 'Educational attainment and stability in long-term foster care'. *Children and Society,* 6, 38-60.

Aldgate, J., Heath, A., Colton, M., and Simm, M. (1993). 'Social work and the education of children in foster care'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 17, 3, 25-35.

Andersson, G. (2001). 'The motives of foster parents, their family and work circumstances'. *British Journal of Social Work, 31,* 2,235-48.

Arun, D. (2003), *Children at Risk,* www.sourceuk.net/articles/a02787.htm September, 2003.

Archer, M. (1999). 'Careless treatment'. *Special Children,* 120, 8-9.

Auerbach Roberts, E. (1989). 'Towards a Social-Contextual Approach to Family Literacy'. *Harvard educational review,* 59, 9: 165-179.

Aull Davies, C. (2001). *Reflexive Ethnography.* London and New York: Routledge.

Ausubel, D., Novak, J., and Hanesion, H. (1968). *Educational Psychology: A cognitive view.* New York: Holt. Rinehart and Winston.

Bald, J. (1982). 'Children in care need books'. *Concern,* 44, 18-21.

Bald, J., Bean, J., and Meegan, F. (1995). *A Book of my own,* London: Who Cares? Trust.

Barnes, A. (1999), *National Literacy Association,* www.nla.org.uk/annebarnes.html August 2003.

Barnes, A. (2003), National Literacy Association: Notes 2/4/03, www.nla.org.uk/annebarnes.html October 2003.

Barry, M. (2001). *A sense of Purpose: Care leavers' views and experiences of growing up.* London: Save the Children.

Barton, D. (1995). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of Written Language.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Beard, R. (1993). *Teaching Literacy, Balancing Perspectives,* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Bebbington, A., and Miles, J. (1989). 'The background of children who enter local authority care.' *British Journal of Social Work,* 19, 5, 349-68.

Beek, M., and Scohfield, G. (2004) *Providing a Secure Base in Long-term Foster Care,* London: BAAF.

Bell, J. (1993). *Doing Your Research Project*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Bennett, T.; Martin, G., Mercer, C., and Woollacott, J. (1981). *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Berridge, D. (1997). *Foster Care: A Research Review*.   London: The Stationery Office.

Berridge, D. (2001). 'Child Care'. *Research Matters*, 11, 26-8 April-October.

Berridge, D., and Brodie, I. (1998). *Children's Homes Revisited*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Berridge, D., and Cleaver, H. (1987). *Foster Home Breakdown*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Berridge, D., and Sinclair, R. (1999). *Improving the Education of Children in Public Care through a Whole Authority Approach*. London: NCB.

Berry, J. (1975). *Daily experiences in Residential Care*, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biehal, N. (1995). *Moving on: Young People and Leaving Care Schemes*. London: HMSO.

Billet, S. (1998). 'Ontology and participation in communities of practice: A socio-cognitive view of adult development'. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 30, 1, 21-34.

Bird, V., and Akerman, R. (2005). *Every which way we can: A Literacy and Social Inclusion Position Paper*. The Basic Skills Agency and National Literacy Trust.

Blome, W. (1997). 'What happens to foster care kids: educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth'. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 14: 1, 41- 53.

Bloom, B. (1964). *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman.

Blyth, E. (2001). 'The impact of the first term of the New Labour government on social work in Britain: the interface between education policy and social work'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31, 563-78.

Blyth, E., and Milner, J. (1994). 'Exclusion from school and victim blaming'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 3, 293-306.

Borg, R., and Seeborne, A. (1976). *Psychology of Learning*. Middlesex, England: Penguin.

Borland, M., Pearson, C., Hill, M., Tisdall, K., and Bloomfield, L. (1998). *Education and Care Away from Home*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in education.

Bowe, R., and Ball, S. (1992). *Reforming Education and changing Schools*. London: Routledge.

Bower, G (1992). 'How might emotion affect learning?' in S. A. Christianson (ed.), *The handbook of emotion and memory*. Michigan, USA: Hillsdale.

Bower, G., and Gilligan, S. (1979). 'Remembering Information Related to One's Self. *Journal of research in personality*, 13, 420-432.

Bower, G., Monteiro, M., and. Gilligan, S. (1978) 'Emotional Mood as a context for Learning and Recall'. *Journal of Learning and Verbal Behaviour*, 17, 573-585.

Bower, G., Gilligan, S., and Monteiro, K. (1981).'Selectivity of Learning Caused by Affective States'. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 110, 4, 451-585.

Bowlby, J. (1982). 'Attachment and Loss: retrospect and prospect'. *American Orthopsychiat*, 52, 4.

Brady, L., Harwin, J., Pugh, G., Scott, J., and Sinclair, R. (2005). *Specialist Fostering For Young People with Challenging Behaviour: Corum Family's Fostering new Links Project*. London: Corum Family, Brunel University and National Children's Bureau.

Broad, B. (1994). *Leaving care in the 1990s – the results of a national survey.* London: Royal Philanthropic Society.

Brodie, I. (1995). *Exclusion from school.* London: NCB: Highlight series.

Brodie, I. (1999). *The Education of Children Looked After.* Bedford: University of Luton

Brodie, I., and Berridge, D. (1996). *School exclusion: research themes and issues.* Bedford: Luton University Press.

Brooks,G., Gormon, T., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., and Wilkin, A. (1996). *Family Literacy Works*, Windsor, England: NFER.

Browne, D., and Moloney, A. (2002). 'Contact irregular: a qualitative analysis of the impact visiting parents of natural parents on foster placements'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 6, 1, 35-45.

Brown, J., and Calder, P. (2000). 'Concept mapping the needs of foster parents'. *Child Welfare*, 79.6, 729-46.

Bruer, J. (1970). 'The skill of relevance and the relevance of skills'. *Saturday Review*, 66-79.

Bruner, J., and Farnham, S. (1978). *Learning disabilities.* California, USA: Fontana.

Bryman, A., and Burgess, R. (1994). *Analysing Qualitative Data.* London: Routledge.

Burns, R. (1982). *Self-Concept Development and Education.* London, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Bus, A., Marinus, M., and Ijzendoorn, V. (1995). 'Joint Book Reading Makes for success in Learning to Read: A Meta-Analysis on Intergenerational Transmission of Literacy'. *Review of Educational Research*, 65, 1, 1-21.

Cairns, B. (2004). *Fostering Attachments: Long-term outcomes in family group care*. London: BAAF.

Cairns, K. (2002). *Attachment, trauma and resilience*. London: BAAF.

Cairns, K., and Stanway, C. (2004). *Learn the Child – Helping looked after children learn: A good practice guide for social workers, carers and teachers*. London: BAAF.

Cameron, E. (1998). 'Handle with care'. *Young People Now*, 108, 12-13.

Campbell, B. (1996). 'Beginning of the end'. *Community Care*, 1146, 14.

Care Standards Bill (2000),
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmbills/105/2000105.html May 2001.

Carlen, P. (1992). 'Pindown, Truancy and the Interrogation of Discipline: A paper about Theory, Policy, Social-worker Bashing... and Hypocrisy'. *Journal of Law and society*, 19, 2, 251-270.

Carvel, J. (2003), *Health department pay price for Victoria Climbie murder*,
http://www.society.guardian.co.uk/children/story/0,1074,974963,00.html November 2003.

Charnley, A., and Jones, H. (1979). *The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy*. Cambridge: Huntingdon Pubs.87.

Charnley, A., and Withnall, A. (1989). *Developments in Basic Education*. London: ALBSU.

Children and Young People's Unit (2001). *Building a strategy for children and young people: consultation document*. London: DfES.

Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), www.hmso.gov.uk/en2000/00en35-a.html November 2001.

Children Looked After by Local Authorities, year ending 31 March 2001; England,

www.doh.gov.uk/public/cla2001.htm May 2002.

Children Looked After in England: 2001/2002, www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb022.htm January 2003.

Children's Webmag (2002), *Children may die in care crises,*
http://www.children.uk.co/news/children%20may%20die.html March 2003.

Children and Foster Care (2006). *An overview of research, outcomes and practice implications.* Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Chirban, J. (1996). *Interviewing in depth.* California USA: Sage.

Christmas, L. (1998). 'Looking after learning: making a difference for young people in care'. *Educational and Child Psychology,* 15: 4, 79-90.

Clark, L. (2003). 'Literacy hour is destroying our children's love of books', in *Daily Mail,* Wednesday, December, 2003:33.

Clements, J. (1999). *Talking Pictures: A Graphic Novel.* North Tyneside Council.

Cohen, R. (1968). 'The Relation between Socio-Conceptual Styles and Orientation to School Requirements'. *Sociology of Education,* 41, 201-220.

Cohen, R. (1969). 'Conceptual Styles, Culture, Conflict, and Nonverbal Tests of Intelligence'. *American Anthropologist,* 71, 828-855.

Cohen, L., and Manion, L. (1998). *Research Methods in Education.* London & New York: Routledge.

Collyer, F. (2002). 'Mental health services fail to address the needs of children and young people'. *Adoption & Fostering, volume* 26, 4:6 London: BAAF.

Colton, M. (1988b). 'Foster and residential care practices compared'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 1, 1, 25-42.

Colton, M. (1989a). 'Attitudes of special foster parents and residential staff'. *Children & Society*, 3, 4, 3-18.

Colton, M. (1989b). 'Care fit for children'. *Children and Society*, 3:4, 339-344.

Colton, M. (1993). 'Against All Odds'. *Community Care*, 8th April: 23.

Colton, M., and Heath, A. (1994). 'Attainment and behaviour of children in care and at home'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 317-327.

Comber, B., and Cormack, P. (1997). *Looking Beyond Skills and Processes: Literacy as Social and Cultural Practices in Classrooms*. Hertfordshire, England: United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA) now United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA).

Community Care (2002), *Budgets threatened by increased spending on looked-after children*, http://www.communitycare.co.uk/articles.asp?liarticleid=35161&liSection1D=22 September 2002.

Community Care (2004). 'Freedom to exclude'. *Community Care*, July 29th 2004.

Community Care (2004). 'Peers fail to amend Children's Bill to make schools work with agencies'. *Community Care*, July 22nd 2004.

Cope, B., and Kalantzis, M. (1999). *The Powers of Literacy*. Lewes, Sussex: Falmer Press.

Cox, T. (2000). *Combating Educational Disadvantage: meeting the needs of vulnerable children*. Lewes, Sussex: Falmer Press.

Cunningham, A. (2002). 'Even their failures can end in success', in *Daily Mail*, Thursday, August 15, 2002:17.

Curtis, P. (2001). 'A literature review comparing the outcomes of residential group care and therapeutic foster care'. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 18, 5, 377-92.

Dando, I., and Minty, B. (1987). 'What makes good foster parents?' *British Journal of Social Work* 17, 383-400.

Davie, R., Butler, N., and Goldstein, H. (1972). *From Birth to seven.* New York: Longman.

Derbyshire County Council (1999). *Read On – Write Away! Leaving Care: into reading.* Derbyshire: Buddy Reading Project.

DfEE (Department for Education and Employment (1994) *Pupils with Problems, Circular 13/94.* London: DfEE.

DFEE (Department for Education and Employment) (1998) *School Standards and Framework Act, 1998.* London: HMSO.

DfES/DoH (Department for Education and Employment & Department of Health) (2000). *Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care*, LAC (2000) 13, London: DoH.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2001). *Statistics of Education: Schools in England, 2001.* London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2002a). *Connexions at a glance.* London: DfES

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2002b). *Extending opportunities, raising standards.* London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2002a). *National Curriculum Assessments For Key Stage 3 and Key stage 2 To Key Stage 3 Value Added measures For Young People in England, 2002/03 (Final).* London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2002b). *National Curriculum Assessments And GCSE/GNVQ Attainment By Pupil Characteristics, In England, 2002 (Final)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2003a). *National Curriculum Assessments And GCSE/GNVQ Attainment By Pupil Characteristics, In England, 2003 (Provisional)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2003b), 'Outcome Indicators for Looked After children, Twelve months to 30th September 2003 – England', www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s00046/index.shtml October 2004.

DfES (Department of Education & Skills) (2003c). *The Schools Admission Code Of Practice*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2003/04a). *National Curriculum Assessments For Key Stage 3 and Key stage 2 To Key Stage 3 Value Added measures For Young People in England, 2003/04 (Revised and Final)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2003/04b). *National Curriculum Assessments For Key Stage 2 and Key stage 1 To Key Stage 2 Value Added measures For Young People in England, 2003/04 (Final)*. London: DfES

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004a). *Five Year strategy for children and learners*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2004b). *Outcome Indicators for Looked After children, Twelve months to 30 September 2004 – England*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department of Education & Skills) (2004c). *Statistics of Education: Special Educational Needs in England: January 2004 (Provisional)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department of Education and Skills) (2004d) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, www.everychildmatters.gov.uk February 2005.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills) (2004e), *Who Does What, How Social Workers and Carers Can Support the Education of Children in Care*, www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects/index February 2005.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2004-2005). *Children Looked After in England (Including adoption and care leavers): 2004-2005*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2005a). *National Curriculum Assessments of 7 Year Olds In England, 2005 (Provisional and Final)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2005a). *National Curriculum Assessments of 11 Year Olds In England, 2005 (Provisional and Final)*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2005c), *National Curriculum Assessments of 14 Year Olds In England, 2005 (Provisional)* www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR September 2005

DfES (Department for Education & Skills) (2005d). *Outcome Indicators for Looked After children, Twelve months to 30 September 2005 – England*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills). (2006a). *A Short Guide to the Education and Inspection Bill, 2006*. London: DfES.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills). (2006b). *Statistics of Education: Children Looked After by Local Authorities Year Ending 31 march 2005, Volume 1: National Tables*. London: DfES. April 2006.

DfES (Department for Education and Skills). (2006c) First Release: Outcome Indicators for Looked After children: Twelve Months To September 2005, England. http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000651/SFR16-2006texttvl.pdf April 20th 2006.

Devine, F., and Heath, S. (1999). *Sociological research methods in context*. Hampshire, England & New York: Palgrave.

De Vous, D. (1991). *Surveys in Social Research*. St Leonard's: Allen & Unwin.

Dixon, B. (2003). *Education – A Carers Handbook*. National teaching & Advisory Service.

DoH (Department of Health) (1991). *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and regulations, Vol. 4. Residential care*. HMSO, London

DoH (Department of Health) (1995). *Social Services Inspectorate and Office for Standards in Education: the Education of children who are looked after by local authorities*. OFSTED.

DoH (Department of Health) (1999a). *Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidanc1999/002001/02*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (1999b). *The government's objectives for children's social services*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000a). *The Children Act Report 1995-1999*. The Stationery Office.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000b). *The Quality Protects Programme: Transforming Children's Services 2000/01 – District Council's role, (LASSL 2000(15)*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000c) *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*. London: The Stationery Office.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000d) *Tracking Progress in Children's Services: An evaluation of local responses to the Quality Protects programme, Year 2*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000e) *The educational performance of children in need and looked after*, Quality Protects Research Briefing Paper. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2000f) 'Outcome Indicators for Looked After children ending September 2000, England', www.publications.doh.gov.uk/public/oi2000.htm April 2002.

274

DoH (Department of Health) (2001a). *The Children Act Report 2000*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2001b). *Children Looked After by Local Authorities, Year Ending 31 March 2001, England*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2001c). *Educational Qualifications of Care Leavers, Year Ending 31 March 2001: England*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2001d). *Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children, Year Ending 30 September 2000 England*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2001e). *Education Protects: Summary for foster carers*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2002a) *The Children Act Report 2001*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Heath) (2002b). *The Quality Protects Programme: Transforming Children's Services 2003-04 LAC (2002)19*. London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2002c) *The Children Act Report 2001*, London: DoH.

DoH (Department of Health) (2002d), *Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children, twelve months to 30 September 2002, England,* www.doh.gov.uk.public/oi2001.htm , December 2003.

DoH (Department of Health (2002e) *Choice Protects: Update Bulletin No 1, November 2002,* www.doh.gov.uk/choiceprotects/index.htm January 2003.

DoH (Department of Health) (2002-2003). *Modern Social Services: a commitment to the future, The 12ᵗʰ Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Social Services*. London: DoH.

.

Dometrius, N (1992). *Social Statistics Using SPSS*. New York, USA: HarperCollins.

Douglas, J.W.B. (1964). *The Home and the School: A study of the Ability and Attainment in the Primary School.* London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Douglas, J. (1985). *Creative Interviewing.* California USA: Sage.

Education Protects. (2003), *Targets and Indicators,*
www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects/index. June 2004.

Education Act (1996) www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1996/1996056.html, May 2001.

Education Act (2002) www.dfes.gov.uk/educationact2002/, March 2003.

Education Act (2004) www.dfes.gov.uk/educationact2004/ November 2005.

Education Act (2005) www.dfes.gov.uk/educationact2005/ February 2006.

Edwards, R. (1993). 'An Education in interviewing: Placing the Researcher and the Research', in C. Renzetti and R. Lee. (eds.). *Researching Sensitive Topics.* London, California USA: Sage, 18.

Elliott, A. (2002). 'The educational expectation of looked after children'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 26, 3: 58-68.

Elliott, E. (1996). *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered.* London: Paul Chapman.

Entwistle, N. (1997). *Styles of Learning and Teaching.* London: Fulton.

Entwistle, N., Hanley, M., and Ratcliffe, G. (1979). 'Approaches to learning and levels of understanding'. *British Educational Research Journal,* 5, 1, 99-114.

Essen, J. Lambert, L., and Head, J. (1976). 'School attainment of children who have been in care'. *Child Care, Health and Development,* 2, 339-351.

Evans, J. (2004). *Literacy moves on.* London: Fulton.

Eynsenk, M. (1979). 'Anxiety, Learning and Memory: A reconceptualisation'. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 13,363-85.

Eynsenk, M., and Keane, M. (1996). *Cognitive Psychology*, Psychology Press.

Fanshel, D., and Shinn, E.B. (1978). *Children in foster care: A longitudinal investigation.* Colombia Uni Press.

Farmer, E., Moyers, S., and Lipscombe, J. (2004). *Fostering Adolescents*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Fletcher, B. (1993). *Not Just a Name, the views of young people in residential and foster care.* London : WCT

Fletcher, B. (1996). *Who Cares? About education: A guide for elected members.* London: The Who Cares? Trust in collaboration with Local Government Association.

Fletcher, B. (2001). 'Education protects: putting the guidance into practice'. *Children's Residential Care Newsletter*. London: NCB.

Fletcher-Campbell, F. (1997). *The education of children who are looked after.* Windsor, England: NFER.

Fletcher-Campbell, F. (1998). 'Progress or procrastination? : The education of young people who are looked after'. *Children and Society*, 12,1, 3-11.

Fletcher-Campbell, F., and Hall, C. (1990). *Changing schools? Changing people? The Education of Children in Care.* Windsor, England: NFER.

Fletcher-Campbell, F., and Archer, T. (2003). *Achievement at Key Stage 4 of young people in public care.* Windsor, England: NFER.

Flew, A. (2000). *Education for Citizenship.* London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Fonagy, P. (1994).'The Theory and Practice of Resilience'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35, 2,231-257.

Foster Care (2003). 'Foster carers should receive more respect and support, says health minister'. *Foster Care, issue 113:5,* May- July 2003.

Foster Care (2004). 'Leaving care charities rescued'. *Foster care, 2004, issue* 115:7 Nov 2003-January 2004.

Fostering Now (2004). *Messages for foster carers.* London: DfES.

Fostering Now (2004). *Messages for professionals.* London: DfES.

Fostering Now (2004). *Messages for foster children.* London: DfES.

Fostering Now (2004). *Messages for elected members.* London: DfES.

Fostering Now (2004). *Messages for families.* London: DfES.

Fowler, F. (1990). *Survey Research Methods.* California: Sage.

Fowler, F., and Mangione, T. (1990). *Standardised Survey Interviewing.* California: Sage.

Francis, J. (1992). 'Fair play for foster carers'. *Community Care, number* 941:8.

Francis, J. (2000). 'Investing in children's futures: enhancing the educational arrangements of "Looked after" children and young people'. *Child and Family Social Work,* 5, 1, 23-33.

Fransson, A. (1977). 'On qualitative differences in learning: effects on motivation and test anxiety on process and outcome'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* 47,244-257.

Frater, G. (2002). *Bridges to Literacy.* London: BSA.

Frazer, M., Richman, J., and Galinsky, M. (1999). 'Risk, protection and resilience toward a conceptual framework for social work practice'. *Social Work Research*, 23, 131-143.

Frean, A. (2003), *Foster parent famine forces children on homes odyssey*, www.timesonline.co.uk/printFriendly/ October 2003.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* London: Penguin Books.

Freire, P., and Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* London: Roultledge.

Gagne, R. (1972). 'Domains of Learning'. *Interchange*, 3, 1-8.

Gardner, H. (1985). *The Mind's New Science.* New York, USA: Harper Collins.

Garnet, L. (1992). *Leaving Care and After.* London: NCB.

Garnet, L. (1993). *The Educational Attainments and Destinations of Young People Looked After by Humberside County Council.* Lincolnshire, Humberside Social Services.

Gilgun, J., Daly, K., and Handel, G. (1992). *Qualitative Methods in Family Research.* California, USA: Sage.

Gilligan, R. (1999). 'Enhancing the resilience of children & young people in public care by mentoring their talents and interests'. *Child and Family Social Work*, 4, 3,187-196.

Gilligan, R, (2000). 'Adversity, resilience and young people: the protective value of positive school and spare time experiences'. *Children and Society*, 14, 1, 37-47.

Gilligan, R. (2000). 'The key role of social workers in promoting the well being of children in state care'. *Children & Society*, 14, 4, 267-276.

Gilligan, R. (20001)._*Promoting Resilience: A Resource Guide on Working with Children in the Care System.* London: BAAF.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical Sensitivity.* California: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B., and Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of Grounded Theory.* Illinois: Aldine.

Goddard, J. (2000). 'The education of looked after children'. *Child and Family Social Work,* 5, 1, 79-86.

Guidance on the Education of Young People (2002), *Standards Fund for 200-2001 with respect to Children in Public Care,* www.dfes.gov.uk/incare/standards March 2003.

Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence.* London: Bloomsbury

Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional Intelligence.* London: Bloomsbury.

Goodwin, P. (2004) *Literacy through creativity.* London: Fulton.

Griffiths, C. (1999). *Breaking Their Fall,* National Literacy Association in partnership with The Who Cares? Trust. Birmingham: Questions Publishing.

Haggart, J. (2000). *Learning Legacies: A guide to family learning.* Leicester NIACE.

Haggart, J. (2001). *Walking ten feet tall: A toolkit for family learning practitioners.* Leicester NIACE.

Hammersley, M. (1990). 'What's wrong with ethnography? The myth of theoretical description'. *Sociology* 24, 4:597-615.

Hannon, P. (1995). *Literacy, Home and School.* Lewes Sussex: Falmer.

Halsey, A.H; Heath, A.F., and Ridge, J.M. (1980). *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class and Education in Modern Britain.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hardman, M., and Jones, L. (1999). 'Sharing Books with Babies: evaluation of an early literacy intervention'. *Educational Review,* 51, 3: 221-229.

Harker, R., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). *Taking care of education: An evaluation of the education of looked after children.* London: NCB.

Harker, R., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). 'More Than the Sum of it's Parts? Inter-professional Working in the Education of Looked After Children'. *Children & Society,* 18, 3:179-193.

Harris, S. (2003). '£1bn was spent putting computers in schools to help pupils become brighter and better. So what has their impact been? Virtually nil', in *Daily Mail,* Saturday, January 11, 2003:23.

Harris, S. (2003). 'Teaching must start in the home, says watchdog', in *Daily Mail,* Wednesday, February 5, 2003:39.

Harris, S. (2003). *Schools urged to teach minorities in ethnic languages,* in *Daily Mail,* Saturday, October 18, 2003:29.

Hartley-Brewer (2002). 'Future Imperfect?' *Young Minds magazine,* 60, 31-33. Sept/Oct.

Hasan, R., and Williams, G. (1996). Literacy in Society, New York: Longman.

Haydon, C. (1999). *State childcare: Looking after children?* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Heath, A., Colton. M., and Aldgate, J. (1989). 'The educational progress of children in care'. *British Journal Of Social Work,* 19, 6: 447-460.

Heath, A., Colton, M., & Aldgate, J. (1994). 'Failure to escape: A longitudinal study of foster children's educational attainments'. *British Journal of Social Work,* 24, 3,241-260.

Heath, S.B. (1982). 'What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school'. *Language in Society,* 2, 49-76.

Heptinstall, E. (2000). 'Gaining access to looked after children for research purposes: Lessons learned'. *British Journal of Social Work,* 30, 6, 867-72.

Hill, M. (1999). *Signposts in Fostering: Policy, practice and research issues.* London: BAAF.

Hirst, K. (1990) 'An evaluation of a pre-school home-teaching project'. *Educational Research,* 32, 1:33-39.

Hoinville, G., and Jowell, R. (1978). *Survey research practice.* London: Heinemann Educational.

Holman, B. (1986). 'Prevention: the Victorian legacy'. *British Journal of Social Work,* 16, 1-23.

Holstein, J., and Gurbrium, J. (1995). *The Active Interview.* California USA: Sage.

Holzman, M. (1986). 'The Social Context of Literacy'. *College English,* 48, 27-33.

Hughes, D. (2003). 'Now Clarke gives 'shamed' school chiefs another £40m', in *Daily Mail,* Saturday, May 17, 2003:31.

Hunt, R. (2000). *The educational performance of children in need and children looked after.* London: DH.

Hunter, M. (2001). *Psychotherapy with Young people in Care.* Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge group.

Illeris, K (2002). *The Three Dimensions Of Learning.* NIACE.

Integrated Children's System (2002)
www.dfes.gov.uk/integratedchildrenssystem/pilotsites/pilotstudy.shtml September 2003.

Jackson, S. (1988a). 'Residential care and education'. *Children & society,* 4, 335-350.

Jackson, S. (1988b). 'The education of children in care'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 12, 19-21.

282

Jackson, S. (1994). 'Educating Children in residential and foster care'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 3, 267-80.

Jackson, S. (2001). *Nobody Ever Told Us School Mattered*. London: BAAF.

Jackson, S. (2002). 'University Challenge'. *Community Care*, 1440, 44-45.

Jackson, S., and Martin, P. (1998). 'Surviving the care system: education and resilience'. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21, 5, 569-583.

Jackson, S., and Sachdev, D. (2001). *Better education, better futures*. Ilford, Essex: Barnardo.

Jackson, S., and Thomas, N. (2001). *What Works in Creating Stability for Looked After Children*. Ilford, Essex: Barnardo.

Jackson, S., Feinstein, 1., Levacic, R., Owen, C., Simon, A., and Brassett-Grundy, A. (2002). *The costs and benefits of educating children in care*. Cohort Studies Working Paper number 4, London, Institute of Education.

Jackson, S., Ajayi, S., and Quigley, M. (2005). *Going to university from care*. London: The Buttle Trust.

Jeffrey, D., King, A., and Leadbetter, M. (2002). *Serving children well: a new vision for children's services*. LGA.

Jensen, A. (1969). 'How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?' *Harvard Educational Review*, 39, 1:124.

Kahan, B. (1994). *Growing up in groups*. London: HMSO.

Kalat, J. (1995). *Biological Psychology*. London. New York: Brookes Cole.

Kay, N. (1966). 'A systematic approach to selecting foster parents'. Case *Conference*, 13, 2.

Kelly, G. (1995). 'Foster Parents and Long-Term Placements: Key Findings from a Northern Ireland Study'. *Children & Society*, 9, 2: 19-29.

Kelly, G., and Gilligan, R. (2000). *Issues in foster care: Policy, Practice and Research*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Kenny, A. (2000) *The Mail On Sunday*, October 20:16.

Kerry, T. (2003), *'Education failure?' Yes, thirty years with nothing learned*. www.sourceuk.net/articles/a/03489.html September 2003.

Knight, T., and Caveney, S. (1998). 'Assessment and Action Records: Will they promote Good parenting?' *British Journal of Social work*, 28, 29-43.

Kolligan, J., and Sternberg, R. (1987). 'Intelligence, Information Processing, and Specific Learning Disabilities: A Triarchic Synthesis'. *Journal Of Learning Disabilities, 20, 8-17*.

Laing, R.D. (1976). *The politics of the family*. London & New York: Penguin.

Lane, D. (1998). 'A gap in the armour'. *Children's Residential Newsletter*, 10, 8-9.

Lawton, D. (1992). *Education and Politics in the 1999's*. Lewes, Sussex: Falmer

Lea, R. (2002). *Education and training: A business blueprint for reform*. London: IoD Policy Paper.

Lindsay, M. (1997). *Learning to care; caring to learn*. London: The Centre for Residential Child Care.

Lindsay, M., and Foley, T (1999). 'Getting Them Back To School: Touchstones of Good Practice in Residential Care'. *Children & Society*, 13, 192-202.

Lister, I. (1974) *Deschooling*. England: Cambridge University Press.

Little, M. Axford, N., and Morpeth, L. (2003). 'Children's Services in the UK 1997-2003: Problems, Developments and Challenges for the Future'. *Children and Society,* 17,3,205-214.

Local Government Association (2002). *Serving children well: a new vision for children's services.* London LGA.

Longley, C. (1975). *BBC Adult Literacy Handbook.* London: BBC.

Looking after Literacy in Kent. (2004), www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/professionals.htm November 2004.

Lucey, H., and Walkerdine, V. (2000). 'Boys' underachievement', in T. Cox, (ed). *Combining Educational Disavantage: Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Children.* Lewes, Sussex: Falmer.

Luckhurst, T. (2002). 'If no one can fail at school, we are all the losers', in *The Independent,* 19 August 2002.

Macmillan, B. (1997). *Why Schoolchildren Can't Read.* London: The Institute of Economic Affairs.

Maddocks, P. (2002). *Fostering for the Future: Inspection of Foster Care.* Social Services Inspectorate: London: DoH.

Malmo, R. (1957). 'Anxiety and Behavioural Arousal'. *Psychological Review,* 64, 5:276-287.

Martin, P., and Jackson, S. (2002). 'Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers'. *Child & Family Social Work,* 7, 2:121-30.

Marton, F., and Saljo, R. (1976). 'On qualitative differences in learning: outcome and process'. *British journal of educational psychology* 46, 4-11.

Meek, M. (1982). *Learning to read.* London: The Bodley Head.

Menmuir, R. (1994). 'Involving residential social workers and foster carers in reading with young people in their care: The PRAISE reading project'. *Oxford review of education,* 20,329-338.

Mental Health Foundation (1999). *Bright Futures.* London: Mental Health Foundation.

McClelland, N. (1997). *Building A Literate Nation.* Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire: Trentham Books.

McCracken, S., and Reilly, I. (1998). 'The systematic approach to foster care assessment: a review and update'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 22, 3 16-27.

McCrosky, J., and Andersen, J. (1976). 'The Relationship between Communication Apprehension and Academic Achievement among College Students'. *Human Communications Research,* 1976, 1, 73-81.

McCurry, P. (1999). 'Championing their cause'. *Community Care,* 1263, 20.

McParlin, P. (1996). *Education of Young People Looked After: checklists for teachers, residential workers, foster parents, field social workers, independent visitors, employers.* Leeds, First Key.

Miller, A. (1992). *Breaking down the wall of silence.* London: Virago.

Ministerial Task Force on Children's Safeguards (1998). *The Government's Response to the Children's Safeguards Review (Cm 4105).* London: HMSO.

Minnis, H., and Devine, C (2001). 'The effects of foster care training on the emotional and behavioural functioning of Looked After children'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 1, 44-54.

Mittler, P. (2000). *Working Towards Inclusive Education: social contexts.* London: Fulton.

Moon, C., and Wells, G. (1979). 'The influences of home on learning to read'.

Journal of Research in Reading 2 (1) 53-62.

Moore, M., and Wade, B. (1996). 'Home Activities: The Advent of Literacy'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* 4, 2, 63-75.

Morgan, D. (1997). *Focus groups in Qualitative research.* California USA: Sage.

Morgan, R. (2005), *Being Fostered: A National Survey of the Views of Foster Children, Foster Carers, and birth Parents about Foster Care,* www.csci.org.uk February 2006.

Morgon, S. (1996). *Care about education: a joint curriculum for supporting children in public care.* London: NCB.

Moriarty, R. (2003). 'Detention Outlawed in Schools', in *Daily Express,* January 6:2.

Morris, J. (2000). *Having Someone who Cares?* London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

National Extension College (1999). *Caring for children and young people: S/NVQ – based training for foster carers and residential child care workers.* Cambridge: NEC.

National Children's Bureau (2003). *Let's Get Positive: Challenging negative images of young people in care.* London: NCB.

National Children's Homes (2005). *Close the gap for children in care.* London: NCH.

National Foster Care Association (1996). *Education: A guide for foster carers.* London: NFCA.

National Foster Care Association, (2000). *National Standards for Foster Care.* London: NFCA.

National Foster Care Association (2000). *Code of Practice.* London: NFCA.

National Literacy Association in partnership with The Who Cares? Trust (2002).

Believe in me. Birmingham: Questions Publishing.

Neuman, S. (2000). 'Books make a difference: A study of access to books for children in care'. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, 3: 286-311.

Neuman, S. (2000), *Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy for children in care*, www.yearofreading.org.uk/Research/careusares.html September 2000.

NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) (2005). *Evaluation of the out of school hours learning opportunities for children in public care*. Slough: NFER.

Nixen, S. (1997). 'Limits of support in foster care'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 27,923-30.

North Tyneside Library Service (2002). *Talking Pictures*, North Tyneside.

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) (1993). *English Key Stages 1,2,3,4.* London: HMSO.

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) (2001). *The National Literacy Strategy: the Third Year.* London: OFSTED.

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) (2002*). Raising Achievement Of Children In Public Care.* London: OFSTED

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) (2003). *The national literacy and numeracy strategies and the primary curriculum.* London: Ofsted publications centre.

O'Hare, A. (2002). 'Dumbed Down Degrees', in *Daily Mail*, August 12, 2002:16.

ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2003). *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities*. London: The Stationery Office.

Oppenheimm A.N. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement.* London: Pinter.

Osborn, A. (1990). 'Resilient children: a longitudinal study of high achieving socially disadvantaged children'. *Early Child Development and Care,* 62, 23-47.

Osborne, A., and St Claire, L. (1987). 'The ability and behaviour of children who have been in care or separated from their parents'. *Early Child Development and Care,* 28, 3, 187-354.

Padbury, P., and Frost, N. (2002). *Solving Problems in Foster Care: Key issues for young people, foster carers and social services.* London: The Children's Society.

Packman, J. Randall, J., and Jacques, N. (1986). *Who Needs Care?* Oxford: Blackwell

Parker, R., Ward, H., Jackson, S., Aldgate, J., & Wedge, P. (1991). *Looking After Children: Assessing outcomes in Child Care.* London:HMSO.

Part, D. (1993). 'Fostering as seen by carers'. *Fostering & Adoption,* 17, 1,26-31.

Pask, G. (1976). 'Conversational Techniques In The Study And Practice Of Education'. *British Journal Of Educational Psychology,* 46, 12-25.

Phillips, M. (1997). *All Must Have Prizes.* London: Little Brown and Company

Phillips, M. (2003). 'A Lesson In Lunacy. Billions spent on failed gimmicks, schools that can't afford to pay teachers, soaring truancy. Is this what Mr. Blair meant by education, education, education?' in *Daily Mail,* Wednesday, May, 28:12.

Piaget, J. (1963). *The Origins of Intelligence in Children.* New York: Norton.

Pilling, D. (1986). *Escape from Disadvantage.* London: NCB.

Pollit, A. (2001). *Research into the dip in performance in English of children entering Key Stage 3,* www.qca.org.uk/rs/rer/ks3-dipreport.asp January 2002.

Pugh, G. (1996). 'Seen but not heard: Addressing the needs of children who foster'. *Adoption and Fostering*, 20, 1, 35-41.

Prasad, R. (2003). 'Loose connections: unfair treatment of foster carers fuelling shortages', in *The Guardian*, May 14, 2003:12.

Priestley, S. (2004). 'Foster carer shortage hits critical level'. *Society. Guardian.co.uk*. Tuesady, August 24, 2004.

Renzetti, C., and Lee, R (1993). *Researching sensitive topics*. California USA: Sage.

Ritchie, C. (2005). Looked After Children: Time for Change? *British Journal of Social Work*, 35, 761-767.

Rogers, A. (1992). *Teaching Adults*. Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Rhodes, P. (1993). 'Like any other job: Paying foster carers'. *Foster Care*, 75:6-7.

Rogoff, B. (1982). 'Integrating Context and Cognitive Development'. *Advances in Developmental Psychology*, 12, 125-170.

Rowe, J. (1984). *Long Term Foster Care*. London: Batsford.

Rowe, J., and Lambert, L. (1973). *Children Who Wait*. London: Association of British Adoption Agencies (ABAA).

Rutter, M. (1985). 'Resilience in the face of adversity: Protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder'. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147,23-51.

Ryan, T., and Walker, R. (1999) *Life Story Work*. Nottingham: Russell Press.

Salmon, J., and Law, A. (1995). 'Fight To Save The Queen's English', in *The Sunday Express*, September 24:1.

Sandiford, P. (1996). *Improving educational opportunities for looked after young people*. London: NCB.

Sameroff, A., Seifer, R., Baldwin, A., and Baldwin, C. (1993). 'Stability of intelligence from pre-school to adolescence: The influence of social and risk factors'. Child *Development, 64,* 80-97.

Schofield, G., Beek, M., Sargent, K., and Thoburn, J. (2000). *Growing up in Foster Care.* London: BAAF.

Schofield, G. (2003). *Part of the family: Pathways through foster care*. London: BAAF.

Schofield, G. (2004). *providing a secure base in fostering care*. London: BAAF.

School Admissions Code of Practice (2003), http://www.dfes.uk/sacode/docs/DFES-Schools1962Admissions.pdf. October 2003.

Shah, S. (2003). *Fostering: what it is and what it means.* London: BAAF .

Shaw, C. (1998). *Remember my messages.* London: The Who Cares? Trust.

Sinclair, I. (2005). *Fostering Now: Messages from Research.* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sinclair, I., Gibbs, I., and Baker, C. (2002). *What happens to foster children?* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sinclair, I., Gibbs, I., and Wilson, K. (2004). *Why they stay and why they leave?* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sinclair, I., Wilson. K., and Gibbs, I. (2004). *Foster Carers: Why they succeed and why they fail?* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sinclair, J. (2000), *Time to get a life: Jenny Sinclair explains why she and many other foster carers are fed up with fostering,* www.http://society.guardian/story.co.uk October 2000.

Sinclair, R. (1997). *The Education of Children in Need*. London: NCB.

Sinclair, R., and Gibbs, I. (1998). *Children's Homes: A study in diversity*. Chichester: Wiley.

Skuse, T. and Evans, R. (2001). 'Directing social work attention to education: the role of Looking After materials', in S. Jackson (ed.), *Nobody Ever Told Us School Mattered*, 179-190. London: BAAF.

Smith, F. (1978). *Reading*. Cambridge: England.

Smith, R. (1985). *Learning How to Learn*. Milton Keynes, England: Open University Press.

Smith, R. (1998). *No Lessons Learnt*. London: The Children's Society.

Smith, F.; Brann, C.; Cullen, D.; and Lane, M. (2004). *Fostering Now: Current law including regulations, guidance and standards*. London BAAF

Social Exclusion Unit (1998). *Truancy and Social Exclusions*. London: HMSO.

Social Exclusion Unit (2003*) A better education: The issues* (2003), Office of The Deputy Prime Minister. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

Social Exclusion Unit (2003)._*A better education for children in care*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

Social Exclusion Unit (2003*). A better education for children in care – practice guide*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators (2001-2002), www.doh.uk/paf November 2002.

Stein, M. (1994). 'Leaving Care, education and career trajectories'.
Oxford Review of Education, 20, 3, 348-360.

Steiner, C. & Perry, P. (1997). *Achieving Emotional Literacy*. London: Bloomsbury.

Stokoe, R. (2003). *Set up to fail? Overlooking looked after children*. London: Liberal democrats.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures & Techniques*. California USA: Sage.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sunderland, P. (1992). *Cognitive Development Today*. London: Paul Chapman.

Taking care of education (2004),
www.ncb.org.uk/projects/tcoe June 2004.

Taylor, D. (1981). 'The family and the development of literacy skills and values'. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 4, 2:92-103.

Teale, W. (1981). 'Parents reading to their children: What we know and need to know'. *Language Arts*, 58, 902-911.

Teale, W. (1986). *Emergent Literacy*. Norwood, N.J.

The Basic Skills Agency. (2003). 'Raising Standards by Raising Parental Involvement'.
Basic Skills Quarterly, March: 22:10

The Children Act (1989). *Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Family Placements and volume 4: Residential Care*. London: HMSO.

The Children Act Report (2001),
www.doh.govuk/scg/childenactreport2001.htm June 2002.

The Daily Mail (2002) September 21.

The Fostering Network (2006). *Improving the educational achievements of looked-after children.* The Fostering Network, March 2006:1-8

The Observer (2003). 'Schools must have more cash', in *The Observer* May 25th, 2003.

The Quality Protects Programme (2003). *Transforming Services 2003-04, LAC(2002)19.* London: DoH.

The Telegraph (2003). 'Care children could go to private school', in *The Telegraph,* 21 January 2003:17

The Times (2003). 'Children in care may get boarding school place', in *The Times,* 13 June 2003:16.

Tizard, B. (1993) 'Early influences on literacy', in R. Beard (ed.), *Teaching Literacy: Balancing Perspectives,* 74-82.

Tooley, J. (1998). *Education Without the State,* London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Toomy, D. (1989). 'How Home-School Relations Policies Can Increase Educational Inequality', *Australian Journal of Education,* 33,3, 284-298.

Toomy, D. (1993) 'Parents hearing their children read: Rethinking the lessons of the Haringey Project'. *Educational Research,* 35, 3, 223-236.

Topping, K. (1988). *The Peer Tutoring Handbook: Promoting Co-operative Learning.* Croom-Helm.

Topping, K., and Wolfendale, S. (1985). *Parental Involvement in Children's Reading.* Kent, England: Croom- Helm.

Topping, K., and Wolfendale, S. (1995). 'The effectiveness of family literacy programmes'. *Reading,* 29, 3, 26-33.

Triseliotis, J. (1989). 'Foster care outcomes: a review of key research findings'. *Adoption & Fostering,* 13:3, 5-13.

Triseliotis, J., Borland. M., and Hill, M. (2000). *Delivering Foster Care.* London: BAAF.

Tucker, S. (2003). 'Inter-professional Education: A Curriculum Response to Work with Children and Young People'. *Children and Society,* 17, 2:137-148.

Utting, W. (1997). *People Like Us: The Report of the Review of the Safeguards for Children Living Away From Home.* London: NCB.

Vernon, J., and Sinclair, R. (1998). *Maintaining children in school: The contribution of social services departments.* London: NCB.

Voice for the child in care (2002*). Sorted and Supported.* London Voice for The Child in Care.

Voices from Care (2003), www.thefostering.net April 2003.

Wade, B., and Moore, M. (1993). *Bookstart..* London: Bookstart Trust.

Wade, B., and Moore, M. (1996). 'Home Activities: The Advent of Literacy'. *European Early Childhood Research Journal,* 4, 2, 63-76.

Walford, P. (1991). *Doing Educational Research.* Routledge: London and New York.

Walker, T. (1998). 'Educating looked after children'. *Young Minds,* 37, 10-11.

Walker, T. (2001). 'The place of education in a mixed economy of child care', in S. Jackson (ed.), *Nobody Ever Told Us School Mattered.* BAAF, 22—236.

Walker, M., Hill, M., and Triseliotis, J. (2002). *Testing the limits of Foster Care.* London: BAAF.

Wallace, W. (1998). 'Handle with care'. *Times Educational Supplement*, 4274, 29 May.

Ward, H. (1995). *Looking After Children: Research Into Practice*. London: HMSO.

Ward, H., Jones, H., Lynch, M., and Skuse, T. (2003). 'Issues concerning the health of looked after children'. *Adoption & Fostering, volume* 26, 4:8/9.

Warren, D. (1997). *Foster Care in crisis: A call to professionalize the forgotten service*. London: NFCA.

Waterhouse, S. (1997). *The organisation of fostering services*. London: NFCA.

Webster, A., Beveridge, M., and Reed, M. (1996). *Managing The Literacy Curriculum*. London & New York: Routledge.

Weisberg, H.F (1977). *An introduction to survey research and data analysis*. San Francisco: W.H Freeman.

Wells, G. (1985). *Language Development in the Pre-school Years*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, G. (1987). *The meaning makers: children learning language and using language to learn*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Wertsch, J. (1985). *Vygotsky And The Social Formation of Mind*. Harvard University Press.

Wheal, A. (2000). *The Foster Carer's Handbook*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishers.

Wheal, A. (2005). *Companion to Foster Care*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

White, C. (1996). 'In care, shut out'. *Community Care*, 1146, 21.

Who Cares? Trust, (1998a). *Who cares? About education: the education of children who are looked after by local authorities*. London: WCT

Who Cares Trust (1998b). *Who Cares about Education: An action guide for young people*. London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust, (1999a). *Equal Chances: Project Summary: Finding the Facts.* London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust, (1999b). *Equal Chances: Practice guide: Acting on the facts.* London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (1999c). *Your Life Your Future!* London: DH.

Who Cares? Trust (1999d). *Right To Read.* London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (2000). *The Need to Know: meeting the information and communication needs of children in public care*. WCT. London: Family Policy Studies Centre, City Parochial Foundation.

Who Cares? Trust (2001). *Who Cares? About Education, an action guide for young people in residential and foster care*. London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (2002). *Brainwaves*. London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (2003a). *Literacy, Attainment and Achievement*. London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (2003b). *Education Matters*. London: WCT.

Who Cares? Trust (2006). *Education: Who cares about going to university?* London: WCT.

Wills, P. (2003), *Government's Failure to plan properly caused school funding crisis,* www.libdems.org.uk/index.cfm/page.homepage/section.home/article.4723 November 2003.

Wilson, G. (2002). 'Business bosses blast the 'dumbing down' of exams', in *Daily Mail*, Monday, July 22:16.

Wilson, K., Sinclair, I., Taylor, C., Pithouse, A., and Sellick, C. (2004). *An exploration of the research literature in foster care*. Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE).

Woodhouse, C. (2002a). 'We're living in an educational cloud cuckoo land', in *Daily Mail*, Thursday, August 15:16.

Woodhouse, C. (2002b). 'What's the answer to our failing schools? VOCATION, VOCATION, VOCATION', in *Daily Mail*, Monday, July 22:16.

Young Minds (2001). 'Number of children in care rising shows annual report September/October edition'. *Young Minds*, 54:03.

Young Minds (2002) January/February edition. *Young Minds:* 18-24.

Young Minds (2003) 'Book Therapy on offer in Cardiff'. *Young minds*, May/June edition, 2002, 64:06.

Survey questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.
Please make one response to each question if it is relevant to your situation

Yes No

1. Age   2. Gender

3. How long have you been a foster carer?

4. How many children have you fostered?

5. What is the longest period of fostering with same child(ren)?

6. Is your standard of education lower than GCSE, grade C?

7. Have you attended/completed an accredited fostering training course?

8. Do you receive a fostering wage, apart from the fostering allowance?

9. Have you undergone foster care in-service training?

10. Do you have natural born children under 18 years old living at home?

11. What memories do you have of your own school experiences?

Fostering context

12. Is being an educator to your foster child part of your role?

    If you do, please explain.

13. What contribution do you make to the literacy development of your foster child/ren?

14. Do you have specialist books in your home that help your foster child
    make sense of his/her experiences?

    If you answered yes, please explain.

15. Do you get extra allowances for outings, books or coaching lessons?

16. Does your foster child attend after-school clubs, leisure clubs etc?

    If you answered yes, please explain.

17. Do you feel equipped to support your foster child's education in the home?

    If you do, please explain.

18. Has educational support been made an explicit part of your role?

19. Have you received training on the importance of giving educational support?

20. Has your foster child ever been bullied, teased or called names?

21. Have you ever been contacted by the school/preschool about behavior problems following a parental visit?

22. Has your foster child been told about the charity *A National Voice*?

23. Does your child receive *The Who Cares?* magazine?

24. Did you receive the magazine *Breaking their fall?*

25. Are you fully involved in all issues/decisions relating to learning difficulties behavior problems and the statement process?

26. Do you feel it is your responsibility to secure an educational placement?

    Please expand on your answer.

Literacy context

27. Does your foster child own any personal books?

    If they do, what are they?

28. Did your foster child bring any personal books with them when they came to you?

29. Do you provide a range of books for use by everyone in your home?

If you answered yes, what are they?

30. Do you involve yourself in your foster child's reading activities?

    Please expand your answer.

31. Do you feel it is your responsibility to read to/with your foster child?

    Please expand your answer.

32. Do you buy comics and magazines for your foster child/?

33. Do you think you are responsible for providing your foster child with reading and writing materials?

    If you answered yes, why do you think this is?

34. Do you encourage your foster child write letters, notes of thanks etc?

35. Is library borrowing a regular activity?

    If you answered yes, do you make it a family activity?

36. Is it a mandatory requirement of your placing agency that your foster child join a library?

37. Does your foster child have a quiet place to read/study?

    If you answered yes, where is this?

38. Does your foster child have a Life Story book?

39. Are you able to spend quality time with your foster child to talk, listen and share special moments?

40. Have you received the guide *Education Protects?*

41. Does your foster child have access to Care Zone website?

42. Is it important for foster children to listen to music?

School context (answer if applicable)

43. Do you know your foster child's designated teacher?

44. Are you given advice on truancy and exclusion issues?

45. Does your foster child attend school regularly?

46. Has your foster child had discipline problems at school or at home?

47. Does your foster child read any other books apart from school ones?

48. Do you generally involve parents in all decisions relating to education including meetings with teachers and school events?

49. Do you attend school concerts/plays?

50. Do you liaise with the school regularly?

51. Is your foster child ever taken out of school to attend a review/or for parental contact?

52. Has your foster child receive the action guide *Who Cares? About Education?*

53. Does your foster child mix well socially?

54. Do you attend parents' evenings?

55. Do you help with homework?

56. Do you feel equipped to help with homework?

Please expand your answer.

Policy context

57. Are you fully involved in planning the care and educational needs of your foster child?

58. Have you received the leaflet *Educating: a guide for foster carers*?

59. Does each member of the core group: social worker/school representative/ parent attend regular reviews with you?

    If no, please explain.

60. Do you hold a Personal Education Plan for each foster child?

61. Do you receive an Assessment and Action Record when a child is placed with you?

62. Do you receive 'essential information' (LAC forms) on the same day a foster child is placed with you?

63. Do you feel an integral part of an interagency team?

    If you do not, please explain.

64. Do you generally have regular productive contact and support from your current social worker/link worker/ family placement worker?

    If you do not, please explain.

65. Are you a member of the Fostering Network?

66. Have you read the National Standards and Code of Practice?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please add anything else you think is relevant. No names or addresses are required as all information is strictly confidential and your anonymity is assured.

If, however, you would like to take part in a follow-up interview then please contact me: Barbara on 01375670461

SJ/KH/Let

Dear Barbara

Thank you for letter dated 20th March 2002 regarding your PhD.

We would be only too happy to help you in your studies. The most
appropriate way forward is for you to send as many social surveys as you
wish to me, and I will distribute these to the foster carers. I will arrange for the
carers to return the completed social surveys and for these to be sent to you.

Your completed faeces would be of great interest to my company, and I'd be
really interested in obtaining a copy if possible.

Please let us know if there is anything else we can do to help you in your
studies.

Good luck with obtaining your PhD.

Best wishes

K Allcouth

Suzanna Jacoby
Manager

SOME EXAMPLES OF SPECIALIST BOOKS FOR FOSTER CARERS.

Bannister, A. (2004). *Creative therapies with traumatised children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Copeland, M., and Copans, S. (2002). *Recovering from depression: A workbook for teens*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Fahlberg, V. (1994) *A child's journey through placement*. London: BAAF

Gray, P (2001). *Working with emotions*. London: Routledge.

Jewett, C. (1984). *Helping children Cope with Separation and Loss*. London: Batsford.

Jones, D. (2003). *Communicating with vulnerable children*. London: Gaskell.

Keenan, T (2002). *An introduction to child development*. USA: Sage.

Mellor, N. (2000). *The Good, the Bad and the Irritating: A practical approach for parents of children who are attention seeking*. Bristol, England: Lucky Duck Publishing.

McNamara, S. (2000). *Stress in young people: What's new and what can we do?* London/New York: Continuum.

Plummer, D (2001). *Helping children to build self esteem*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Rose, R. (2005). *The child's own story: Life Story Work with Traumatised Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Smith, P; Pepier, D., and Rigby, K. (2005) *Bullying in schools: how successful can interventions be?* Cambridge University Press (2005).

Wheal, A. (2004). *Adolescence: Positive Approaches for Working with Young People*. Dorset, England: Russell House Publishing.

SOME EXAMPLES OF BOOKS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

Anderson, R. (2001). *The flight of the Emu*. London/Oxford: Hodder and Stoughton.

Anderson, R. (1997). *Carly's Luck*. USA: Mammoth.

Byng, G. (2003). *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*. London/USA: Harper Collins.

Creech, S. (2001). *Ruby Holler*. London: Bloomsbury.

Doherty, B (2002). *Holly Starcross*. USA: Puffin.

Frampton, P. (2004). *Golly in the cupboard*. Manchester, England: Tamic Publications.

Glover, S. (1999). *The Nowhere Boy*. London: Corgi.

Hosseini, K. (2005). *The Kite Runner*. London: Bloomsbury.

Klass, D. (2001). *YOU DON'T KNOW ME*. USA: Puffin.

Ridley, P. (2001). *Mighty Fizz Chilla*. USA: Puffin.

Spinelli, J. (2001). *STARGIRL*. Kent: Orchard Books.

Wilson, J. (2002). *THE WORRY WEBSITE*. London: Doubleday.

Wilson, J. (2003). *The Story of Tracey Beaker*. London: Corgi Yearling.