UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones

5-1-2013

Educational Experiences of Emancipated Foster Youth: An Exploratory Study

Cynthia Joyce Stunkard
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations

Part of the Other Education Commons, and the Social Work Commons

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EMANCIPATED
FOSTER YOUTH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

Cynthia Joyce Stunkard

Bachelor of Science
Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock
1988

Master of Education
Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock
1989

A dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

Department of Educational and Clinical Studies
College of Education
Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2013

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Cynthia Joyce Stunkard

entitled

Educational Experiences of Emancipated Foster Youth: An Exploratory Study

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education
Department of Educational and Clinical Studies

Michelle Tannock, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Tom Pierce, Ph.D., Committee Member

Susan Miller, Ph.D., Committee Member

Lori Olafson, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Tom Piechota, Ph.D., Interim Vice President for Research &
Dean of the Graduate College

May 2013

ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF EMANCIPATED YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE ON THEIR

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

by

Cynthia Joyce Stunkard

Dr. Michelle Tannock, Doctorate Committee Chair

Associate Professor of Special Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The data obtained in this qualitative study focused on the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care after graduation from high school from the viewpoint of the youth. Data were gathered from interviews from 10 participants. Themes included: (a) How do youth emancipated from foster care perceive their educational experiences? (b) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (c) What did teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

Interviews were conducted and used predetermined questions. The answers were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were evaluated for themes. The themes included: a) There were supportive adults in the lives of the participants, which included school staff or a foster parent. b) The effect of school behaviors, both positive and negative, and the relationship of those behaviors to placement stability. c) Feelings about school experiences including a feeling of normalcy and the inability to feel successful. d) School staff's knowledge of a participant while placed in foster care, which included knowledge of and no knowledge of being a foster child. e) The impact of classroom teachers was evident including easy or difficult transitions into the classroom. f) Participating in the study to help children in foster care consider their educational process with subcategories including positive aspects of foster care, self-advocacy, communication, transition services, and ameliorating negative feelings.

The results for this study included the perceptions of the former youth in foster care about his/her educational experiences. The results of the study demonstrated the need to fill the gap in the current literature about the experience of youth in foster care

and provide a basis for further investigations related to the schools, social work agencies, caseworkers, and foster families can support youth in foster care in promoting positive outcomes in their educational experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

Although both of my parents passed away before I was able to earn my doctoral

degree, this is dedicated to the memory of my parents who always encouraged me to be

independent and supported me in each endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are over 500,000 children and youth in the foster care system in the United

States (National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 2003). Of these 500,000,

approximately 20,000 transition out of foster care each year through emancipation or

reaching the age of majority (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006). Emancipated

children must learn to navigate adult life without the supports that have been in place

through the time in foster care. For children in foster care the termination of services

includes removal from current adult support through the loss of foster parents, social

workers, and school staff. Add the complexity of the adult world, and the negative

outcomes increase, including homelessness, incarceration, lack of employment, or

underemployment, teen parenthood, difficulty with finding and keeping housing, and

substance abuse (Barth, 1990; Berzin, 2008; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Packard, et al.,

2009; Scherr, 2007; Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007; United Stated General

Accounting Office, 1999), the ability to have a positive outcome decreases. Avoiding

these obstacles may be the deciding factor in how well the transition into independent

living occurs.

While there is a growing body of research on foster children, the experiences of

emancipated foster children are in need of further investigation. This research on the

school experience of emancipated foster children will add to the scholarly literature and

may give educators, social workers, and pre-service teaching professionals information to

more effectively address the needs of foster children before the age of majority or emancipation when adult supports are typically terminated.

Perceptions of Foster Care In the United States

Within the United States, perceptions of foster care can be obtained though literature, news media, films, and historical programs. One way perceptions can be shaped is through literature, both current and classical. For example, within literature, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1838) and *Gossamer* by Lois Lowery (2006) can be examined. Each of these two novels portrays children in foster care in a different way; an orphan trying to survive in the *Oliver Twist* novel; and a child searching for a loving family in the *Gossamer* novel.

A second way that society's perceptions about foster care are shaped is through social media such as movies and newscasts. The social media reports on the extremes of the foster care experience, for example, positive perceptions of a family who has fostered dozens of children or the death of a child in a foster home garnering negative perceptions.

A third and more reliable source for shaping perceptions is through history. Orphans are present in all cultures. There have been provisions within different societies in the world to care for orphans and other dependent children. Those provisions have changed during the history of the United States as they have internationally.

In Colonial America, indenture was an accepted method of caring for orphans, dependent children, and children from all socio-economic classes (Hasci, 1995). At this time, children were considered miniature adults who were expected to grow up quickly. Indenture was used to teach children the value of hard work and the skills of a trade to

provide a future livelihood. Children lived, worked, and learned a trade from the family to whom they were indentured.

In the late 1700s, those overseeing the poor were given authority to give financial relief to help families or to indenture the children to avoid paying the monetary relief. When a child was indentured, he/she was to be fed, housed, and taught skills; education was not a priority. Indenture was economic rather than emotional or psychological in nature (Mimtz & Kellog, as cited in Hasci, 1995).

In the early to middle 1800s, orphan asylums became the prominent way of caring for children from impoverished families. Indenturing a child was used less for the upper class of children and was regulated to the children of poor families (Hasci, 1995). Some asylums, however, continued to indenture older children. By the 1850s, placing-out was beginning to replace indenture by moving children from poor urban families to a temporary orphanage; then permanently to rural homes.

Placing-out, by way of Orphan and Baby Trains, replaced the orphanages and asylums in the late 1800s to the early 1900s. The children selected to be placed-out were on the streets of a New York City that was overcrowded and was experiencing a large influx of European immigrants during the mid-1800s. The children were on the streets for various reasons including parental death, disease, industrial accidents, neglect, abandonment, and overcrowding of the city (Warren, 2001). To assist in finding children, agents of the New York Children's Aid Society (CAS) went through the streets of New York City looking for street children and vagrants. Other overcrowded orphan asylums and infant asylums brought children to CAS workers, as well as other public officials such as policemen (Cook, 1995). Children's Aid Society's placing-out system

was "designed to protect children from the urban environment and from their own parents, who were presumed to be unworthy individuals incapable of rearing children properly. All ties between children and their biological parents were to be ended" (Bruce, as cited in Hasci 1995).

Orphan and Baby Trains continued shaping perceptions in the United States in the second half of the 19th century into the beginning of the 20th century. These placing-out programs took homeless and orphaned children and placed them in rural homes in the Midwestern United States instead of housing them in large orphanages. The Orphan Trains and Baby Trains, based in New York City, were run by two independent organizations, The Children's Aid Society and The New York Foundling Hospital, which provided a placing-out program for over 200,000 children who were orphans or whose parents could not care for them between 1854 and 1930 (Warren, 1996).

The first organization, The Children's Aid Society, operated the Orphan Trains and assisted orphaned, abandoned, and homeless children of any age. The second, The New York Foundling Hospital focused on children under the age of two. Starting in 1853 and continuing for 75 years, these two organizations made arrangements for children to be transported to the midwestern part of the United States where families added them to their household.

The Orphan Train movement sent more than 200,000 children from New York City to more than 45 states, to Canada or Mexico, but the majority went to the Midwest of the United States (Warren, 2001). Most children were placed in homes that accepted them as part of the family; others were merely extra help on the large farming homesteads.

Known as orphans, street urchins and foundlings, these children were given clean clothes, a haircut, and sent west on trains sponsored by The Children's Aid Society to waiting families. The only qualification needed to accept one of these children into a family was the ability of the family to provide a home for the child. Families lined up at each railroad stop and selected a child or children to be informally "placed-out" into their homes.

The New York Foundling Hospital ran trains, but their trains carried young children, typically under the age of two. Nuns arranged in advance for the babies to be placed in Catholic homes and with families waiting to adopt a child. Their trains were called "mercy trains" or "baby trains" (Warren, 1996).

This social experiment, the Orphan Train and Baby Train, is now recognized as the start of the foster care movement in the United States (Warren, 2006 & 1996). Although the new families would not legally adopt the children or be compensated for caring for the child, as is the case for current foster care placements, the child was usually given the family name and was considered part of the family. The United States government did not take part in the arrangements; all arrangements were made between the adoptive families of the Midwest and the agents for the two organizations.

These two placing-out agencies did not screen the applicants or investigate the house in which they were placed. They rarely visited the children after placement and frequently legal custody of the child was not obtained from the biological parent before they were placed-out (Cook, 1995). This was true not only for the Children's Aid Society and the New York Foundling Hospital, but for other organizations helping the overcrowding in the large cities such as the San Francisco Boys and Girls Aid Society

(Hasci, 1995). Lack of funding was often used as a reason for not following up on placements. After criticism of the way homes were found, agencies began a more careful examination of the homes. At the end of the 1800s, child abuse and parent neglect began to be recognized as problems (Cook, 1995; Hasci, 1995). Childhood was beginning to be viewed as a separate stage, that of innocence where children were allowed to be children (Hasci, 1995).

In addition, societies like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC) started in the eastern United States in the early 1900s. These societies were given power to remove children from suspected abusive and neglectful homes. These children were then placed in orphanages. The SPCC was instrumental in the government's acknowledgement of the existence of child abuse and neglect (Cook, 1995; Hasci, 1995).

Due to the work of the SPCC, placing-out was replaced by boarding-out. From 1900-1930, the creation of the juvenile court system to specifically determine the welfare of children who become state wards helped the boarding-out system gain momentum (Cook, 1995). As the courts and government became more involved in the welfare of children, home placement began to replace asylums or orphanages when families or mothers were deemed unfit to care for their children. By the 1920s, boarding children with foster families became one of the ways for large cities such as New York and San Francisco to work with dependent children. Boarding-out was then referred to as foster care (Hasci, 1995).

Changes continued into the 1930s in the creation of the Aid to Dependent Children Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935 (Dore & Kennedy, 1981). This Act

provided funding to keep impoverished families together instead of having those families give their children to a placing agency or put them in an asylum or orphanage. The 1969 amendment to the Social Security Act made mandatory the provision of the foster child to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipient by the individual states and further broadened the eligible population to include potential and actual AFDC recipients (Dore & Kennedy, 1981). This act solidified the establishment of the foster family home as a community-based alternative to institutionalization thus decreasing the use of residential facilities for those found eligible for care through the juvenile court system (Dore & Kennedy).

Title XX, enacted in 1975 revised again the Social Society Act to cover a broader range of the population and "prevent inappropriate institutional care through community-based programming." Title XX made funds available to "expand services for less restrictive out-of-home care, including group homes and foster homes (Dore & Kennedy, 1981).

However one's thinking related to foster care are developed, through literature, news media, movies, or historical programs; whether perceptions are positive or negative, over 500,000 children are currently placed in foster homes. Additionally, 250,000 children transition in and out of the foster care system each year for a total of 750,000 children. Of those in foster care, 20,000 are emancipated through reaching the age of majority or through petitioning the courts. Given this large number, the experience of emancipated children is in need of further investigation to understand a population for whom there is sparse research.

Current Foster Care Placement

Currently, entering the foster care system is either voluntary or involuntary.

When a child is placed voluntarily, the biological parent or guardian is unable or

unwilling to care for the child. When an involuntary placement occurs, a child is

removed from biological parent due to physical or psychological harm. Most youth who

enter foster care have experienced some form of abuse, neglect, or other trauma that has

been documented over a period of time by law enforcement, social services, or child

protective services (e.g., domestic violence, sexual abuse, impaired caregiver, neglect, or

traumatic loss) (Hazen, Connelly, Kelleher, Lansverk, & Barth, 2004; Henry, Cossett,

Auletta, & Egan, 1991; Holland & Gorey, 2004; McNeil, et al., 2005). In the United

States, most children are placed in foster care due to neglect (Pew Commission on Foster

Care, 2006).

Recent Historical Changes To Foster Care

The change from an informal placement, such as the Baby and Orphan Trains, to

a more formal foster care placement occurred due the passing of Public Law 96-272.

Public Law (PL) 96-272 was a key aspect of this shift from protecting children to placing

them in a functional family as a family treatment option. PL 96-272 included two main

parts. First, PL 96-272 promoted permanency planning and casework practices by

establishing levels of placement prevention and criteria for removal (Woolf, 1990). In

other words, the agency removing the child must justify to an independent review board

that all possible alternatives have been explored to keep this child in their birth home and

removing the child is the last option. This has resulted in agencies removing children

with more severe needs and prompting a treatment oriented foster care program. Second, PL 96-272 also mandated that there must be a plan for returning the child to his/her birth home or another permanent home by way of adoption (Woolf). This makes the goal of foster care a short term one, instead of a permanent placement like the goal of the Orphan and Baby Trains.

In 1980, the United States Congress passed three distinct aspects to child welfare reform known as Public Law 96-272, which coincides with the voluntary or involuntary placements. The first aspect was to make the child welfare systems accountable to the federal government by emphasizing permanency planning or reunification and to move away from foster care as a long term solution by delivering services to children and families in their homes with a focus on strengthening family skills to prevent out of home care such as foster care. The second aspect included funds for treatment to families to help prevent removal from the birth home. Third, it provided financial subsidies for families who would adopt children previously thought to be not adoptable including children with special needs (Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, 1980).

Foster care is intended to be a short-term situation until a permanent placement can be made. There are four different situations that may occur when placing a child in the foster care system. First, for a child removed from a birth home, is reunification with the biological parent when appropriate. Second, adoption occurs, preferably by a biological family member, foster parents, or another certified caregiver the child might not know. A third situation occurs when a permanent transfer of guardianship is made to a foster parent or to kinship care. Fourth, other planned permanent living arrangements

can be made, such as staying with the current foster family or an independent living center.

Since 1974, various United States public laws have been created to include all children, regardless of disability, in the education process. In the subsequent 30 years, further amendments created a federal program that provides intervention services for children with special needs from birth to 21. However, there were no formal services available for children emancipated from foster care until Public Law 106-169, the John H. Chafee Act or the Foster Care Independence Act of 1989. This law was enacted to provide children emancipated from foster care the opportunities for housing assistance, additional education or training, counseling, and other services. As a result, the Independent Living Program provides the above services, up to 21 years of age, as a support for young adults leaving care to assist in the transition from foster care to independence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

Concerns For the Foster Child

Removing children from homes where documented abuse or neglect occurred required trained foster parents to address the neglect or abuse they may have encountered while living in the birth home. Special training for the foster parent was necessary because not only did the foster parent have to work with the child, they needed to work with the social worker on a permanency plan to return the child to the birth family. Foster children who have been abused may have special education needs and the foster family needs to work with educators.

Children in foster care frequently qualify for special education services including speech-language disabilities, learning and emotional disabilities (Scarborough et al., 2004; Stock & Fisher, 2006). Young children in foster care qualify for special education services at a rate of 50% compared to 3% of typically developing children residing in a birth home. Statistics for children in foster care vary from 25% to 36% who are in special education in comparison to 11% of those who are not in foster care (van Wingerden, Emerson & Ichikawa, 2002). Preparing and educating foster families to work with children in foster care is an ongoing process.

Youth in foster care typically come from families where the family structure includes single parent families or families that may have a parent who is incarcerated. Of special interest is a large-scale study that reviewed the composition of foster families. Wilson, Fyson, and Newstone (2007) found a majority of foster families had two parents with 90% of those with an intact married couple. This study indicated that a stable environment is needed for a foster child. This is evident in the statistics reported in the study: the average marriage of the foster parents was 20 years, the age range of the couples was 31-60 years, the foster parents had fostered an average of 9.8 children (Wilson, Fyson & Newstone).

Another concern for youth in foster care is the occurrence of negative disruption, either a single disruption or multiple disruptions. When a youth is moved from one family to another, the transfer of records, finding another family, making new friends, adjusting to the neighborhood, and new school is sometimes difficult (Evans, 2004; Halvalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Supulveda, 2009). James (2004) conducted a study, and found that 20% of the placement disruptions were related to child behavior

problems. Less than 7% of the disruptions were a result of foster family requests for removal because of a child's behavior. Three percent of disruptions occurred because of threats or negative contact from the biological family.

Statement of the Problem

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (2003) reports the total number of children in foster care is 524,000 nationwide and growing. In March 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Report, included the number of entries, exits, those waiting for placement, those whose parental rights have been terminated, and those who were adopted bringing the adjusted total of children served in foster care as 787,000 in 2003. This is an increase of almost a quarter of a million children not reflected in the number of children in earlier reports on foster care. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) report for 2006 reflected the same trend: In care, there were 510,000 children served and total served through entries and exits amounted to 799,000 (The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2008).

As of September 2007, The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) estimated the total number of children in foster care to be 496,000. Of that number, 193,440 (39%) were 13 years or older and 29,000 exited or were emancipated from foster care (AFCARS, 2007). The number of youth leaving foster care rose from 23,100 in 2004 (AFCARS, 2004) to 29,000 in 2007.

Typically foster care is associated with social work, not education. However, in the yearly report from the National Council on Disabilities (NCD) it was estimated that

30-40% of children in foster care receive some type of special education services (NCD, 2008). van Wingerden, Emerson, and Ichikawa (2002) also found that an estimated 30-45% of children in foster care received special education services compared to 11% of the general population. Supported by George et al, researchers found children in foster care are approximately 15 times more likely to be identified with an emotional disability than those not in foster care (George, Voohis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992). Given these statistics, working with students in foster care is a relevant issue for educators.

The purpose of this study was to obtain qualitative data about the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care after graduation from high school from the viewpoint of the youth. To address this purpose, the following research questions were answered (a) How do youth emancipated from foster care perceive their educational experiences? (b) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (c) What did teachers do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

Significance of the Study

The field of special education, as it applies to children in foster care with special needs, has limited research. In addition, few studies have been conducted to assess the needs of the special education children in foster care as it applies to delivering educational services to them. Of the current foster care research available, the studies typically focus on the preparation and retention of foster parents, early intervention, negative outcomes for children in foster care, and statistics comparing children in foster

care with other populations, but few studies have followed a line of investigation from the viewpoint of the child. Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003) state that the research base for foster care is relatively low. Flynn and Brodie (2000) agree by stating that significant focus is lacking on the educational experiences of foster children. Supported by both Brodie (1999) and Goddard (2000) in their research, is a concern about the lack of research highlighting foster children's perspectives of their educational experiences.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by snowball sampling due to the sensitivity of the topic and is limited geographically to a large urban city in the southwestern United States. Possible limitations include schedule changes, changes in location of the focus group, potential loss of participation due to illness, reluctance to participate in the focus group, and participants moving to another area. These limitations occur within the general population and cannot be controlled by the researcher. According to researchers, there are negative outcomes after emancipation from foster care, such as becoming homeless, pregnant, or incarcerated (Barth, 1990; Hill, 2009; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Packard, et al., 2007; Price, et al., 2009; Scherr, 2007; Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007; United States General Accounting Office, 1999). These negative outcomes may affect participation in the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, foster care, kinship care, and adoptive care will be used interchangeably. The following definitions provide a reference for each of these terms.

Acceptable Placement Disruption. When a child is moved to join siblings, moved to a less-restrictive setting, or moved back with a biological family member (Sailor, Dunlop, Sugai, & Horner, 2009).

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). Describes the permanency status of children or youth in out-of-home care who are considered unlikely to be reunified with their family of origin or achieve permanency through adoption. APPLA is also referred to as long-term foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Boarding-out. Arrangements for a child to stay with someone who is paid to take care of the child for a period of time (Macmillan Dictionary, 2010).

Child Abuse. An act, or failure to act, on the part of the parent or caregiver that results in the death, serious injury, or emotional harm of a child including physical, sexual, emotional mistreatment, or neglect (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Child Neglect. The failure to act in providing for the shelter, safety, supervision, and nutritional needs of a child. Neglect can be physical, educational, emotional or medical (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Emancipation. A legal action, by which, a minor is freed from control by their parents or guardians, also known as the age of majority. Parents and guardians are free from any and all responsibility of the child. In most states the age for emancipation is 18 years of

age or requires a person to be 18 years of age and out of high school thus reaching the age of majority (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Emergency Placement. An urgent placement needed for children when they first enter the child welfare system, when the children are too challenging, or for other reasons are required to leave their foster home or other out-of-home placement (Sailor, Dunlop, Sugai, & Horner, 2009).

Emotional Abuse. Any act or omission by the parents or other caregivers that could cause serious behavioral, emotional, or mental disorders. Emotional abuse is also psychological child abuse, verbal child abuse, or mental injury of a child (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Family Foster Care. A placement where children live with non-relative adults who have been trained, assessed and licensed or certified to provide shelter and care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Formal Foster Care. A change of care that is legally authorized and involves a change in legal responsibility. It is supported and documented by the child welfare agency and court system. There is documentation to determine who has the legal right to care for the child (Encyclopedia of the Health of Children Online, 2011).

Foster Care. Substitute care, provided 24 hours a day, for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes. A child is in foster care in accordance with this definition regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed and payments

are made by the state or local agency for the care of the child, whether adoption subsidy payments are being made prior to the finalization of an adoption, or whether there is Federal matching of any payments that are made (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005).

Guardian. A person who holds the parental responsibility and legal authority of a minor child who intends on providing care for the child. Transferring legal responsibility removes the child from the child welfare system and allows the guardian to make decisions on the child's behalf (Child Welfare League of America, 2010).

Informal Foster Care. A private arrangement between the parent and another party where there is no change to any form of legal responsibility, usually grandparents, relatives or family friends (Encyclopedia of the Health of Children Online, 2011).

Kinship Care. Substitute care provided by a person who is non-related by blood, marriage, or adoption who has a close relationship with the child or child's family, or a person who has a close relationship with the child or child's family and is related to the child by blood beyond the third degree, for example, godparents, neighbors, teachers, or close family friends (Child Welfare League of America, 2010).

Long-term Foster Care. The permanency status of children or youth in out-of-home care who are considered unlikely to be reunified with their family of origin or achieve permanency through adoption. Long-term foster care can also be termed Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Looked After Children. Those children looked after by a local authority either under a court order or who are accommodated elsewhere than the birth home. The term was

introduced by the Children's Act of 1989 in the United Kingdom (U. S. Department of Health, 2009).

Negative or Problematic Placement Disruption. When a child is moved due to the inability of a foster parent to manage the child's behavioral difficulties or when the foster parent requests that the child be removed from the home which interrupts stabilization, or treatment efforts (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009).

Out-of-home Care. Settings in which the child lives when unable to stay with their family of origin. Out-of-home care placements may include relative homes, kinship care homes, foster care, temporary foster care, residential settings such as group homes or institutions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Pre-Adoptive Placement. A placement selected when reunification with biological family is not available or when parental rights are terminated (Sailor, Dunlop, Sugai, & Horner, 2009).

Physical Abuse. Physical injury inflicted upon a child with cruel or malicious intent. Physical abuse can be the result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise harming a child. May be the result of over-discipline or physical punishment (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Physical Neglect. The refusal of or delay in seeking health care, abandonment, expulsion from the home, or refusal to allow a runaway to return home, and inadequate supervision (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Relative Care. Care provided by persons related to the foster child by blood, marriage, or adoption, for example, grandparents, aunts, or uncles (Child Welfare League of America, 2010).

Placing-out. Placing a child in a home at no cost for the purpose of making the child a member of the family with whom he/she is placed (Butler, 1919).

Reunification. The process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin. Reunification is the most common goal and outcome for children in out-of-home care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Sexual Abuse. Term which includes fondling of a child's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic material (Mersch, Williams, & Shiel, 1999).

Snowball Sampling Technique: Term in which participants of a study recommend another participant with similar interests to the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Temporary or Short-term Placement. Placement for children when reunification with the birth family is planned within six months (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009).

Therapeutic Foster Care. Placement of a child with a foster family who has been specially trained to care for children with certain medical or behavioral needs including medically fragile children, children with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Therapeutic foster care requires more training for foster parents, provides more support for foster children and foster parents than regular foster care and has lower limits on the number of children in the home. Therapeutic foster care is also known as treatment foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Treatment Foster Care. Placement of a child with a foster family who has been specially trained to care for children with certain medical or behavioral needs including medically fragile children, children with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Treatment foster care requires more training for foster parents, provides more support for foster children and

foster parents than regular foster care and has lower limits on the number of children in the home. Treatment foster care is also known as therapeutic foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Summary

The educational experience of the child in foster care is a topic for which there is little research. Understanding the educational perspective from a the perspective of those who were in care will give the field of education more information related to delivering educational services to a child in foster care. Researchers indicate a need for investigating the educational experiences of foster children from his or her viewpoint (Brodie, 1999, Flynn & Brodie, 2000; Goddard, 2000; Harker, Ober, Larence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003). This study endeavors to fill this gap in the research through focus on the educational experience of the emancipated foster child.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The chapter begins with the literature review procedures used to locate experimental studies involving foster care, education, and emancipation outcomes. Then, discussions of the foster care placement process and emancipation are discussed followed by a description of the laws enacted to ensure the rights of foster children. Finally, research related to the topic of foster care, education, and emancipation is summarized.

This chapter has two purposes. The first is to explain the need for foster child's perspective in the educational process to assist the personnel that work with foster children including the educators, social workers, foster parents, and the foster children. The second purpose is to summarize and analyze current professional literature related to area of emancipated foster children.

The Literature Review Process

A systematic search through computerized databases was conducted. Included in the databases were Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), H.W. Wilson Company, Sage Journals Online, EBSCOHost, and ProQuest – UMI Digital Dissertation Database. The following descriptors were used: foster care, foster education, foster care and education, foster care and experiences, foster care and emancipation, foster care and student experiences, foster care and student, foster care and student perceptions, foster care and child perceptions, foster education and perceptions, foster care and education viewpoints, foster students and education viewpoints, foster child and education

viewpoints, foster care and special education. An ancestral search through the reference lists of the obtained articles was included in the search.

Selection Criteria

Studies were included in this literature review if (a) the procedures and data-based results were published between 1989, when money for Independent Living became available, and 2013, (b) the subjects were children in foster care who were at the age of emancipation, 18-24, when the study was conducted, (c) the study focused on variables of success in an educational placement after emancipation, and (d) the purpose of the study was to examine the outcomes after emancipation. The following articles were located using this process.

Research has been conducted on the outcomes for children emancipated from foster care, the research has focused primarily on negative outcomes experienced within five years of reaching independence. The negative outcomes include the lack of employment or underemployment, homelessness, teen parenthood, difficulty with finding and keeping housing, criminality, and substance abuse (Barth, 1990; Hill, 2009; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Packard, et al., 2007; Price, et al., 2009; Scherr, 2007; Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007; United States General Accounting Office, 1999).

Negative Adult Outcomes After Emancipation

Scherr (2007) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the educational experiences of children in foster care compared to those not in foster care. The subjects were children in foster care and special education from birth to twenty-one years of age who lived in a

foster care or kinship care placement at the time of the study. Included studies were

designed to investigate the educational status of students in foster care compared to peers

not living in out-of-home care.

Analysis of data was uploaded to the computer software program,

Comprehensible Meta-Analysis Version 2. Confidence intervals at 99% were determined

and were the basis for statistical significance. Homogeneity analysis was conducted to

determine the most appropriate statistical model: fixed, random, or mixed. The results of

four meta-analyses were completed that included special education eligibility, grade

retention, suspension, and expulsion (Scherr, 2007).

The results related to the special education eligibility were found using a mixed

effects statistical model. Approximately 31% of foster children qualified and received

special education services with a range between 22 and 35%. Foster children who

qualified for special education from the 1980s to 2000 rose from 18% to 36%. Children

in foster care were five times more likely to be indentified as needing special education

services. A random model effects was applied to the combined sample size of 9,950

identified students in the area of grade retention. The analysis showed that 33% of

students in foster care had been retained at least once. Foster children were seven times

more likely to be retained than those not in foster care. Suspension and expulsion were

most often reported together in the studies selected for meta-analysis and using mean

proportion effect size, 24% of students in foster care had been expelled or suspended at

least once with a range of 15% to 36%. In comparison of those not in foster care, only

7% were suspended or expelled at least once. Foster children are three times more likely

to have been suspended or expelled (Scherr, 2007).

Scherr (2007) concluded that 13% of the general education population receive special education services which is in sharp contrast to the 31% of children in foster care who qualify and receive special education services and is cause for concern. Grade failure and retention for children in foster care is also disproportionate. Grade failure and retention for students not in foster care is 15% compared to 33% for children in foster care. Frequent moves may prevent the child in foster care from receiving grade level instruction, resulting in grade failure. Retention may not be the most effective means of remediation for 33% of children in foster care. This researcher combined the two categories of suspension and expulsion, and found that 24% of foster children are expelled or suspended compared to 7% of non-foster children. To prevent either suspension or expulsion, suggestions from Scherr (2007) include positive behavior support, functional behavioral analysis and behavior intervention plans, in addition to school and community based mental health services to assist those students.

The negative outcomes for foster children may be lessened if an understanding is gained about their views on education. This viewpoint has been neglected by researchers and is important in the self-determination and social validation of a foster child, thus the underlying need for this research. By understanding the educational viewpoint of foster children, those involved with their well being, namely the educators, social workers, and parents, will be able to guide the educational process from a different viewpoint, the foster child.

McMillian and Tucker (1999) assessed the exit status of older youth leaving foster care including data on foster child employment and home situation upon exiting foster care. The records of 252 subjects were reviewed from 71 counties. Of those who met the

criteria, 167 were female and 85 male; 194 were Caucasian, 55 African American, and three were of mixed race. Records were reviewed and examined for nine variables including age entered care, months in care, number of placements, number of re-entrances into care, group home placement, inpatient psychiatric placement, residential treatment placement, and foster home placement. Also included in the review of the records were the foster child's employment, living arrangements, education, parenthood status, criminal involvement, and substance abuse prior to leaving care. Data were examined using a multivariate analysis that correlated factors related to outcomes. Logistic regression was also applied because all outcomes were dichotomous (McMillian and Tucker, 1999).

The exit status of youth according to the data from this study found that 63% of foster children were leaving care with no plan as to where to live or who to call when needing support: 26% of emancipated foster children left care and were living with relatives and 45% left foster care without a job or high school education. These factors led the authors to conclude that youth as a group are leaving unprepared for life on their own. McMillian and Tucker (1999) attribute the abrupt discharge to possible youth impulsivity, few placements for older foster children, the appeal of moving back to birth families, or living with a romantic partner. The quick discharge from foster care leaves little assistance in transition or independent living services on the part of the foster family or social worker. McMillian and Tucker (1999) suggest giving older foster children more autonomy over choices with continued support through voluntary means up to the age of twenty-one, including case management, payments for placement providers, and Medicaid.

By understanding the educational viewpoint of foster children, educators and social workers could work together to create a transition into independence that may lead to success in adulthood. Negative outcomes for foster children may be lessened if an understanding is learned about foster children's views on education.

Positive Adult Outcomes After Emancipation

Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien, Emerson, Herrick, and Torres (2006) found positive outcomes experienced by children previously in foster care. The study examined alumni emancipated between one year and thirty-one years. The alumni experienced many of the previously detailed negative outcomes, but as the length of independence increased, the positive outcomes also increased including the rate the children achieved graduation of high school, earning a college degree, and earning a General Education Diploma (GED).

The purpose of the study by Pecora, et al. (2006) was to evaluate the intermediate and long-term effects of foster care on adult outcomes. Specifically, these researchers wanted to determine education levels that foster youth achieved and the financial situations of the youth formerly in foster care. These researchers also wanted to identify the experiences in foster care that gave the youth formerly in foster care a higher educational achievement level and a positive financial situation. A total of 659 subjects from the Casey Foundation in the Pacific Northwest participated in the study. These 14-18 year old foster children were in care for more than 12 months between 1988 and 1998. The former foster youth could not have major physical or developmental disabilities or be placed in foster care for any reason except being an unaccompanied refugee minor. The

ethnic make up of the participants included 45% Caucasian, 21% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 22% other. The mean age for the participants at the time of the interview was 24.2 years old. Males accounted for 39.5% of the participation and females, 60.5% (Pecora et al., 2006).

Researchers read and recorded specific information from case files including living arrangements before foster care, reasons for initial placement, mental and physical problems, treatment by birth family, disabilities, and maltreatment data. Interviewers asked questions about education level, financial situation, accessing independent living services, what resources were available when leaving care and what supports were in place during care. Statistics reported from the data included both negative and positive outcomes. The negative outcomes stated by the participants included a 20% homelessness rate within a year of leaving foster care. A total of 16.8% received Temporary Aid to Needy Families compared to 3% of the United States households in 1999 (U.S. Census Bureau, as cited in Pecora et al., 2006), and 33% of the former foster youth were living below the poverty level. Positive outcomes represented by the data included 84.8% of the foster children finished high school, 20% finished with a technology or vocational degree, and 20% obtained a bachelor of science degree or higher. Additionally, 25% of the former foster youth reported having independent skills and resources when leaving care (Pecora et al., 2006).

As a result of this research, Pecora et al. (2006) put forward the following conclusions and recommendations. Each foster care program should encourage a high school diploma not a GED. Improvements need to be made in identifying and treating mental health problems to increase classroom success. All agencies should work towards

stable placements. When foster youth are transitioning into independent living, concrete resources are needed in addition to more support and preparation for postsecondary educational programs. The authors suggested funding changes to independent living programs to provide success for independent transitioning. Each agency should develop a comprehensive transition plan for leaving care, provide foster children with broad skills, and continue support as they exit care and start independent living (Pecora et al., 2006).

This was the only study in which researchers focused on positive outcomes for children placed in foster care. In this study, the need to understand the educational perspective of successful foster children was emphasized. Future studies should be designed to determine educational experiences that correlate with outcomes that are positive.

Educational Impact Of Foster Care And Special Education

Goerge, VanVoorhis, Grant, Casey, and Robinson (1992) conducted a study to examine special education characteristics and to determine which services were accessed for children in foster care. Data were accessed from Illinois State Social Service Departments and the Illinois State Department of Education. All subjects were children in foster care who were also identified as needing special education services in Illinois. Information was collected using a database at the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services and the Illinois State Board of Education. Records were matched from the Department of Child and Family Services and the Illinois State Board of Education using software to complete a "probabilistic record-match" thus giving each subject a

single record. The single record for each subject was evaluated with an in-depth analysis using multivariate longitudinal analytic techniques to determine how and when the foster child began to receive special education services.

Goerge, et al. (1992) found a higher proportion of children in foster care located in one specific county, Cook. However, Cook County had a lower percentage of children in foster care receiving special education services even though they had more children placed in foster care. The researchers also found that children receiving foster care increased as the child ages and at age fifteen, it declines. The age distribution of children with learning disabilities, mental disabilities, behavioral disorders, or physical disabilities show little difference between students enrolled in special education who were not in foster care and those who were in foster care and also received special education services. When all special education services are combined, a significant difference in age distributions is evident (Goerge, VanVoorhis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992).

Data analysis showed that foster children are more likely to be categorized as having emotional or intellectual disabilities than learning or physical disabilities. Of the foster children in special education, 50% are identified as having an emotional disability compared to 10% of those in special education not in foster care. In other words, 13% of foster children are labeled as having an emotional disability compared to 2% of the general population. Goerge et al. (1992) found children in foster care and foster children in special education are even statistically, but those in institutional settings are five times more likely to be indentified as needing special education services (Goerge, VanVoorhis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992).

Another aspect of the data examined by Goerge, et al. (1992) was the initial reason for placement. When analyzing the reasons, neglect and abuse comprised approximately 80% of the cases. The authors stated that the implications for this study should be used to improve service delivery, policy making, and methodology. In service delivery, the Department of Child and Family Services should be more aware of special education needs of children in foster care. The authors stated the Department of Child and Family Services should also examine how school and social workers work together to provide the foster children the best education, not just protection. In the area of policy, children in foster care are at a higher risk of receiving special education services. Finally, the authors recommended that all entities involved in placing a child into foster care need to focus on the coordination of educational services as the child changes placement in foster care or returns to the birth home (Goerge, VanVoorhis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992).

This study uses only data gained from files without the perspective of the foster youth on their status in the school. Adding the viewpoint from the foster child may assist educators and social workers in understanding the educational impact, which may include lost records and frequent school moves.

Smucker, Kauffman, and Ball (1996) conducted a study to examine the school related problems of children in foster care specifically those receiving special educational services due to an emotional behavioral disability (EBD) in comparison to those receiving special education services for EBD but who are not in foster care. Additionally, the researchers compared those foster children who are not receiving

special education services and those who are not in foster care and not receiving special education services.

Thirty-two students were placed in four groups of eight with an even distribution of girls and boys. In each group, four of the participants were African-American and four were Caucasian. Matching students were obtained from one or more schools in the district through school records and interviews with caseworkers and teachers (Smucker, Kauffman, & Ball, 1996).

Using the School Archival Records Search's Student Profile Recording sheet (SARS), Smucker, Kauffman, and Ball (1996) located eight of the eleven variables to organize the data from school cumulative folders and behavioral files. The SARS is designed to identify at-risk students. Records were coded and the authors conducted brief interviews with school personnel familiar with the student to gain information, excluding any confidential information. Discriminate analysis was used to determine if the group could be predicted using independent variables and to guard against Type I error. Of the cases entered into the statistical analysis, 68.75% were correctly classified (Smucker, Kauffman, & Ball, 1996).

The groups of students in foster care and special education were coded FCED, ED was the code for students in special education and classified EBD. For students only in foster care, the code FC was used and N was the code for those students not in foster care or special education. The analysis provided statistical evidence that indicated foster care, not EBD, was the most influential factor in the number of schools attended and number of grades retained. There was a greater risk to those grouped as FCED in attending multiple schools and being retained at least one time. The third variable entered was the

number of negative comments in the school records. FCED differed significantly from the other three groups in retention rates and negative comments in school records (Smucker, Kauffman, & Ball, 1996).

A qualitative component was added to code the negative comments. Two researchers coded eleven categories with 92% agreement on the comments. FCED and FC had three times and twice, respectively, the negative comments when compared with the ED and N groups. The finding supported the perspective that students in foster care and classified as EBD experience more academic and behavioral problems than the other three groups. However, the ED and FC groups did not show any significant difference between them. Data from this study suggest students in FC are at risk for school problems and being labeled EBD appears to have a combined effect on the student's school performance. The authors suggest the integration of social work and educational staff efforts serving the foster care population and emphasis on the importance of safety and education for the foster child (Smucker, Kauffman, & Ball, 1996).

While the authors of this study conducted brief interviews with school personnel, the views of the child on their educational experience were not gathered. These data would support the social worker and educational staff in providing educational experiences that could increase support for this vulnerable population.

Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm (2003) collected baseline data to evaluate and determine the degree of focus and level of involvement of a large child welfare agency. The educational process of children in foster care was the purpose of the study. The subjects in this study were 500 randomly selected foster children aged five to eighteen from four major child welfare agencies in California. A total of 308 children were

identified for baseline data collection. Data collected included information such as academic or behavior problems, completion and date of Needs Assessment and Case Plan Summary, special education status, IEP on file, and if the child had been emancipated.

Additionally, a random sample of forty-three caregiver interviews were conducted in person or by phone and recorded verbatim. Caseworkers also participated in a 40-item questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale to assess the level of knowledge about educational procedures, resources, and being involved in the educational process. The researchers concluded that the caseworkers and supervisors from the child welfare agency paid little attention to the educational progress and had little knowledge of the educational process (Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm, 2003).

When reviewing the foster child's school records, Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm (2003) found that 60% of the school attendance forms were missing from the files and 78% of the Needs Assessment forms were missing. The researchers also noted that 28% of the caseloads were receiving special education services. The lack of communication between agencies, social services and the school district was evident in the missing records (Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm, 2003).

Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm (2003) stated that greater communication between the child welfare agency and the school needs to be in place if the educational needs of foster children are to be addressed. This was evident in the results from the caregiver interviews in that when trying to enroll a new foster child in school, they lacked the special education or school related documentation to ensure the correct educational program for the child. Called an educational passport by the authors, the passport contained educational information such as placement, grades, report cards, test scores, an

IEP if applicable and IEP goals. Foster parents in this study remarked that they were not given a passport, nor were the documents updated regularly for the children in their homes. Because of high placement disruption, not having these documents to forward to the next placement can postpone the educational services for a foster child or incorrect placement can occur when scheduling classes for high school foster children (Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm, 2003).

With a greater focus on education, caseworkers and caregivers can advocate more effectively for the foster child. Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kimm (2003) suggest a more formal program to assist and advocate for the foster child; a liaison, a school social worker, between the education and social work systems to assist and advocate for the foster child.

The current proposed study is designed to extend the body of knowledge on educational experiences through the addition of the perspective of the foster children themselves. Without the perspective of the foster youth in this study, the focus on education as suggested by the authors could be more complete.

Evans (2004) conducted research to examine the characteristics and academic achievements of children reentering foster care. The subjects were 392 children who initially entered foster care from July 1997 through May 2002 and later reentered foster care. Two control foster children, who remained in foster care, were matched for each foster child who reentered. Each reentering foster child was matched for sex, age (within one year), race, reason for entry, and initial foster care entry. A team, including a pediatrician and psychologist evaluated each child. The child's caregiver was interviewed as well. Evaluations were conducted at local medical centers and resulting

information was entered into a database. Data were analyzed using chi-square and z-tests for correlation difference with the students reentering and the control group. Achievement data were analyzed using multiple regression, ANOVA, and t-tests (Evans, 2004).

The author reported a lower than the national average of children initially entering foster care, but a higher than national average with regard to reentering foster care. Evans (2004) first states that students showed less than one point change in IQ between placements. This takes into account a positive outcome as foster children can move placements, require special education services, leave, and reenter care without significant decreases in IQ performance. Secondly, the data indicate those students who were doing well prior to initial placement may decline academically after being placed in foster care. Third, reentry to foster care was directly related to the first placement and may also involve placement in a more restrictive setting. Last, the author noted few changes in the demographic information or psycho educational data between initial and reentry placements. Limitations include a five-year snapshot of one group of children in one southeastern state. Different results may be obtained when comparing foster children across states (Evans, 2004).

This research, which examined the characteristics and academic achievements of foster children reentering foster care, does not include examination of the perspectives of the foster youth. Without the perspective of the foster youth in this study, the focus on the educational achievements of this population as suggested by the author is not complete.

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2004) conducted a study to investigate the effect on school performance when an educational liaison works with the school system and social work agency to reduce educational barriers for foster children. The authors identified 120 foster children, 60 placed in the treatment group, and 60 in the control group, ranging in age from 5.4 years old to 17.1 years old. The treatment group consisted of thirteen foster children in elementary school, 22 in middle school, and 20 in high school. The control group consisted of 34 foster children in elementary school, 11 in middle school, and 14 in high school. In the treatment group, 32% of the participants were in general education. The control group consisted of 59% in general education (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004).

An Educational Specialist (ES), an educational liaison between the social work agency and the educational agency, assisted both agencies to remediate the difficulties encountered to minimize the disruption to the educational services of the foster child. The ES worked with ethnographical data obtained in the 1997-1998 school year and compared it to data obtained after the intervention occurred. The ES assisted over 250 cases during the year of intervention. Of those 250 cases, 31% involved assisting with the special education needs of foster children, 26% of the cases were for pre-referral needs, 16% of the assisted cases were for the obtaining of procedural information, 16% were for student behavior or other academic deficiencies, 10% were requests for resources, and 2% of the cases were ordered to the court system (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004).

Data were analyzed using nested analysis of variance (ANOVA). Variables included grade point average, math and reading achievement scores, attendance, special

education status, and number of schools in the two-year treatment period. Additionally, a

t-test was performed to analyze the pre/posttest scores to indentify any significant

findings. In the pretest scores, the control group had higher academic scores in math and

reading, however, in the posttest, the treatment group made significant gains over the

control group (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004).

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2004) suggested the positive findings indicated a

need for an educational specialist to act on behalf of the foster child in areas of school

related difficulties. The authors also suggested the need to identify specific supports to

increase academic educational outcomes, attendance, and continued collaboration

between the education and social work agencies.

The researchers suggest continued collaboration between the education and social

work agencies, however gaining information from the perspective of the child in foster

care would also add to the body of research for those involved. Understanding the child's

viewpoint could also assist in providing the best placement in terms of safety which is a

concern for the social worker, and educational continuity, which is a concern for the

educator.

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006) continued the work of Zetlin, Weinberg, and

Kimm (2004) to improve the educational outcomes for foster children through the

collaboration of the school, child welfare agency and a non-profit law office. The

participant was an educational liaison assigned to a child welfare agency to assist with

educational difficulties experienced by the child welfare agency. The educational liaison

took the information provided by the child welfare office such as inability to secure

educational records, school districts refusal to enroll a foster child, denial of special

education services, placement or eligibility services for special education, and issues involving suspension or expulsion of a foster child (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

Both the educational liaison and the child welfare agency worked together to find a solution to each of the 250 cases logged in during the second year of the study. The log indicated the number of contacts needed to resolve the educational issue with 63% needing short-term involvement from the educational liaison and 33% being labor intensive. Of the short-term cases logged, 50% were resolved with one to two contacts or inquiries, 33% with three to ten inquiries or actions, and 17% were complex enough to require ten or more inquiries or law office intervention. At the end of the study, the data were examined to determine if the educational liaison was effective in supporting the child welfare agency. A pre-test questionnaire was administered to the caseworker at the beginning of the study. The findings revealed that there were significant omissions in records and knowledge on the part of the social workers in the area of education (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006).

Within 18 months, into the two-year study, there was a significant increase of up-to-date material in the foster children's files. The level of awareness of educational procedures, educational system, and involvement in the educational progress was significantly higher than at the beginning of the study. Students' school performance also increased, specifically in math and reading. Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006) concluded that the educational liaison model is one effective strategy to provide interagency cooperation and add to the successful educational experience for foster children.

Again, the authors suggested continued collaboration between the education and social work agencies, but gaining information from the perspective of the child in foster care would also add to the body of research for those involved. Understanding this viewpoint could also assist in providing the best placement for the child in terms of safety for the social worker and educational continuity for the educator.

Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien, Emerson, Herrick, and Torres (2006) conducted research to assess the educational achievements of adults who were formerly placed foster care. Their subjects were 1,082 of 1,609 identified alumni from the Casey Foster Field Agency Offices who were foster children from 1966-1998, placed in a foster home for twelve months or more, and were emancipated for at least one year. Of the participants, 54.6% were female and 45.4% were male, 35% were of color, and average age at interview was 30.5 years old. Participants were alumni of twenty-three different Casey Family programs in thirteen of the states in the United States.

Interviews and case record reviews were conducted with alumni. Raters read case files and recorded information without knowledge of the study hypothesis. They recorded information including demographics, entry and exit dates, type of exit from care, reason for first placement, birth parent information, and foster family parent information. Professionally trained interviewers from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center conducted the interviews using standardized scales covering areas such as education, mental health, employment, relationships, and parenting (Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien, Emerson, Herrick, & Torres, 2006).

Results in the area of medical and psychological conditions in foster children indicated that 50.6% of alumni were professionally diagnosed with a psychological

disorder during childhood. Mental health services were the most commonly provided service. Results in length of stay and number of placements indicated that the Casey Foundation provided long-term foster care to older youth, typically aged ten to seventeen, while other options were explored such as reunification with the birth family or adoption. The average entry age for the foster children was 13.2 years of age; average age at first placement was 8.9 years of age; age at exit of care was 19.4 years of age; length of time in foster care was 7.2 years if/when a foster child was returned to the birth family for periods of time, and increased to 10.5 if no adjustment was made for a return to the birth family. The results in the experience in school indicated that 37.9% of the foster children received special education services; 36.2% repeated a grade; 67.6% attended three or more elementary schools; and 33.1% attended five or more elementary schools (Pecora, Kessler, White, Williams, Hiripi, English, White, & Herrick, 2006).

When comparing the alumni to the general population, as the age of alumni increased, graduation rates of 86.1% represent the total of foster children who earned a high school diploma or general education diploma (G.E.D.). This compares to 80% of the general population that earned a high school diploma or G.E.D. Forty-nine percent of Casey Family alumni attended some college compared to the 51.7% of the general population. Over 24% of the general population completed an undergraduate degree compared to 10.8% of the Casey alumni. Children in foster care have lower attendance rates for college completion, but as the age of the alumni increases, so does the educational performance (Pecora, Kessler, White, Williams, Hiripi, English, White, & Herrick, 2006).

One additional research question was posed to predict high school completion while in foster care. Logistic regression analyses were used to determine the variables that were statistically significant in predicting high school completion. Those predictors were older age at entry, fewer placement changes, employment while in foster care, independent living training, and less criminal behavior. The implications for the education, as stated by the authors, for foster children included fewer placement changes, fewer school absences, inadequate school advocacy, lack of educational supports, and lack of teacher awareness. The authors further state that it is important to orient teachers and school administrators to the issues that youth in care deal with and for school personnel to advocate on behalf of the foster children to provide success (Pecora et al., 2006).

This study examined the point of view of the foster child, but the average age of the participants was 30.4 years old. The length of time that passed between graduation or emancipation could lead to a skewed result, as the memory of the event could be markedly different than the actual event. Also, the types of questions asked focused on outcomes after graduation or emancipation, not their in-school perceptions. The authors do recommend that teachers and other school personnel become aware of the issues surrounding children in foster care. By learning about the educational viewpoint of the foster child, the issues of importance may be discovered.

Stone, D'Andrade, and Austin (2007) conducted research to address the gaps in literature to answer two questions: (a) How do representatives from child welfare and educational instructors characterize the educational issues faced by foster children; and (b) How does each representative understand the role of the other representative in

addressing educational issues? To answer the questions, Stone, et al. (2007) interviewed

fourteen social workers and educational system personnel in nine California counties in

one-hour semi-structured interviews. Local agencies and school districts were contacted.

Permission was given and fourteen total participants were interviewed. Questions were

asked about stability, special education process, and placement. Additionally, the

participants were asked to identify barriers and possible solutions to the educational

process and placement (Stone, et al., 2007).

Two researchers recorded responses for comparison that were transcribed for

analysis and reviewed. A total of 303 foster parents were interviewed to gain more

information about child characteristics, placement characteristics, working with the birth

parent, background of the foster parent, information about school enrollment, school

performance, and special education services for the foster child. The constant

comparative method of qualitative analysis was used to develop themes and patterns.

Notes were read, reviewed and analyzed across and within the two groups, social workers

and school educational personnel (Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007).

Multiple themes emerged surrounding the educational process. The delay of the

educational process for a foster child was identified as the first theme in the unavailability

of educational records included slow transfer of records including special education

information, foster child unable to enroll in school for an extended period of time,

questions as to placement of a foster child in special education due to delayed or no

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), and who would authorize or reauthorize the IEP.

The second theme, related to foster care placement changes, included delaying the

transfer of records, gaps in foster child's knowledge, repeating classes, and starting the

special education process but not completing it before the placement change. The third theme identified was the factors that intensified the educational issues for foster children including high mobility interrupting the educational process. This included the foster child label causing different treatment, advocacy for the foster child because of legal responsibility for educational planning especially special education services, and difficulty in communication and collaboration between the two systems, educational and social work, as social workers place safety over education. Both sets of participants cited funding and educational resources as a problem (Stone, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2007).

Stone, D'Andrade, and Austin (2007) also found a lack of trust between child welfare and educational systems that needs to be corrected. The authors concluded that bridging the gap between the two systems is essential. The main goal of both should be the uninterrupted education of the foster child. Keeping the foster child in the same school regardless of placement changes should be a priority and include considering the safety of the foster child. Transfer of records should be timely especially special education records, to ensure a continuous educational experience.

These researchers examined the educational process from the viewpoint of the foster parent through interviewing. Triangulating the information to include the viewpoint of the foster child in understanding the educational process would add to the body of knowledge about how the two systems, educational and social services could best serve those children in foster care.

Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, and Supulveda (2009) conducted research to examine educational outcomes for foster children who were placed in foster care by examining which experiences are related to educational success. The 359 participants

were 19, 22, and 25 years of age at the time of the interviews and had previously been in care for at least twelve months or more. Participants were located in one of thirteen states serviced by the Casey Family Service's field offices. Various areas were examined such as educational outcomes including obtaining a high school diploma, G.E.D., or dropping out, returning after dropping out of a post-secondary program, or earning a post-secondary degree. Also examined were the service variables given by Casey foundation including independent living and transition services. Additional questions about friends, social workers, foster parents, and placements were asked during qualitative interviews (Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Supulveda, 2009).

A regression model was used to predict secondary educational outcomes, but was weighted due to the large number of white females who participated in the study to counterbalance gender and race. Outcomes of the study showed that 85.6% of the foster children earned a high school diploma or G.E.D. by age 25 compared to 86.6% of the general population. Those who earned a high school diploma (65.7%) reported some post-secondary education, however, 51% reported having dropped out for a period of time. Reasons for dropping out were addressed through interview questions and included negative outcomes such as pregnancy, academic failure, and substance abuse. Transition services alone did not predict if the foster child would be in school at the time of the interview, but a combination of transition services and continuing education and job-training program predicted more success. The authors recognized that only 54.6% of the Casey alumni who were of age to participate did, therefore the findings may only represent a specific population who could be easily located or readily wanted to participate. Also, outcomes reported are higher than those in the public welfare systems

and could be the result of the Casey Family Services approach to foster care (Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Supulveda, 2009).

Eight recommendations were made based on the outcomes and data analysis: (a) provide extended foster care services until age twenty-one; (b) prepare foster children for post-secondary education; (c) encourage earning a high school diploma, not a G.E.D.; (d) work to find the right placement for the initial placement; (e) promote all types of post-secondary education, not just college; (f) examine, to minimize, post-secondary drop out rates; (g) explore relationships between the social worker and foster care; (h) and focus on male foster children (Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora, & Supulveda, 2009).

All of the eight recommendations are applicable to this exploratory research study obtained by conducting interviews with children emancipated from foster care. Each recommendation could be impacted by the information gained through this exploratory study by finding the educational experiences of the children in foster care.

Foster Child Perspective of Foster Care Experience

Geenen and Powers (2007) examined the experiences of emancipated youth as they transitioned into adulthood. Participants in the study included 19 foster children, eight emancipated foster children, 21 foster parents, 20 child welfare professionals, nine educational professionals, nine independent living staff members, and two additional professionals. The youth, both currently in foster care or in an independent living setting, and those who were emancipated participated in focus groups that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes with five to nine participants per group. Participants were in foster care ranging from less than one year to over ten years.

All other participants including foster parents, child welfare personnel, educational professionals, independent living staff and two others also participated in similarly structured focus groups. A total of 10 focus groups were conducted with responses and conversations recorded and translated verbatim. Open-ended questions allowed participant participation and additional follow-up questions were asked for added details. Transcripts were transferred to the software program, Ethnograph, and coded using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant-comparative method (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

Categories and themes emerged including seven themes related to transition from foster care to adulthood. Those themes were self-determination, coordination and collaboration of services, the importance of relationships, the importance of family, normalizing the foster care experience, independent living programs, and issues surrounding disabilities. In the area of self-determination, foster children commented on the irony of trying to be independent when so many skills are not practiced. Social workers reinforced that statement by saying that protection of the foster child is so important that the life experience of failure is rarely permitted. Within the theme of coordination and collaboration, all focus groups talked about the lack of systems working together and how it leads to ineffective service for the foster child. In the area of relationships, having a stable, loving adult with whom the foster child can contact for assistance was important to the group of foster children, foster parents, and social workers in order to provide the continuity the foster child needs as they transition into adulthood (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

During the transition period, the foster children discussed exploring the boundaries and resources of the foster family and birth family while using the independent living services as an additional method to ensure success. In addition, providing a gradual release from the foster care system would allow for easier transitioning and mimic the typical transition experienced by birth children from their birth home. In the area of independent living, finding a program that has an opening is sometimes challenging. Occasionally, the program interferes with the adult behaviors that the foster child is trying to accomplish. For example, noted by one foster parent, the class a foster child was to attend was about keeping a job, however, the foster child could not come to the meeting because they had to work, and they were dropped from the independent living program as a result. Often, noted the social workers, there are not sufficient services provided by the independent living programs to meet the specific needs of a foster child (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

Seven subthemes for foster children with a disability were noted including insufficient advocacy when being emancipated, changes in placement with disruptions to special education services, and the inability of the independent living programs to accommodate foster children with disabilities. Geenen and Powers (2007) stated that if the information from this study and others indicate that if the resources are to be used effectively, the strategies currently employed need to be changed. More innovative services need to be applied to make independent living successful. The authors suggest a self-directed support approach with all programs used to support foster children written into an integrated transition plan (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

The perspective of the child in foster care was explored in this study but the viewpoint of education was omitted. By interviewing children recently emancipated, the educational impact of a child in foster care would be explored through research, and the information gained could support foster children in school to make transition to independent living a successful experience.

Fernandez (2007) conducted research to explore children's perspective of their foster care experience. Fifty-nine children, 29 boys and 30 girls, participated in the study; of those, 70% were Anglo-Australian, 2% were Indigenous Australian, 17% European, 9% Pacific Islanders including Fiji, Tonga, and Thailand, and the remaining 2% were Sri Lankan. Titled the *Growing Up In Care Project,* the researcher used a repeated measures design measured at four months after placement, at 18 months, and a final measure at 24 months incorporating both qualitative and quantitative measures. The foster children completed two standardized measures: the Hare Self-Esteem Scale and the Interpersonal Parent and Peer Attachment Inventory. Additionally, the children were interviewed with two adapted instruments: Assessment and Actions Records and the Looking After Children Protocols (Fernandez, 2007).

The data analysis indicated that at four months after placement, 60% of the boys and 70% of the girls reported feeling sad. For over 50% of the children, multiple feelings were reported including worried, scared, and lonely, all at once. However, only 19% of the boys and 60% of the girls reported feeling angry. These emotions rated consistently 18 months later. Caution was noted because of the self-reporting form from the children (Fernandez, 2007).

The Interpersonal Parent and Peer Attachment Inventory indicated that the cohesion within the foster family was statistically significant. In all three areas, trust, communication, and alienation, children under the age of 12 had a higher mean score as well as a higher parental attachment score. In relationships, peers and mothers scored higher in their attachment than father attachment scores. Contact with birth family was scored high at the first interview, 72% saw family members, usually mom, and indicated contact occurred once a month to once every three months, but at the second interview, 70% had no contact at all with their birth parents. Contact with siblings remained strong between interview one and two, 65% of the foster children wanted more contact with their birth family, especially siblings. Self-esteem as measured on the Hare Self-Esteem Scale indicated no significant differences between peer and school self-esteem in relation to either boys or girls. Girls did have significantly higher self-esteem than boys. Lower self-esteem was negatively correlated with the number of placements on the Looking After Children protocol; between interview one and two, girls scored significantly higher in social skills and problems with peers. When looking at relationship building skills, each child had between four and 15 positive skills at interview one (Fernandez, 2007).

At interview two, at least seven additional skills were reported. The author concluded that individualized responses to foster children based on age, gender, and individual differences are needed. Children are resilient, but foster caregivers play a role in influencing the risk factors that lead to a change in placement. Foster caregivers need to support foster children in wanting more contact with the birth family and continue to support that need while balancing positive attachments to the foster family (Fernandez, 2007).

The research into the foster care experience parallels the current research question posed. Understanding the perspective of each facet of the child's life in foster care could help provide a successful educational experience.

Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003) conducted a study to investigate the data obtained from the initial interviews with foster children in residential care and their views of their educational experiences while in care, garnered at the start of the *Taking Care of Education* developmental program in England. A random quota sampling was employed to select 50-80 interviewees between the ages of 10 and 18. Forty-one males and 39 females were selected who resided in foster care from four months to 17 years. The subjects were selected based on age, gender, and ethnicity to reflect the broad sample of those in care (Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003).

The study was set in three English local authorities and was conducted through a longitudinal mixed-methods design with semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the *Taking Care of Education* project. Information from the beginning of the project formed a baseline for the follow-up interview data comparison. Children rated educational progress using a Likert style scale; qualitative interview comments were also included. Data were analyzed using transcribed interviews and the Likert scale was analyzed (Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003).

The results indicated that children responded favorably to being in foster care as related to its impact on their educational progress. Forty-six percent of the respondents thought their educational progress improved while being in care. Children were able to name an individual who supported their educational progress including 41% naming

teachers, 24% named their foster parent (Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003).

Foster children's comments stressed the fact that social workers need to understand that being moved within the foster care system without any perceived awareness of the child's needs or impact such movements might have on educational progress is detrimental. Other comments focused on the priority of meeting physical and emotional needs with little emphasis on long-term developmental needs and educational opportunities (Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003).

A checklist using a Likert style scale of 12 supportive factors was included in the study. Items such as having a quiet room to study, a computer for homework, or a quiet place to study were asked. Having someone attend a school event was reported by 67% of the respondents (Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2003).

Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003) included 13 foster children who indicated that having an individual who showed interest in educational progress by encouraging them to do well in school and looking at their school work and report cards was important. The children in foster care also recommended that foster parents and social workers listen to their opinions about educational support and consult with them regarding their home and school placements.

Although seen as a positive factor in supporting foster children, there is little research to clarify factors that might enable teachers to effectively support the needs of the foster child within the schools. Future research to address this issue would be opportune. Negative outcomes such as placement disruptions and school transfer were noted by foster children participating in the study and confirm that educational issues are

not always considered by social workers when making placement decisions (Harker et al., 2003).

Harker et al. (2003) also mentioned the lack of research that examines the education of the foster child. The researchers commented about the wide variation of educational supports in foster care. They suggested further research into the range of foster placement and capacity to support the education of the foster child would be desirable. The setting of the study was England and although foster care procedures are similar, they are not the same as the identifying and provision of services in the United States for identifying and providing services to foster children. This was an initial study to provide the baseline data for a larger project by the National Children's Bureau, *Taking Care of Education*. Evaluation will be ongoing, but additional data are not currently available to compare with the baseline. Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003) appear to give validity to the need for additional studies into foster children's viewpoints.

Johnson, Yohen, and Voss (1995) studied the impact of family foster care placement from the child's perspective. In this study, the subjects were 11 to 14 year-old foster children placed in care between six months and two years. A total of 95 foster children, 51 from state foster agencies and 44 from private agencies were selected for the representative sample. Fifty-nine were interviewed, 25 from the private agencies and 34 from the state agencies, consisting of 30 males and 29 females. Forty-three were African-American, nine were Caucasian, and seven were of Hispanic background matching the percentages represented in the overall population in care (Johnson, Yohen, & Voss, 1995).

Interviews were conducted with the subjects in the private foster homes (N=56), at the social service agency (N=3), and one interview was conducted in a restaurant. Four trained social work students conducted a semi-structured interview using pre-coded and open-ended questions lasting 90 minutes. Sessions were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim (Johnson, Yohen, & Voss, 1995).

The data analysis method was not reported in the text, however eight themes were noted: (a) circumstances surrounding placement; (b) reasons for changes in placements; (c) problems in current placement; (d) changes in child's life including school, friends, neighborhood, and other changes; (e) coping with separation from own family; (f) thoughts about returning home; (g) importance of the caseworker to the child; and (j) children's views on state intervention (Johnson, Yohen, & Voss, 1995). Only 60% of the children interviewed were able to identify the reason for placement in foster care. When changing placements, 58% reported having no involvement in the change. Three children reported having difficulty in the current placement.

Positive changes were reflected in the comments made by the participants. The positive changes reported in the findings included friends, neighborhood, school, and home life improvements. For example, 56% of the children said foster home neighborhoods were better than the neighborhoods in which their birth families live. Fifty-six children reported missing their family when asked about coping with the separation from their family. Only 33% were worried about returning to their birth home because they thought the abuse and/or neglect would reoccur. All the children were aware that their return home was not in their control. The caseworker was important to 50 to 59 children interviewed, but stated these children that the main caseworker job was

to schedule birth home visits and spend time with the foster child. Thirty-four of the children felt it was a good idea to be removed from their birth home with 17 stating that they should not have been removed. For theme eight, there was no consensus on using foster care as an intervention, however, 35 children stated that sometimes it is good for a child to be in foster care (Johnson, Yohen, & Voss, 1995).

The main conclusion of the study focused on the children's suggestions to change and improve the quality of information made available after placement. The results of the study also suggest that the children viewed being in foster care positively. As a qualitative study, many quotations from the children were noted in the article. The main focus was the impact of the foster care placement from the viewpoint of the child; however, the researchers did not verify the children's responses for accuracy. There was no record of the process in which the data were analyzed. The authors make the point that research involving the assessment of care by the children themselves is limited and the studies that do exist are retrospective in nature. There is a need for additional studies to examine the child's perspective in all areas of foster care (Johnson, Yohen, & Voss, 1995).

Gil and Bogart (1982) conducted research to examine foster children's perceptions specifically about themselves, their current situation, career goals, and future hopes. One hundred foster children in either foster homes or group homes participated in the research. Fifty children each from the foster homes or the group homes were surveyed. The demographic data for the foster home included 21 boys and 29 girls. Those who participated included 12 Caucasian, 30 African-American, 1 Asian, and 3 coded other. In the group home, 32 boys and 18 girls participated and of those, 21 were

Caucasian, 19 were African-American, 6 were Asian, and 5 were coded other. Ninety-five children completed the survey (Gil & Bogart, 1982).

Two age appropriate questionnaires were developed and included sections of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and Parks Career-Role Inventory. Additionally, a behavior checklist was developed and administered by the authors with open-ended questions. A stratified random sample was selected from the list of names and permission was granted to participate. Volunteers were trained to administer the questionnaires. Foster children were instructed to talk about how they spent time with and without the foster family and what it was like to be a foster child. Foster parents were not permitted to be a part of the recording of answers, only trained volunteers. Completed questionnaires were sent to the Child Abuse Council office, assigned a number and filed. No control group was procured as the procedure to get one from the local public school was too complicated and time-consuming and thus rendered impossible (Gil & Bogart, 1982).

The results from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory indicated both groups, the foster home and group home, had lower than normal self-esteem. The children in the foster home scored higher in self-esteem than those residing in a group home. On the Parks Career-Role Inventory, the participants selected low-status, sex-stereotyped occupations; 17% showed differences between career wish and reality, 24% reported helping careers, and 59% of the children in each group chose the same career in wish and reality. On the Behavior Checklist, declarative sentences with responses ranged from "always" to "never." Some items reached statistical significance using Chi Square analysis. Those children living in a foster home had more varied diets, more time with

friends, privacy, more material goods, and positive family relationships. On the open-ended questions, children were asked where the best place they had lived was, and 80% of the children living in foster homes indicated that their current placement was best; 15% chose their birth family, and 4% chose a group or other foster home. Of the children in the group home, 47% indicated that their current placement was best; 39% chose their birth home, and 14% chose another foster home or other group home (Gil & Bogart, 1982).

Gil and Bogart (1982) noted patterns rather than significance on some items that indicated a consistent difference between foster family home responses and group home responses. They also advocate a way for all involved in working with foster children to communicate to lessen the trauma of placement disruptions and to improve on the delivery of the services and how it effects the children in care (Gil and Bogart, 1982).

This study also confirms the need for research from the perspective of the child in foster care. Even though children in foster care may have different viewpoints than those involved in caring for them, their perspectives are important.

Birth Family Perspective of Foster Care

Kapp and Propp (2002) conducted a study to address the gaps in literature regarding satisfaction of birth parents with children in foster care and to develop a customer satisfaction instrument through a structured mail survey with birth parents whose children are placed in foster care through state or private agencies. Demographic information was not collected as part of the study. As a result, Kapp and Propp (2002) acknowledged this as a limitation because exact numbers were not reported. The

following statistics are based on the authors' reconstruction of the participants. Subjects consisted of approximately 75% female and 25% male with Caucasians comprising the majority of the birth parents in the focus groups. In each focus group, however, there were one or two African American or Hispanic birth parents. Ages ranged from early 20s to late 60s and were from a broad range of socio-economic classes.

Focus groups were conducted in three locations around the state. Four of the focus groups occurred in the northwest of the state in the local community with 8-14 participants in each group. In the central and southwest part of the state, four additional focus groups with four to six participants were conducted. Groups met in neutral sites not related to the state or private agencies such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. Focus groups began with a brief introduction, summary of purpose and intent of the focus group. The focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Participants were asked three main questions as researchers and group leaders facilitated the focus groups (Kapp & Propp, 2002). All groups were tape-recorded and transcribed, coded and categorized using constant comparative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Common themes emerged after entering the data into the NUDIST computer program that cuts and pastes verbal text into established coding category files thus assisting the researchers to clarify emergent themes. After data were analyzed, participants were contacted by phone, given the review of the major findings and asked for feedback about the new survey instrument. Additional feedback and insights by the participants were recorded. The authors also commented that there are few studies that include the point of view of the birth families (Kapp & Propp, 2002).

Six themes were identified: communication, availability (of social worker and turnover rates of the social worker), respect, parent caregiver involvement, rights, and satisfaction. Suggestions were also recorded with the survey comments. Kapp and Propp (2002) concluded that the themes developed generally were ones of frustration over the lack of communication with and respect given to birth families, as well as frustration over the availability of the social worker to assist the birth family in completing the necessary steps to reunification with the birth family. Kapp and Propp also noted that the birth families want more involvement in the process of reunifying their family.

The suggestions from the birth parents gave the researchers additional recommendations for improving client satisfaction as the main purposes of the study. Although the demographic data were incomplete, the strength of this qualitative study was reflected in the participants comments included in the text, *Transition Through Emancipation* (Kapp & Propp, 2002).

The viewpoint of the birth family is also an area with little research. However, having this perspective adds to the research available for those who deliver services to children in foster care. The child's perspective is also important to the body of research.

Suggestions to provide a positive transition into adulthood have been proposed and explored. Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, and McCready (2008) suggest that by providing transitional services to emancipated foster children through the age of 21, the cost-benefits out weigh the negative outcomes experienced by current foster children. Using a program entitled *Transition Guardian Plan*, the foster child enrolls to receive a monthly stipend and support services. According to Schoeni and Ross (as cited in Packard, et al., 2008), the average youth does not achieve self-sufficiency until reaching

26 years of age. From high school graduation until age 26, parents spend a median of $3410 a year on their child on housing, tuition, transportation, and other expenses. This money is not available to emancipated foster children (Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, & McCready, 2008).

Researchers indentified the *Transition Guardian Plan* to begin to prepare foster children for independent living. Between the ages of 16 and 18, the juvenile court will appoint a transition guardian. This guardian will distribute a monthly stipend, continue to be an adult contact, and support and recognize the child's desire for independence. Distributing these funds, along with the adult contact are meant to replicate as closely as possible what a responsible parent does to assist his/her child into independent adulthood (Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, & McCready, 2008).

The researchers used the *Transition Guardian Plan* expecting positive results from former foster children including fewer admissions to state prisons, fewer emancipated foster children on welfare assistance, and higher income taxes paid based on improved lifetime employment through an increased educational level. Over five years, the plan would have a benefit cost ratio of 2.7 to 1 compared to the current rate of 1.5 to 1. Additionally, the contact with the guardian would provide additional data after emancipation regarding any further problems or successes experienced by the foster child (Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, & McCready, 2008).

Understanding the perspective of the foster child will assist the working personnel in planning support during the transition into adulthood. The implications of the current research may benefit the foster child's educational process by planning the most effective program.

Foster Family Perceptions of Being a Caregiver

DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, and Price (2009) conducted a study to determine if caregiver engagement in a group-based intervention would change the risk factors for foster children. The participants were 700 foster families assigned to either an intervention group (N=359) or a control group (N=341). All ethnic groups were represented across the foster families. Eligibility to participate in the study included a 30-day minimum placement with a child between five and twelve who was not considered medically fragile.

The group-based interventions were conducted in community recreation centers or churches. A within intervention group analysis test was conducted to determine whether the 16 weekly sessions, provided by trained leaders, would change the perceptions of the foster family when considering the problem behaviors exhibited by the foster child and negative placement changes. Using the program Project KEEP (Keeping Foster Parents Trained and Supported), the intervention group received 16 weeks of training, support in behavior management, and supervision from an interventionist. Of the KEEP participants, 75% attended 90% of the group sessions (DeGarmo, et al., 2009).

Data were examined using a pre/post design and a hierarchical regression framework (ANCOVA) to place participants in nested groups. DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, and Price (2009) found that the group process with foster parents participating in KEEP counteracted the increase of problem behaviors to maintain the foster child in the current placement. Negative placements were decreased in all groups, but specifically in the Hispanic families who comprised 33% of the participants (DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, & Price, 2009).

DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, and Price (2009) concluded that the training, support, and supervision through various strategies taught during the 16 week Project KEEP program increased the foster child's and foster parent's ability to avoid a placement disruption. Positive engagement, as taught in the Project KEEP, also increased the positive outcomes for all involved thus reducing the negative outcomes (DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, & Price, 2009).

Viewpoints from the perspective of the foster family are also an area with little research, but understanding each individual part of a system that provides care is important. The foster child's perspective has little research in the area of education, which is needed.

Summary

A child emancipated from foster care continues to be a topic of interest to researchers; however, more understanding from the perspective of the foster child is needed. A group of experts assembled by The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning participated in a discussion about foster children. One of the participants commented that "we know virtually nothing about what happens in the classroom for children and youth in foster care" (Center for Future of Teaching and Learning, 2010). Of the articles reviewed, the emphasis included attachment issues, educational performance, graduation rates, special education placement, incomplete school records, school mobility, negative outcomes after graduation, placement disruptions, and the disconnect between social work and the educational system as demonstrated in this review. The viewpoint of the educational experience of the emancipated foster child has

61

been neglected. Understanding the educational experience from a foster child's point of

view will assist those who work with this population. The results of this study may serve

educators, social workers, foster parents, and foster children by giving a perspective

currently unavailable in the literature, including standard pre-service teaching textbooks.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The overall purpose of this exploratory study was to obtain qualitative data about the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care. The specific purpose of this study was to understand the educational experiences of emancipated foster children from their viewpoint. To address this purpose, the following research questions were answered: (a) How do youth emancipated from foster care perceive their educational experiences? (b) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (c) What did teachers do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

Research Approach

An exploratory approach was used to investigate a little known phenomenon, (i.e., the educational experiences from the perspective of the foster youth). Using a semi-structured phenomenological interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), the researcher planned to conduct focus groups, however, individual interviews replaced the focus group format because participants were reluctant to participate the focus group. The method for this study was selected due to the lack of research on this topic, children in foster care and their school experiences. An interview served as an appropriate research technique for this study as it involved the collection of data by noting the individual

responses from questions supplied by the researcher to generate data. The interview used

ensured the collected data was within the target area of the researcher's interest.

Additionally, the researcher and a research assistant took field notes for the first

three interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to further enhance

the interplay between participants such as body language and facial expressions. Field

notes assisted the researcher in noting nuances that cannot be recorded electronically.

Due to the lack of research on the topic of educational experiences from the

viewpoint of a foster child, understanding the experience will add to the body of

scholarly research, as well as support the participants of the study through social validity.

The child's viewpoint is independent and will serve as a baseline for future research.

Internal and External Validity

In this exploratory study, the internal validity refers to "the degree in which

conclusions about causal relationships can be made based on the measures used"

(Morgan, 1997). The researcher has experience as both a foster parent and teacher,

including ten years of experience with therapeutic and treatment foster children. During

those ten years, five teenage foster children were placed in the researcher's home.

Educationally appropriate placement for those children including initial special education

placement was advocated, as well as providing transition assistance before and after

emancipation for the teenage foster children. The researcher has over twenty years

experience in the field of teaching including with a wide range of educational settings,

varying disabilities, and grade levels. The researcher has also worked as an adjunct

faculty member at two universities teaching pre-service teachers and supervising student

teachers. During these experiences as both a foster parent and teacher, an initial bias held

by colleagues regarding foster children was observed, in that colleagues were resistant to

foster children being placed in their classroom. The teacher's reaction to a foster child

being placed in the classroom formed many questions about how this perceived bias

would impact the foster child as a student. This led to the current research question (i.e.,

How does a foster child perceive his or her educational experience?).

The goal in a focus group was to learn about the participant's experiences and

perspectives (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups were not formed due to the participant's

reluctance to participate. Interviews were conducted in place of the focus groups.

Changes were made, submitted and approved by the committee, and the IRB. In this

study, each group member is different in his or her background and individual

experience, but each had experience with the research topic, having experienced foster

care. Each participant had something to contribute about the topic of foster care and felt

comfortable discussing it during an individual interview with the researcher.

Each participant freely discussed the topics and the data reported from each

individual was standardized, as the same questions were asked of each individual (refer to

Appendix A). This predetermined content allowed the researcher to keep the discussion

focused on the topic of educational experiences. By selecting homogeneous participants,

the within group dynamics have been accounted for in the design and internal validity.

Conducting sessions with different individuals, adds to the assurance that across

individuals, the internal validity has been checked on duel levels.

A bias exists for the primary researcher. By having experiences as a foster parent

and teacher, one must be aware of personal bias toward researching children's viewpoints

about educational experiences. With this awareness comes responsibility to develop

open-ended research questions to avoid leading the participants as well as giving the

participants the latitude to express their thoughts.

Participants

The participants of the study were 10 children emancipated from foster care ages

19-42. Participants were living independently without the monetary support of a foster

family or social worker. One participant was accessing assistance made available

through the Independent Living Program, but the participant, not a supervising adult such

as a foster parent or social worker, was maintaining the access to services. The

demographical data concerning the ethnic make up of the children in foster care living in

the urban location of this study were not available, but nationally, children in foster care

are comprised of those who are 41% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 21% Hispanic,

and 11% Other or Mixed Race (AFCARS, 2011). Every attempt was made to have a

representative sample to match these percentages of the current composition of foster

children served. Due to the non-probability sampling methods (Morgan, 1997), the

participants do not reflect the composition of the national statistics. This study included

participants from the following self-reported groups of ethnicity, Caucasian 60%,

African-American 30%, and Hispanic 10%.

Nine agencies located in the county in which the study occurred were contacted

regarding participation in the study after the university's ethics board granted permission

for the research. Those agencies included *state omitted* Partnership for Homeless Youth:

Apple Grove; Eagle Quest; Maple Star; *county omitted* County Social Services; Trinity

Foster Group; St. Francis Group Home Care #8; Bountiful Family Services; and Sankofa Group (refer to Appendix B). A computer search using Foster Care and the large urban city in which the study occurred were used as the Boolean Phrases to find local agencies supporting children in foster care. The agencies provide a wide range of services for current and former foster children, and give support and resources to emancipated foster children when supports from the foster family and social worker are discontinued.

Five national organizations were also contacted to participate in the study. These include Covenant House, Stand Up For Kids (national and local chapter), Foster Care To Success, Foster Club, and Foster Care Alumni of America. These organizations were located after using foster care and organizations as Boolean Phrases in computer searches.

Additionally, advertisements (Appendix C) were placed in two local university campus newspapers in the large urban area in the Southwestern part of the United States in which this study occurred. These two universities were selected due to their high enrollment of the potential target population (i.e., 17-24). One local university has an approximate enrollment of 28,000 and the second university has approximately 27,000 enrolled. Both universities offer a wide range of degree programs.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Sampling</h3>

A sample reflects the population from which it comes, however, with non-probability sampling (Morgan, 1997), there is no assurance that the sample will be the same composition as the general foster care population. A sampling error may occur by

chance as only foster youth who have the time, exposure to the invitation to participate, the desire to participate, and resources attended the interviews.

For this reason, a combination convenience and snowball sampling were implemented for this exploratory study. Those foster youth who have some continued association with the listed agencies would be most likely to participate. Those foster youth who are enrolled in one of the programs at the large local universities may also have more resources to participate. Those students at the large local universities may have experienced more success with foster care and be more willing to participate and share those positive experiences.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

A delimitation of this study included the specific urban location in the United States. This study focused on the former foster youth in a large southwestern city. This location may offer services that may not transfer or generalize to populations in other large urban areas in the United States. The services available in this urban location may not be comparable to those available in large urban areas in other states or international countries. Due to urban areas having higher concentrations of specific populations, resources are developed to service those populations. These additional resources are typically more readily available in urban areas as opposed to those available in rural areas or small towns.

A second limitation of this study was the population selected; specifically, foster youth who have been emancipated from the foster system. Other foster youth may have valuable insight into their educational experiences but were not included in this study, as

they have yet to reach the age of consent. Additionally, former foster youth who are incarcerated, hospitalized, or not yet emancipated were not able to participate in the study, but may provide data that is markedly different from those who did participate.

A third limitation considered those foster youth who have severe disabilities who may not be able to participate, thus limiting the scope of the exploratory study. These foster youth may have reached the age of majority, 18, but have not yet been emancipated because of the additional services available for youth with severe disabilities continues through the age of 21.

A third limitation included former foster youth who lacked the time to participate. To counteract this, the researcher continued the open recruitment over a nine-month period allowing for participants to select a convenient time.

Another limitation included those who are unaware of the study. To counteract this limitation, the researcher placed advertisements and flyers with contacted agencies, which may have continued contact with former foster youth.

Additional limitations included location or time limiting participation. Participants did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences in a focus group and only one proposed location was used for interviewing the participants. As demonstrated by the participants, sharing information in a focus group was not preferable and the method of data collected was changed to counteract the reluctance by conducting individual interviews.

Another limitation was the method of self-reporting. The participants were asked questions pertaining to their educational experiences as a foster child. There was no mechanism in place to check if the participants were in foster care or if the shared

experiences are true, so the researcher had to accept the perceived educational experience of the participant's comments as truth.

Finally, the advertisements in the two college newspapers may create bias in that those students who were successful in public school and who have enrolled in higher education may answer the advertisement. The educational experiences and viewpoints of these former foster youth may be markedly different from those who are not enrolled in higher education.

Settings

Three settings, the library at one of the universities, the conference room at a local agency, and a conference room in a local Professional Development School, were selected as sites for the interviews. The settings were selected for their close proximity to bus lines, ease in access to potential participants, and proximity to each other. Each of the settings was less than one mile from the other.

The library was selected due to close proximity for those students electing to participate after viewing the university advertisement (Appendix C) distributed to the large local universities. The conference room in the Professional Development School was selected for the same proximity reason, but gave those students who may not be familiar with the university's layout a less complicated location to navigate. The local agency was also selected for proximity, and gave the participants a non-school related location in which to participate.

Setting One

An auxiliary room in the library on the campus of the local university, served as a potential setting for the interviews to be conducted. The auxiliary room of the library was centrally located on the campus and is in close proximity to the contacted agencies. The room contains one large conference table surrounded by twelve chairs. This arrangement supports ease in interviewing. No participants used this location to be interviewed.

Although no participants chose this location, two meeting dates were secured to allow for participant flexibility that occurred during one calendar week. These two meeting dates occurred at 6:00 p. m. on Monday and Tuesday. The meeting dates were secured through the reservation of the space at the library.

Setting Two

The second location available for participants to meet was a conference room in a local agency serving children in foster care. Located on a bus line, this three-story office building is easy to find, has ample free parking, and is in close proximity to the contacted agencies. The conference room contains a large rectangular conference table with twelve chairs for ease with interviewing. No participant used this facility.

Although no participant used this location, two meeting dates were secured to allow for participant flexibility that occurred during one calendar week following the first focus group meeting scheduled at the library. These two meeting dates occurred at 6:00 p. m. on Monday and Tuesday.

Setting Three

The third meeting space was at a local Professional Development School. Eight of the participants selected this location for their interview. Two additional participants were interviewed by telephone. The elementary school is on the city bus line, has free parking, and is in close proximity of the contacted agencies.

Participants chose the time most convenient for the interview and the researcher accommodated each request. Initially, two meeting dates were secured to allow for participant flexibility and occurred during one calendar week. These two meeting dates were scheduled for 6:00 p. m. on Tuesday and Friday reflecting the schedules for the previous locations.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this exploratory study was a self-contained method, the interview, which served as the principal source of data (Morgan, 1997). Interviews served as a primary means in data collection (Morgan) to explore new research from the research participant's viewpoint. The researcher served as the interviewer and supplied questions in an interview setting. The interview questions for this study were (a) What can the foster child tell about his/her educational experiences as a foster child? (b) What were the educational experiences of the foster youth? (c) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster child when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (d) What did the teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community? (e) What did the foster youth think the most interesting topics were in the interview? (f) What does the foster

youth hope will happen as a result of participation in this study? (g) What does the foster youth hope educators do differently, if anything?

The researcher's questions provided the focus and the data were generated from the interviews. The interview questions were developed to ask participants about their educational experiences. The topics, including educational experiences, transitions into and out of the classroom, and teachers were selected due to the lack of academic research on these topics. The researcher developed the interview questions based on the topic areas. Using a semi-structured phenomenological interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), the researcher conducted an interview while digitally recording the conversation. Additionally, the researcher took field notes, for further documentation, including data on body language and facial expressions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

A research assistant trained by the researcher was present at the first three interviews. The research assistant took detailed field notes. These notes matched those of the primary researcher with 90% accuracy giving the exploratory study internal validity. After the change from focus groups to interviews, and the notes of the researcher and research assistant were compared, it was determined that a research assistant was not needed when conducting interviews. This was reflected in the amended proposal submitted to the IRB.

At the conclusion of the first three interviews, the recorded conversation was transcribed verbatim. Anecdotal notes were added to each interview from the field notes. Each interview was coded and the data were reduced to include the codes. After submitting changes to IRB, three more participants were interviewed, transcribed

verbatim, anecdotal notes added, and codes identified while the data were reduced using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant-comparative method. Two more interviews were conducted using the same procedure. The two participants interviewed by telephone did not have anecdotal notes as the researcher was recording the interview and talking to the participant on the phone. The constant-comparative method was used to develop themes after the completion of the interviews.

After the transcripts were completed, each participant was given the chance to read their portion of the transcript for accuracy. Each participant was given the opportunity to retract or elaborate on his or her comments. No participant amended, elaborated, or retracted interview comments.

Materials

Materials for this exploratory study include iPad®'s Speech2Text® software installed on an iPad®. An iPad® is a tablet computer developed and marketed by Apple Inc.® primarily as a platform for audio-visual media including books, periodicals, movies, music, games, and web content (Apple, 2011). The Speech2Text® application on the iPad® recorded digitally record the conversations during the focus interview and transcribe the conversations through the Speech2Text® software application (Apple, 2011). Additional materials included writing utensils and a notebook for each researcher was used for recording antidotal observations including facial expressions, gesticulations, body posture, and speech intensity.

The iPad®'s Speech2Text® software installed on an iPad® was ineffective in collecting more than one person's speech pattern. The second recording device, an iPod®'s digital recording, was used to transcribe the participant comments.

The Professional Development School each had the table and chairs needed to conduct interviews. Permission and scheduling was procured from the site and the researcher arranged the tables and chairs for ease in the discussion during the interview. The researcher also created signs as needed to direct the participants to the exact location in the building.

Confidentiality

As the participants entered the interview room, each was given a consent form (Appendix D) to read and sign. The participant was also given a demographic sheet (Appendix E). The consent form was marked with a control number that corresponded with the demographic sheet. From that point on, the control number on his or her demographic sheet referred to each participant. Only the researcher knew the identifying information. These forms were kept in a locked file cabinet at the local university at which the study was conducted and will be subsequently destroyed after five years.

Design and Procedures

As the participant arrived, the research assistant was at the entrance of the building providing directions to the exact location in the building while the researcher handed out the consent letters and demographic sheets. Both researchers greeted each of the participants and thanked them for their willingness to share their experiences. This

was the case for the first three interviews until the research assistant was removed in the amended ethics proposal.

During each session, the participants received a consent form (Appendix D) to sign to participate in the research study. This letter explained the nature of the study and supplied the necessary permission for each participant. Each participant was given a demographic sheet to complete (Appendix E). This information was used to compare age or gender. The demographic sheet received a number that corresponded with the consent letter and all additional identifying information was removed. From that point on, each participant had a number to identify them. For example, the first interviewed participant would be coded as P1.

The researcher provided an introduction to the study, by informing the participant that there was an interest in aspects of foster care from the perspective of the foster child, in this case, a former foster child. The researcher informed the participant that he or she might choose to participate or not participate in any and all questions. The participant was also informed that his or her conversations would be included in the dissertation. Individual comments could be included in the body of the research in the form of the dissertation, publications, or presentations as direct quotes.

The participant was informed that he or she will be contacted after the transcription is complete and invited to meet with the researcher to reread their transcribed comments to specific questions. On each transcription, the question was listed in addition to the comments made to that question by each participant. Participants had the opportunity to retract their statement or elaborate on each of the questions. Each

participant signed a transcription review sheet (Appendix F) to give permission to use his or her comments in the study.

The researcher disclosed background information including experience as a doctoral student, therapeutic foster parent, and teacher. The participants were informed that the researchers took field notes during the session that indicate facial expressions, body position, or body language. All field notes were included in the transcription and were available at the time of the participant's review.

For the first three interviews, the research assistant was introduced. The participants were informed that the research assistant was needed to add validity to the study; in other words, both researchers' notes were compared to see if they agree. They were also told that the research assistant was taking additional notes on facial expressions, body position, or body language. The notes were used in the research to add to the transcription. For example, if a participant raised his or her hands up after making a comment, when the comment was transcribed, the additional body language note was added in parenthesis to give additional meaning to the participant's comments.

The participants were informed that in addition to the note taking, their voices were recorded on two systems; Speech2Text® and an iPod. ® The researcher informed the participants of how the Speech2Text® software works, as well as the iPod® use as an additional source of data collection, adding validity and accuracy. Having both recordings allowed the researcher multiple sources for transcription purposes.

Each participant was asked to say a first name and location to test the recording clarity and to demonstrate what the collection data will entail. The recording was played back for the participant to hear.

The researcher asked each question for the research study (Appendix A). Each of the seven questions was asked. Time was given to allow the participant to reply to the question. Additional probing questions (Appendix A) were to gain information about the question or to indicate to the participants that more information was added to the question being discussed. At the end of the questions, the researcher concluded the interview by asking the participant, "What do you think was the most interesting topic or idea that was part of the discussion tonight?" The researcher stated that hearing as many perspectives is important.

When all of the questions were posed, and the discussion concluded, the participant was thanked for his or her time and willingness to participate. After the participant left, both researchers wrote a memo to record initial insights about the session. After the first three interviews, only the researcher completed the memos. According to Wolcott (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006), "writing notes, reflective memos, thoughts, and insights is invaluable for generating the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative" (p. 161). If appropriate, the antidotal memo was integrated into the field notes and transcriptions to further enhance understanding of the conversation.

Analysis

Analysis of the data initially took into consideration the individual. The transcriptions of the interviews were completed and reviewed. The field notes were integrated into the transcriptions to add to the descriptions of body language, voice intensity, and gesticulations for each participant.

Organizing the Data

Initially, data generated by the 10 interviews were organized by date and location. The researcher took the transcripts, anecdotal memos, and field notes and merged them into one document with the verbatim conversation. Following this, the memo comments and field notes were added to the body of the conversation.

At the conclusion of the verbatim transcription, each participant's comments were printed for him or her to read and make alterations as necessary. Participants were given the opportunity to add or retract information.

The data were not entered into the Atlas.ti software program to manage the analysis of the data as the enormity of the focus group data were not realized. Each interview was coded by hand as a separate event thus creating 10 events for comparison and coding.

Immersion in the Data

Reading and rereading all of the transcripts, memos, and field notes that had been combined into one document immersed the researcher in the data. Each of the individual comments, and themes emerged through the process of looking at and analyzing the data.

During this stage, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "careful attention to how the data are reduced is necessary. In some instances, direct transfer onto pre-developed data recording charts is appropriate" (p. 158). Ten interviews generated a large amount of verbatim data. The data needed to be reduced into themes and codes. At the initial stage, reading the data and developing general codes, the data were reduced very little, but an initial set of codes began to emerge.

Generating Categories and Themes

In an effort to avoid forcing data into preconceived categories, coding the recurring ideas of the interviews and uncovering these themes during the process of coding allowed the participant's views to shape the research. Morgan (1997) suggests beginning with a detailed examination of one or two interviews before applying the resulting codes to the remainder of the group.

After reading two interviews, the researcher noted all occurrences of a mentioned topic or code by each individual participant. The researcher read the remainder of the participant transcriptions in groups of two to identify those codes in each.

The researcher took into consideration the final question posed to the individual before departing to assist in the initial formation of categories, themes, and codes. The question, developed by the researcher, "what was their impression of the most interesting part of the discussion?" aided in generating a list of possible categories or themes that could be used for developing codes in the research data.

Coding the Data

Coding the data provided the emerging categories and themes in a formal structure. Codes represent the abbreviations of each of the categories and themes that have been expressed by the participants. For example, a theme that may come out of the data could be the miscommunications that occur between teachers and foster youth. This could be coded MIS: TFY

During this period, the researcher was reducing the data into smaller pieces of information that was used to gain insight and meaning into the individual participants. This lead to the researcher finding a code that is not shared by any of the other

participants and may be a line of research to pursue subsequently or to report as an outlier or as a unique contribution by a participant.

After all of the codes were applied, key points of the findings were generated. These key points were addressed critically to assess bias in construction of the codes, or if they were natural extensions of the interviews. Looking critically at the individual codes provided opportunities to find alternative understandings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher identified findings from the data and described them in a way that justified the inclusion of the code, not as a personal bias, but as a legitimate response from the interview.

Summary

The open recruitment period of nine months and change in data collection method from focus group to individual interviews demonstrated the reluctance of children formerly in foster care to participate in research. However, participants who were interviewed were forthcoming with information regarding their experiences. The next chapter summarizes the findings from the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize data collected about the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care. The interview questions for this study were (a) What can the foster child tell about his/her educational experiences as a foster child? (b) What were the educational experiences of the foster youth? (c) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster child when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (d) What did the teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community? (e) What did the foster youth think the most interesting topics were in the interview? (f) What does the foster youth hope will happen as a result of participation in this study? (g) What does the foster youth hope educators do differently, if anything?

Recruitment

Recruitment began with advertisements placed in two university newspapers, with a combined enrollment of over 40,000 students. Both universities are located in a large urban city in the southwest of the United States. After the placement of the advertisements, a total of four participants contacted the researcher for more information on the study. All four were scheduled for an interview, but of the four, only three were interviewed despite rescheduling the fourth participant's interview twice. Attempts were made by the researcher to accommodate participant's schedules including rescheduling one participant three times before an interview occurred.

After three months, only three subjects were interviewed, so an amendment to the recruitment process was submitted to the institutional review board (IRB) in an attempt to increase the number of participants. This included flyers sent to sixteen local and national agencies (see Appendix B). Two of the letters were returned unopened leaving fourteen contacted agencies. The researcher continued recruitment for the study, however, after four months, no additional participants were recruited via the flyers.

During the eight months of open recruitment, the advertisement in the large southwestern universities' newspapers continued to be published. Three additional participants contacted the researcher and volunteered for the study. Each stated that they found the information in the newspaper. Snowball sampling (Morgan, 1997) provided four more participants. These four participants responded to a suggestion to participate from two previous participants.

Recruitment Sites

Three sites were identified and secured for the study, the conference room at a local Professional Development School (PDS), the conference room in the Curriculum Materials Library in the education building on the campus of a university in which the advertisement appeared in the newspaper, and the conference room of a local agency. Of the three, only the conference room at the PDS was used. Participants were given a choice of locations when scheduling the interview. Eight of the participants chose the PDS conference room. Two participants were unable to schedule a time to come to the university campus library or the elementary school so the interview was conducted by phone. One participant was scheduled for the elementary school conference room and

the university library, but did not keep either interview appointment and subsequently did not participate.

The conference room of the PDS appeared to make the participants comfortable. The relaxed posture and body language of the participants recorded in the field notes suggests the participants were comfortable with the conference room. The conference room provided no distractions to the interview process, as it is located in the school office with doors and window treatments closed.

Participants

During eight months of open recruitment, twelve participants contacted the researcher, of which ten were interviewed. The participants consisted of five (50%) males and five (50%) females. Additional demographic data were collected (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Data of Participants

Gender	Ethnicity			Age		
	African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	19-28	29-38	39-48
Male	0	4	1	1	2	2
Female	3	2	0	2	3	0

Due to the non-probability sampling methods (Morgan, 1997) the participants do not reflect the composition of foster care nationally (see Table 2) (AFCARS, 2011), nor do they reflect the total number of possible participants in the urban area. The state's

84

government website lists 3500 foster children in currently in care (Clark County

Government website, 2012).

Table 2

AFCARS Report: July 2012 Report #19

Ethnicity	Percentage
Caucasian	41%
African American	27%
Hispanic	21%
Other Races/More Than One Race	11%

Whether stigma, isolation or recruitment strategies prevented participants from

volunteering for the study, children formerly in foster care appear to be reluctant to talk

about educational experiences. The recruitment for the study remained open for nine

months. Again, both university newspapers reached approximately 40,000 students. The

fifteen additional agencies to which the recruitment flyer was sent services 3500 children

currently in foster care. These agencies are well established in the local community and

nation. No participants volunteered for the study as a result of the flyers. All participants

were recruited through university newspapers or through a suggestion to participate from

another participant. As stated in the limitations, participants may not feel comfortable

sharing their experiences because of perceived stigma, lack of access to knowledge of the

study, lack the financial means, or lack of transportation to participate.

Proposed Sample

The proposed sample for this study was former foster youth 18-24 years of age. Convenience sampling, through the advertisements in two local university newspapers and snowball sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), in which identified cases of interest come from people who know others who also were emancipated foster children, garnered only 30% of the participants in the proposed 18-24 year-old age range. These convenience and snowball sampling also produced 60% of the participants responding to the advertisement in only one university newspaper. The six participants who responded through the university newspaper may have more resources to participate, or experienced more success with foster care and were more willing to share those experiences.

The remaining participants were over the age of 24, including two subjects who were over forty. It may be that six of the participants who responded through the university newspaper may have more resources to participate, enough time may have passed to discuss the subject of foster care, or there was not a study for which they could participate prior to the current study.

Participant 1

Participant One, coded as P1 for the purpose of anonymity, is a thirty-six year-old woman who was in foster care for fourteen years and lived in a total of three placements. She has earned multiple college degrees. P1 answered the advertisement in the university newspaper and appeared to be comfortable talking about her experiences from age three to the present. Her interview lasted ninety minutes and included several references to teachers. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in college.

Participant Two

Participant Two, coded as P2, is a twenty year-old woman who was in foster care for nine years and lived in a total of eleven placements. P2 answered the advertisement in the university newspaper and appeared to be comfortable discussing her educational experiences. Her interview lasted sixty-five minutes and consisted of a discussion of self-advocacy, the importance of being treated like every other student, and the transition into adulthood. P2 discussed teachers who were influential in her high school graduation and subsequent college enrollment. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in college.

Participant Three

Participant Three, coded as P3, is a forty-two year-old man who was in foster care for fourteen years and lived in a total of two placements. Despite dropping out of high school, P3 completed a general education diploma (GED) and earned a college degree. P3 responded to the advertisement in a university newspaper. His interview lasted fifty-seven minutes and he appeared to be comfortable discussing his educational experiences. His interview contained descriptions of the foster care system.

Participant Four

Participant Four, coded as P4, is a nineteen year-old male who was in foster care for fourteen years and lived in a total of eight placements. He responded to a phone call from another participant's suggestion of participation and appeared to be comfortable discussing his foster care placements. His interview lasted fifty-one minutes and consisted of a discussion of what he interpreted as a normal educational experience in high school. P4 discussed positive aspects of remaining at a single high school while a

child in foster care. He did not comment on post-secondary schooling. At the time of the interview, he was an assistant manager at a fast food restaurant.

Participant Five

Participant Five, coded as P5, is a forty year-old male who was in foster care for seven years. He lived in a total of six placements, one of which was an institutional placement. P5 answered the advertisement in the university newspaper. He was concerned with anonymity, inquired about a telephone interview, and was interviewed via phone. Consent forms were read and emailed to the participant prior to the interview and he verbally agreed. The consent forms were subsequently mailed, signed, and returned to the researcher. The interview lasted forty-five minutes and included a discussion of negative educational aspects. P5 did not complete high school. In tenth grade he studied for and passed the test for a general education diploma (GED). He has since earned a college degree. He did not appear to be completely comfortable discussing his educational experiences as three of his answers started with the words, "I don't feel comfortable answering this." He did answer all of the questions without coaxing or coercion from the researcher. He hoped that by participating in the study he would ameliorate his negative feelings toward the foster care system and help other children in foster care.

Participant Six

Participant Six, coded as P6, is a thirty-two year old woman who was in foster care for seven years and lived in a total of three placements. P6 responded to a suggestion to participate from another subject. She appeared to be comfortable discussing her foster care experiences and her interview lasted seventy minutes. During

the interview, P6 discussed the support she received from her foster family and the teachers at school. She completed three semesters of community college and spoke of returning to college once her children have grown.

Participant Seven

Participant Seven, coded as P7, is a thirty-three year old woman who was in foster care for eight years and lived in a total of three placements. P7 responded to a suggestion to participate from another subject. She appeared to be comfortable discussing her foster care experiences and her interview lasted sixty-seven minutes. P7 discussed the support she received from a specific teacher. She also discussed being identified as having a learning disability. She was one of only two participants who discussed special education services. She did not comment on post-secondary schooling. At the time of the interview she was employed in the food industry.

Participant Eight

Participant Eight, coded as P8, is a thirty-four year-old male who was in foster care for ten years and lived in a total of six placements. He answered the advertisement in a university newspaper. He was not currently a student, but was considering going back to school. He became aware of the advertisement because he works near the university campus. He appeared to be comfortable discussing his educational experiences in foster care. He did not respond in the first person. He used "they" and "them" as opposed to using "I" when referring to his experiences. The remaining nine participants spoke of their educational experiences in first person. At the time of the interview he was employed in the construction industry.

Participant Nine

Participant Nine, coded as P9, is a thirty year-old male who was in foster care for eighteen years and lived in a total of nine placements, two of which were institutional placements. Participant Nine responded to a suggestion to participate from another participant. The interview lasted sixty-six minutes, during which, P9 appeared to be comfortable discussing his educational experiences. He discussed his foster parents and special education services during the interview. He was one of only two participants who discussed receiving special education services. At the time of the interview he was enlisted in the military.

Participant Ten

Participant Ten, coded as P10, is a twenty-two year-old woman who was in foster care for ten years and lived in a total of four placements. She responded to a suggestion to participate from another subject. She was unable to schedule an appointment due to her school schedule and transportation issues. She was interviewed via phone for forty-nine minutes. Her consent form was mailed, signed, and returned to the researcher. She appeared to be comfortable discussing her educational experiences that continue in post-secondary school. At the time of the interview she was enrolled in school to be a employed in the food industry.

Summary of Participants

Eight of the ten participants finished high school; the remaining two earned a GED. Six of the ten participants attended college with three (P1, P3, and P5) earning a degree, three (P1, P2, and P10) currently enrolled at the time of the interview, and three

(P3, P5, and P6) considering furthering their education. This is consistent with the study conducted by Pecora, et al. (2006) who recorded 84.4% of similar participants completing high school, but only 20% earning a college degree. In the current exploratory study, the researcher found 80% finished high school and 30% earned a college degree. Only two of the participants, P7 and P9 indicated they received special education services. The meta-analysis conducted by Scherr (2007) found that approximately 31% of foster children receive special education services. In the current exploratory study, only 20% self-reported receiving special education services.

Methodology

The proposed method for collecting data was a focus group format. When initially telephoning to inquire about the study, participants were cautious. They asked many questions about the structure of a focus group. The participants appeared to be hesitant to participate in a focus group. Participants asked about remaining anonymous and how that would be possible in a focus group. The researcher discussed the format of the focus group. Interviews were then offered to participants. Participants agreed to an interview with the researcher. Focus groups were not formed due to the lack of participant's willingness to discuss foster care topics in a group setting. The resulting format, written into the amended IRB documents, was individual interview. During the interviews, nine of the participants commented about how "uncomfortable" (P2, P4, P6, and P7) or "uneasy" (P1, P3, P8, P9, and P10) they were about the possibility of participating in a focus group.

Because the initial format was a focus group, a research assistant was included in the first three interviews. Field notes, analytical memos, and reliability checks of these interviews determined a stable interview was being conducted. After it was determined a stable interview was being conducted, the assistant was eliminated for the individual interview, this change was also included in the amended IRB proposal.

The researcher continued to use the same questions and probes developed for the focus group. The order of the questions remained the same. The fifth question, "what did you think the most interesting topics were in the discussion", appeared to be more difficult to answer in an individual interview. As the original question was developed for a focus group, the researcher used probes to connect the question to their interview. The question contained the word "discussion" rather than "interview." The question was rephrased to say, "what did you think the most interesting topics were in the interview." This was the only change in the question format required due to the shift from a focus group to individual interviews.

Interview Results

Seven questions were asked during the interview. Interview questions included (a) What can the foster child tell about his/her educational experiences as a foster child? (b) What would the foster child like educators to know about his/her educational experiences? (c) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster child when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (d) What did the teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community? (e) What did the foster youth think the most interesting

topics were in the interview? (f) What did the foster youth hope would happen as a result of participation in this study? (g) What did the foster youth hope educators do differently, if anything?

Interviews lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes, with a mean of 61.2 minutes. All participants answered each of the seven questions regarding their personal educational experiences. Using field notes and analytic memos, it was noted that participants, with the exception of P5, appeared to be comfortable answering the questions. P5 stated he was uncomfortable answering question two, asking him to discuss what educators should know about his experiences, and question seven, which asked him to discuss what he hoped educators would do differently. The researcher waited for his response and did not pressure him to answer. He did answer each of the questions after fifteen to twenty seconds of silence.

Participants did not discuss the topic of birth parents in regard to placement in foster care during the interviews. P6 and P7 discussed how their birth mother's drinking and staying out late affected their education. P6 stated, "I didn't go to school because my birth mom didn't make me – I think that is one of the reasons I got taken away and put in foster care." P7 stated, "My mom was out drinking every night and didn't get me up for school. I guess it wasn't important to her – so – it wasn't important to me." P6 and P7 attributed these behaviors to their entrance into foster care. P10 stated that her foster parents were more important to her than her birth parents because "I can count on my foster parents to help me. My birth parents – not so much." These were the only times birth parents were mentioned in respect to educational experiences.

Educational Experiences

After brief introductions, building rapport with the participant, and stating the purpose for the research, the participants were asked each question. The first question asked was "What can you tell me about your educational experiences?" The participants provided personal descriptions of their educational experiences throughout the interview. In reviewing the transcripts, recurring phrases became prevalent. These phrases, discussed in the subsequent sections, included adult supports from school staff members including teachers, foster parents, positive and negative school behaviors, and the normalcy of foster care as it related to school.

Adult Supports

Each participant mentioned having an adult interested in education during the interview. All ten of the participants indicated that an adult, such as a foster parent(s), teacher, coach, counselor, or Jr. Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) officer was important to them during school. The participants recognized strong memories of these adults who guided them through the educational process. These memories expanded into the following categories, foster parents and school staff to include teachers, coaches, a counselor, and Jr. ROTC officer. Additionally, the participants stated they used the skills learned from the adults to develop self-advocacy skills. These skills were used while the former foster child gained independence.

This question, "what were school experiences like", also garnered some responses about school in general. These responses were categorized as positive and negative educational impact and typical and atypical school experiences. The responses are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Foster Parents

When discussing educational experiences, participants were able to recall a specific adult in their life who was instrumental in providing educational success. Foster parents were mentioned by seven of the participants. Specifically, the comments about foster parents included how committed the participant felt his/her foster parents were to them remaining in one placement (P2, P4, P6, P7, and P9). As P2 stated, "I was in a stable place. Not for long, but long enough to feel loved."

P4 stated,

"My foster parents were committed to me. I knew I wasn't going to have to move once I got to their house. They wanted me to feel secure and do well in school. They went to my parent-conferences, my basketball games – everything a parent is supposed to do – they did it."

P6 said, "Well, my foster parents really wanted what was best for me. I felt like I was going to stay there until I was done with school. It was stable – nice – not chaotic like being with my birth mom."

P7 also discussed her foster parents support, when stating, "My environment was switched all around. It was hard at first, but after just a little while, I felt this placement – my last placement would be my last."

As P9 stated,

"My foster parents made my life easy. There were no surprises from them. They were stable in the way they handled me – and I was a handful. I had emotional issues, but they handled it – and me. I think they knew I needed a place to stay – really stay for a while and grow."

Foster parents were supportive in the educational role for the child in foster care. Five of the participants (P2, P4, P6, P7, and P10) stated that they felt their foster parent was committed to them. P2 stated,

"We were neglected for a couple of days at a time. We were bounced around between relative's homes for a while. Someone made the call and we were put into a foster home. Even though I didn't stay at that first one, I felt they were committed to getting me squared away. I was young, but I remember that feeling."

P4 also commented about the commitment of his foster parents when stating,

"I knew I wasn't going to need to move again. I felt like my foster parents were going to stand by me no matter what I did. I didn't get into any trouble, but I knew they were going to keep me in their house until I finished high school. It was so great."

Similarly, P6 stated,

"I stayed with the same family for all four years of high school. I knew my foster parents were supportive of me and my graduating high school – they pushed me to do well at school – my best – I didn't know how to study before I came to live with them – I was out on my own and didn't really care about my education – after I was placed with them – it changed. I became focused on school and my education. "

P7 commented about her foster parents. She said, "I was in the same placement during high school. It was a great place to be." P10 supported this statement during her interview with her comment, "My foster parents were with my educational process all the

way. They didn't stop – they wanted what was best for me – even though I didn't know what that was, they did."

Five participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P9) commented on the foster parents support of academic excellence. These participants also commented that they felt their foster parents were supportive. P1 discussed her early life in foster care when commenting,

> "I remember being in one of my first foster homes where there was a lot of reading going on. A lot of family time at the table, reading the Bible, and um, there were puzzles, and Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys books and that started my fascination with reading. It became an expectation in my foster home – all of them really – do well in school."

As P2 stated when discussing her foster parents, "It is tough being a foster kid and trying to graduate from high school. There are so many obstacles in your way that you kind of lose your drive, but luckily I had them to help me." She also stated, when discussing academic excellence, "Even if it was a C and that was the best I could do, that was good enough for them."

P4 also had foster parents who wanted an education for him and wanted the best for him as reflected in his comment,

> "My foster parents made sure I got my homework done. They checked on my grades and went to conferences when they were supposed to. So it was mostly my foster parents pushing me to do my best. And me, I did what I was supposed to do – you know – homework, studying, all that."

Similarly, P6 stated,

"They pushed me to do well at school – my best – I didn't know how to study

before I came to live with them – I was out on my own and didn't care

about my education – like I said earlier – after I was placed with them – it

changed. I became focused on school and my education."

P9 discussed his foster parent's educational commitment and expectations. He stated, "Even though I went to a school for kids with behavior problems – I was smart and my foster parents knew it and expected me to do well academically."

Two of the participants (P6 and P7) agreed that their foster families stressed skills for independence. Some of the areas of independence discussed included getting a job, budgeting, and saving money. P6 stated,

"My foster parents wanted me to be able to be independent. They helped me get a

job. I was a nanny – a glorified babysitter really – the mother – the one I

worked for – worked at home. I just drove the kids to appointments – took

them to the pool – did some chores around the house like making lunch,

laundry, dishes – that sort of thing while she worked at home. My foster

parents helped me figure out how to budget stuff – money management. It

helped me when I was ready to become independent."

P7 commented on a similar experience with her foster parents and independence when stating,

"I tried to get a job, but the social worker didn't want me to get a job and my

    foster parents had to convince her again that this was something that all –

    ALL – teenagers needed to do or have – a job. I got a job at a grocery

    store and took out the groceries to the cars. It helped me be responsible

    for money – my money – it was the first time I had my own money. It

    was so exciting."

Another topic discussed by three participants (P4, P6, and P10) was continued connection to their former foster parents. P4 stated,

"I still call my foster parents – they really are what I want as real parents –

    supportive – caring – and just parents – they are still there for me if I need

    them."

P6 commented on this topic, when she stated,

"I still call them and they call me – check on me and my kids – send me

    birthday cards – that sort of thing and it's been – hmmm – let me see – 8,

    no 9 years since I lived with them."

P10 discussed her foster parents when commenting,

"I still call my foster parents mom and dad because my real mom and dad

    don't do anything for me. I call them if I am having trouble. Even though

    I have been out on my own for a couple of years. They still make time for

    me. They still send me birthday and Christmas presents and invite me to

    holiday things. I still feel connected to my foster family."

School Staff

When participants discussed their educational experience, it was difficult for some of them to recall overall perceptions during their educational career. Seven

participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10) were able to recall a specific school related adult in his or her life who was instrumental in providing educational success. The school staff who were mentioned included a counselor, a drama teacher, an art teacher, a Jr. ROTC instructor, a fifth grade teacher, and football, softball, and volleyball coaches.

P1 gave examples of three teachers instrumental to her success. This participant first focused on a fifth grade teacher who "gave hugs and nurtured me." P1 also discussed a music teacher who "capitalized on my ability to sing." P1 stated that she was very shy, but the music really "brought me out of my shell." Her drama teacher also helped in "finding my voice." As P1 stated, "I was shy and through music and drama, I began to shine and people started to know who I was." She also stated,

"With regards to educational experiences, they have been very positive.

Simply because I channeled my own personal pain into doing something that would change where I was – so education became my focus. I knew that getting an education would help me. As far as the teachers who weren't helpful, I didn't really focus on them that much. It was hurtful, but I focused on my strengths and sought out those teachers that would support me and my strengths."

P2 discussed two school staff members and a counselor who were instrumental in her success. She discussed the counselor at length. She noted the counselor was "my cheerleader" when discussing schedules and advanced placement (AP) classes,

"As I was getting ready to start my senior year, I didn't do as well as I hoped my junior year – so I really pushed myself my senior year. I wanted to further my education. I made up my mind that I wanted to go to college. I

100

didn't want to go to a junior college, I wanted a bachelor's and then my

master's and Ph.D. I worked hard and took AP classes. I didn't pass all

of them, but when I wanted to drop them, I went to the counselor and she

reminded me of my goals and what I wanted to achieve – college – so I

didn't have a choice but to do my best. She really pushed me and kept me

going. They told me I could do it – and I did. They gave me goals and a

plan to graduate and reach those goals."

P2 continued with a discussion of her government teacher when commenting,

"My government teacher – I told her – at the beginning of my senior year – that I

was going to be one of those kids who got an A in her class. I didn't get

an A in her class, but during the year, when I wanted to drop the class –

she said – remember what you told me at the beginning of the year – she

said, "If you want to pass my class, you will need to work hard" and I did

– that's one of the things that motivated me to graduate."

P2 discussed another teacher who assisted her in school. She noted,

"I also had a history teacher. I had him my sophomore year. He was my AP

honors history teacher. I talked to him about going into a program for kids

who weren't doing too well. He told me that I didn't need to go into that

program – I could do a lot better. He was a tough teacher but from the

work ethic he built up in me – it has helped me in college."

P4 discussed a football coach, stating, "The football coach was supportive. He

was about the only one in high school who seemed to care about me." He also discussed

teachers as a whole. He was not specific when discussing a teacher, but stated, "I did

have some very good teachers and teachers that did care – don't get me wrong – I did have some very frustrated teachers. I wasn't an angel, but I did have some good teachers."

P6 discussed a high school art teacher. She stated,

"When my art teacher noticed I was pretty good at art – he got involved in helping me. He saw the artist in me and helped me bring that out. I had some extra time with him – he had a group of students – about five – who stayed after school and got some extra art instruction. It was also exciting when my foster parents framed my artwork and put it up in the house – not just on the refrigerator – real art in the house. I was really proud of my artistic talent.

P7 discussed coaches who were also classroom teachers who helped her. She discussed two different coaches at two different placements. She stated,

"I did have excellent coaches – at both schools. I had a volleyball coach that really pushed me and made me a better player – that was at my first school. At the high school in the city, it was my softball coach who really did a great job at bringing out my athletic side. The coaches were also my teachers. It really kept me self-motivated in their classes. I did my best in those classes – probably because they knew how to get me going – you know coached me."

P9 identified a Jr. ROTC instructor as being influential in school success when stating,

"I went to a school for kids with emotional disabilities all through my

elementary, middle, and part of my high school years. I was with the

same foster family for over four years and I told them I was ready to

change placement. They really gave me a stable environment for me to

get my act together. When I went to my next (and last) placement, I went

to a regular high school. I heard I could get into the ROTC program there.

I signed up and put all my craziness – my out of control emotions – my

frustrations into being a great future soldier. My ROTC officer took

notice of me and checked on me throughout the day. If I was having a bad

day, the ROTC instructor would take me out and I would do something

physical. They really saved my regular school life. I think that is why I

am a successful soldier today."

P10 discussed her culinary arts teacher at the vocational-technical school she

attended during high school. She stated, "I loved cooking – my teacher knew I loved

cooking – she pushed me to go into the culinary arts – that's why I am studying to be a

chef right now."

Self-Advocacy

Four participants (P1, P2, P7, and P9) stated that they were self-motivated to do

their best. They noted they focused on being successful. They used foster parents,

teachers, and other school personnel to support them, but ultimately, they, the child in

foster care, shouldered the responsibility for their success. P1 remarked, "I channeled my

own personal pain into doing something that would change where I was – so education

became my focus. I knew getting an education would help me." She also stated,

"I think that my intrinsic motivation is what pushes me. I think that it was the

teachers, social workers, and family, were people who came into and out

of my life at different times for a reason – but it was me who made the

difference."

P2 continued discussing topics of self-advocacy throughout the interview. She

stated,

"Yes, when I was in foster care, I saw a lot of foster youth who didn't even finish

high school and I didn't want that to be me – I mean my older sister got to

walk for her graduation, but she didn't really earn it – she got pregnant at

an early age – and my little sister wasn't doing so well – I wanted to be

that first person in my family that graduated from high school – I wanted

to own it – yeah – check out what I did – an A HA moment – and I'm

going to have that moment again when I graduate from college. You have

to work hard for it – I wanted to graduate from high school and college –

my parents didn't graduate from high school and I didn't want to not

graduate from high school."

P7 remarked about self-advocacy by referring to the process of foster care in her

life. She stated,

"I'm glad I am out on my own and don't have to do it again. Being a foster child

was traumatizing. It still affects me today. The feeling of being

abandoned by my own biological parents hurts. I feel that by me being in

foster care, I got more confidence – I had role models – my foster parents

that showed me how and what it was supposed to be like – what it is like to be a family."

P9 discussed his moving to a new foster family after five years in one placement. He stated,

"I was ready to try a new placement. I had learned these skills. I set a time to meet with my foster family to tell them – to tell them – I was ready to move to a new placement. It was my choice – and – they respected my choice. Finally telling adults what I wanted was the start of me being in control of my own life."

Positive School Behaviors

Five participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, and P9) noted that they did well in school. P1 stated, "I did well in school from the beginning." P3 remarked, "I did well in school – you know, As, Bs." P4 also commented, "I wasn't a behavior problem. I got pretty good grades – participated in class – did my homework – all the stuff you are supposed to do as a student." P6 replied to the question, "I did well in school – mostly As and Bs." P9 discussed his academics and stated, "Even though I couldn't always control myself emotionally, I was still a good student. I made the honor roll most of the time."

P1 and P6 commented how they used teacher recommendations to get involved in areas of talent. For example, P1 discussed her drama and music teachers when stating, "My drama and music teachers really nurtured my talents to sing and act." P6 discussed her art teacher stating, "Thank goodness for my art teacher – he really made a difference in my education."

P2, P6, and P7 stated that they enjoyed school. P2 stated, "I love school. I love learning." P6 commented, "I feel once I became a foster child, I felt better about school. I started to enjoy school." P7 remarked, "I was comfortable about going to school. Having to go to school every day was easier than I thought." They also stated that they felt as if they had to "prove themselves." P6 noted,

> "I guess I did feel like I had to prove myself sometimes – it was probably just me, but I think I did feel like I had to push myself a little more than other kids – to prove, at least to myself, that I was just like everyone else – not a foster kid."

P7 also noted the need to prove herself, when commenting,

> "I did feel like I had to prove myself a little – do my part like I just said. I wasn't an angel by any means – I did talk out in class a little, but not enough to really – REALLY get into trouble."

P1 also commented about needing to prove herself. She stated,

> "Because I was a foster child, I felt like I had to continually prove myself. I already knew of the life that I did not want because of what I experienced. That was one of the things that drove me and pushed me to excel."

P1 and P4 commented that school was a "safe haven." P1 said, "I needed school. It was my safe haven. I knew how everyone would act and react. It wasn't always that way at home." When discussing school, P4 commented, "I went there to get away from everything. It was a safe haven. I wasn't there for any goals – I wasn't even considering college for that matter. It was survival. I was just worried about going home."

Negative Educational Impact

Although graduating from high school and being gainfully employed or continuing onto post-secondary schooling is seen as being successful, the participants did not appear to feel personal success. P1 and P4 commented about early school years. P1 stated, "I remember being at the school and things being very difficult in half-day kindergarten." P4 said, when talking about the teachers at school during elementary school, "I didn't feel really supported in my education. I had to do it mostly on my own."

P3 discussed the stigma he felt during elementary school, "A little bit. Elementary school didn't go too bad. It was seventh through twelfth that was rough." P3 discussed stigma by stating, **"**I believe there is a stigmatism for, quote-unquote, foster children and sometimes you were made to feel that way at school." P9 commented, "I don't know if it was stigma for being a foster kid or being in a special school, but I did feel a little out of place sometimes."

P6 also noted the stigma from foster care, she stated,

"I guess I did feel like I had to prove myself sometimes – it was probably just me, but I think I did feel like I had to push myself a little more than other kids – to prove, at least to myself, that I was just like everyone else – not a foster kid."

P3, P6, and P7 commented that after each move, they had no connections to the previous school. P3 remarked about moving between middle and high school. He stated,

"When you look at my transcripts, at least academically, after I did pretty well in seventh and eighth grade, I did such a bomb in ninth and tenth – I went into eleventh and I didn't even make it through twelfth grade. I had

107

no connections to school because I moved so far away from everything I

knew. I basically gave up."

P6 also noted her feelings about her movement from one foster care placement to

another when saying,

"I guess when you were moved from placement to placement, I only lived in three

placements – the group home when I was taken away from my birth mom-

then the next placement lasted about a year – my last placement was for

the whole high school time. It was hard because I had no connections to

my old school – none of my friends came to my new school – it was hard

to start again."

P7 discussed moving from one foster home to another when noting,

"Then one day we got news we were going to another foster home. I was SO

upset. I had my friends, my boyfriend, my environment was switched all

around. It was hard at first, but after just a little while, I felt this

placement – my last placement would be my last.

P1 and P9 discussed acting out and talking a lot in class. P1 stated, "I talked a lot

in class" but continued by saying, "I knew I needed to get good grades or I would hear

about it at home." P9 stated, "I would get pulled out of class and redirected to start

learning. I usually waited about a half an hour before I really bothered to get back to

work."

Typical School Experiences

Once at their last placement, P4, P6, and P7 commented that having a stable life at

one home gave stability to school experiences. Before that, P4 stated, "I had been to

three middle schools and three or four elementary schools. I knew I was going to go to this school all the way through."

P6 commented,

"I didn't even come into care until I was twelve. I was on my own

most of the time. My mom didn't do much to make sure I was going to

school. Once I got into care, that all changed. I started to do well in

school. When I went into foster care, I believe it was the security, safety,

and love that made getting an education a breeze."

While P7 commented,

"Having to go to school every day was easier than I thought. I didn't go to

school too much when I was with my mom. It was great to be recognized

by the teacher when I did good. I started to love going to school."

Atypical School Experiences

Two participants did not complete high school. P5 was in a juvenile detention institutional setting during two grades in high school. P3 dropped out of high school in twelfth grade. Both participants have since obtained a GED and each has earned a Bachelor's degree. P3 stated, "At least academically, when you look at my transcripts, after I did pretty well in seventh and eighth grade, then I did such a bomb in ninth, and tenth, I went into eleventh, and I didn't even make it to twelfth."

As P5 commented,

"I was placed in an institution where many bad kids were placed. After I

got there I didn't go to school. I was given the choice to sit in my room or

work. I chose to work. In eleventh grade, I took the *state omitted*

109

Department of Education GED course with a group of other people. I

passed. I studied for that GED for about 90 days before taking the test.

I'm pretty sure that was not a normal school experience."

Another atypical educational experience was noted by P1 who commented on

abuse in her home, but not knowing if the school knew or did anything about it. She

stated, "I acted out in school and got into trouble, then more trouble at home, so I figured

out that if I was good at school, home might not be too bad."

P9 was also in an institutional-type school setting for part of his educational

career. He stated,

"I went to a special school for emotionally disabled kids. There were four or five

kids for every teacher. There was even an aide in the classroom. If I

didn't do what I was supposed to do, I went to what we called - The

Dungeon. We were redirected to start working after fifteen minutes. If

we did, we could earn our way back up to the classroom. I was in the

dungeon a lot for the first few months I was there - then I learned my

lesson. If I wanted stuff – like afternoon snacks and field trips, I had to

participate in class – so I stopped acting out.

Imparted Educator Knowledge

When asked about what they would like educators to know about their

experiences, seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, and P9) interpreted the question

as to whether the school and teachers knew they were a foster kid. Five participants (P1,

P2, P3, P5, and P10) commented on the lack of communication between the schools,

foster parents, and social workers. Each of these topics is addressed in the subsequent

sections in addition to feeling normal at school, the challenges of foster care, and personal feelings about school.

Knowledge of Foster Care

The seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, and P9) who interpreted the question to mean that teachers knew about the placement in foster care, provided personal descriptions what they would like educators to know.

P1, when discussing her teachers stated, "They knew I was in foster care."

P2 noted,

"For my first two years I went to *name omitted* High School and my counselor - she was supportive. She knew I was in foster care and I would go up to her and ask if I could drop out of these AP classes and she wouldn't let me do that - she knew I wanted to go to college so she said no – I had a really good counselor for two years. Whenever I needed help or when I needed to talk to someone about what was going on at home - my foster care situation – she always worked hard to help me and to make sure that I stayed in school and out of trouble."

P3 discussed classroom teachers from his perspective stating, "They just gave up – foster child – he's going to do what he's going to do."

P4 remarked, "In high school I was in one place with the same foster family, so I don't even know if the teachers knew I was in foster care. I just did what I was supposed to do."

111

P6 commented,

"Nothing, I just remember it being pretty normal. I didn't really think anyone
knew that I was a foster kid. I did love school. I guess I did feel like I had
to prove myself sometimes – it was probably just me, but I think I did feel
like I had to push myself a little more than other kids – to prove, at least to
myself, that I was just like everyone else – not a foster kid."

Similarly, P7 stated,

"Like I said, I don't know if any of my teachers really knew I was a foster kid – in
the beginning or at any time I was in care – I did have low self-esteem
some of the time – I felt out of place sometimes – I believe if my teachers
had recognized I could do it, I would have been more successful – not that
I feel unsuccessful – I think I would have been more successful – maybe it
had something to do with my learning disability – not having the
confidence when I started going back to school, but once I was back in
school, I felt safe and secure and was able to learn."

P7 stated,

"I was in a school for kids with severe emotional disabilities. I don't even know
if anyone in my class was in foster care – or if anyone knew I was in foster
care. We all had lots of issues we were dealing with – I wasn't the only
one."

In reviewing the transcripts, recurring themes became prevalent. These themes
included communication between foster parents, the school, and the social work agency,

wanting to be a normal kid, foster care challenges, and feelings of inadequacy in relation to school. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Communication of Foster Parents, School, and Social Work Agency

Five participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, and P10) commented on the lack of communication between the schools, foster parents, or social workers. P1 discussed how different it was to be a foster child and needing help. She stated,

"Things like meeting with a counselor – to be reminded that we are okay – I
needed that – I didn't get it. It was really hard – it was really an
adjustment – I needed help. When I would see the kids with their family
members. I had my family members, but the interaction with your birth
family and a foster family is different. No one really communicated with
anyone else. "

P2 experienced a lack of communication when she was placed in independent living for the first time. She stated,

"I switched schools between my junior and senior year – when I left my junior
year, I had no idea that I was going into independent living – in late July I
was told I was going into independent living – and at the time I was in the
summer program - I was living on campus – I had to move all of my stuff
into independent living – I remember I had to go on the last few days of
summer and go to my old school and withdraw and then register at my
new school. It was all me – no one told me about the move until the last
minute – you would have thought someone would tell me – the school, my
social worker – the courts – someone. They didn't."

P3 commented on the lack of communication between the adults in the life of the child in foster care. He said, "I don't recall the school ever communicating with the social worker." He also commented about the lack of communication in transitioning to adulthood. P3 wanted to go to college and receiving no help, he said, "I turned everything off. Everybody. Teachers. Parents. Everybody. No communication. If they weren't going to help me, I was shutting down."

P2 echoed P3's words in saying, "Everyone needs to get together and talk about it and plan. Academically – socially – even sports and other extracurricular things." P2 also commented "teachers needed to communicate with students."

P5 wanted everyone to communicate so that every kid could be helped. He stated, "My response to that question is really personal. I would prefer not to

> discuss it except to say that the two educators that I know personally did
> not help me in any way to prepare me for school or stress the importance
> of education – no one talked to me. I would think that educators would
> want to help every kid – especially one they were related to."

P10 commented, "I just wanted to be kept in the loop – tell me what is going on – I know – on some level I can't do anything about it – but just tell me what you are planning."

Feeling Normal

Five participants (P2, P4, P6, P9, and P10) stated that they just wanted to be treated normally. They did not want to be singled out as being in foster care. P2 remarked with emotion when addressing this topic. She stated,

"My senior year my teachers knew that I was in independent living. They kind of

built up a plan – they weren't lenient – because I didn't want that to

happen – they knew I was going through a lot of stuff at home so if I was

tired or if I seemed a little distracted – it was because I had a lot of stuff on

my mind - they knew what was going on. During my first three years of

high school, I didn't want them to know that I was in foster care – not as a

shameful thing, but I wanted to be treated like everyone else – I didn't

want any special treatment. That was something that bothered me my

senior year. They knew that I was in independent living and they were a

little easy on me – I'm the same student as everybody else I just have a

different background– if I am going to work for my grade – I don't want

you to cut corners or make my assignments easier for me – I want you to

be as difficult with me as you are with everybody else because it isn't

going to happen in college. The professor isn't going to say, "Oh, you are

a former foster kid – I'm going to go easier on you." NO! This is the real

world – you want people to treat you the same – don't let me slack off

because for me to accomplish what I want – to get where I want to go – I

need to be treated like everybody else or it isn't going to happen at all."

P4 stated, "I don't think anyone knew I was in foster care. I came into the high

school on day one with all the other ninth graders. I just wanted to be a normal kid."

P6 discussed the transition from her birth family to a foster family and the

differences she encountered by stating,

"Well, I didn't want to be singled out because I was a foster kid – I wanted to be

     treated like everyone else, but I wish my teachers would have taken more

     time with me. Thank goodness for my art teacher – he really made a

     difference in my education. You know – I already talked about my birth

     mom drinking a lot. She was a heavy drinker. I had to go to school in my

     foster care placement – I need a little time to adjust. I guess that

     adjustment time was what I needed – or obviously didn't need because I

     did just fine. I needed time to adjust – I felt abandoned by my birth mom.

     She only seemed to care about drinking. The adjustment was a little

     difficult after being on my own for so long."

P9 said, "I was in a special school. For all I know, all the kids in my class were in care, but that didn't matter to our teacher. She held us all to the same standards academically and behavior."

As P10 said when talking about her teachers, "Even if I didn't get an A, I wanted my teachers to build a work ethic up in me. I wanted them to make me feel successful." P10 also commented, "Don't make it easy for me just because I am in foster care – challenge me."

Foster Care Challenges

Three participants (P6, P7, and P8) discussed challenges while in foster care. P6 discussed her home life before coming into care. She described not going to school, "due to my birth mom's heavy drinking." Before she was removed from the birth family, she said, "I was only twelve, but I was on my own and stayed out late. I didn't go to school, so when I went into care, going to school was a bit of a shock. I needed time to adjust."

116

P7 talked about having "low self-esteem." She said, "I believe if my teachers had recognized I could do it, perhaps I would have been more successful." P7 also commented that after a few months in school, "I felt safe and secure and was able to learn."

P8 spent time discussing the differences between east and west coast schools. He felt there was a different standard expected in the east coast with more emphasis on learning. "West coast schools did not seem as rigorous as east coast schools," he said, "I didn't know what to do when I walked into the classroom on the west coast. It was so different from *east coast state omitted*."

Personal Feelings About School

Four participants (P1, P5, P6, and P7) remarked how different it was to be in school in relation to being a child in foster care. When discussing what was happening in the foster home, P1 said, "I was having a lot of problems at home. It would have been good if we could have talked to someone about our feelings. I needed an outlet."

P5 commented, "I felt like a failure. I needed a different kind of help."

P6 said, "I felt abandoned by my birth mom. She only cared about drinking. I had difficulty adjusting to school after being on my own for so long."

P7 discussed how moving from foster family to foster family made it difficult to be successful in school. After moving to the placement in which she would stay throughout high school, she commented, "After getting stable in my foster home, school went a lot better."

Changes In Educator Behavior

When asked what the teachers could have done differently to assist the
participants when they first arrived in the classroom or when moving to another
placement, the responses varied. Responses, discussed in the subsequent sections, to this
question included not wanting the teacher to know that they were in foster care,
communication, making the participant feel special, and the trauma of moving from
placement to placement.

No Knowledge of Foster Care

P2 discussed how she did not want teachers to know she was in foster care. She
stated, "I didn't want my teachers to know I was in foster care. I wanted to be treated
like everyone else." P2 also discussed her high school's senior year. She said, "My
senior year, the teachers knew I was in care. I still didn't want them to cut corners or
make it any easier."

Four other participants (P4 P6, P7, and P10) noted similar feelings about school
personnel knowing about foster care placements and agreed with P2. P4, when
discussing what his teachers, said,

> "Well, I wasn't bad at school. I was - I didn't act bad at school. I acted like a
>> normal kid. Didn't advertize that I was in foster care. Like I said, I don't
>> even know if anyone knew that I was in foster care. I wanted to be a
>> normal kid. It wasn't anyone else's business if I was in foster care. My
>> foster parents treated me like their birth kid so maybe the school didn't
>> even know. Plus, I was at the same school for all of high school. I didn't
>> change schools at all."

P6 had similar comments and stated, "Well, I didn't want to be singled out because I was a foster kid – I wanted to be treated like everyone else, but I wish my teachers would have taken more time with me."

P7 also commented about teacher's knowledge about her being in foster care. She stated, " I don't think anyone even knew I was a foster kid – except that my foster parents were so young – it kind of shocked some people."

As P10 stated, "I don't think anyone at school knew I was in foster care. I didn't change schools when I went into care. I stayed in my same high school."

Communication

Communication was discussed when participants were asked what they would like their teachers to know about their foster care experiences. P1 wanted the school and social system to work together. She said, "If the social work system and the teacher would have communicated more, perhaps what was going on at home wouldn't have happened."

 P3 stated,

"What could my teachers have done differently? Communication. Everyone needs to get together to talk about me and plan for me. Communication and caring – that's what I needed. Nobody talked to me – nobody communicated. Nobody encouraged me to do anything – get good grades, sports, make friends – nothing – nobody."

P10 said,

"I just wanted to know what was going on. Most of the time I just did what

everyone told me to do. Sometimes I didn't even know what was going on in the classroom and the teacher didn't really seem to care."

Classroom Acceptance

When discussing what teachers could have done to change how they accepted children, P1 and P5 were the only two participants who commented. P1 said, "It varied from one teacher to the next, but I will always remember the ones who made me feel special."

P5 had little to say about changes in teacher behavior. He did state, "Some of the teachers were so nice. I wanted them very badly to adopt me and get me out of the cycle I was in."

Placement Changing Trauma

Each of the participants mentioned the trauma of changing placements. P7 spoke about moving and how educators can change. She stated,

"I don't know if teachers even realize how traumatizing it is to move

placements. All new parents – brothers or sisters – new school with all

new friends – having to start all over – *AGAIN!* It is hard to describe how

– well – hard it is. I'm glad I am out on my own and don't have to do it

again."

P4 also wanted teachers to understand how hard moving was and how teachers could make a difference in the move. P8 stated, "If the teachers could just take a little bit of time to get to know us – ask us a few questions – let us introduce ourselves to the class – take away some of the mystery – the move might be easier."

P5 discussed placement changes and stated, "I just felt like a failure. Every time a placement didn't work out, I felt like a failure. Then the institution – failure."

Welcoming Educators

Question four asked participants to think about what educators did to make them feel welcome in the classroom. Although each participant answered, this question garnered very few responses. The responses were limited and as a result, subcategories were difficult to discern.

As P1 stated, when discussing what teachers did to help her feel welcome,

"No, actually, one of the positive aspects of – they just treated us as part of the class – just let us settle in and get to know the class and the kids in the class. A lot of the teachers had flexible grouping – and many of the teachers paired me with another student to get me acclimated to the classroom environment. But it was pretty much – come on in and we would get started."

P5 discussed a time when he felt welcomed. He stated, "I earned enough script or privilege to work with a teacher at making something. It was nice to do something constructive."

P8 stated,

"The best thing – no matter what time of the year you started in the classroom – no differences when you start – in the beginning it is always easier – it has nothing to do with the dynamics of the school and classroom – it has to do with entering the classroom and feeling engaged. If the teacher can

121

introduce himself to the new student and give the new student time to introduce with a set of questions with my likes and dislikes - there is no mystery with the new student – they know who they are – pair them with another student – and break down the barrier of being new – the student will fit in and feel – pretty much instantly – a part of the class."

As P10 stated, "When the teacher gave me a list of questions and gave me a few minutes to think about the answers, I could tell the students in my new class a little bit about me and it felt good to do that."

Four participants (P1, P2, P6, and P7) stated that their teachers did nothing special to welcome them to the class or make the transition to the next placement. P1 noted that she did not remember anything special when stating,

"Maybe the teacher would have a one-on-one conversation – finding out what my interests were. How I like or what I liked about my last school and if I did well. I think just general questions that just let her get to know me, but being so young, it's hard to say what someone else would have done."

P2 was emphatic when talking about being treated equally. She stated,

"The teachers were - specifically my government teacher – she gave me a goals list of everything I wanted to accomplish for each semester but other than that it just they treated me like everyone else. I was in the same league as my other peers. That was my request – we can make goals – and I can talk with the teachers with the counselor as the mediator – but I want to be treated like everyone else."

As P6 discussed the question, she stated,

"I don't think so. I came into the high school as a ninth grader and went on to

graduate from the same school. My life was pretty stable. I don't even

know if the teachers knew I was in foster care – they probably did, but

didn't make a big deal out of it."

As P7 commented,

"Teachers treated me no different in any of the schools I attended as a foster child.

Teachers did notice at times that I struggled in some academics. The

teachers provided me the skills to promote my learning. Like I said – I

came in at the beginning of the year and except for sixth grade, I was at

the school for the whole time. I was at my middle school for seventh and

eighth grade and then moved to a new foster home for ninth through

twelfth grade. I don't remember the teachers doing anything to make me

feel welcomed. There were lots of new students in the classroom since the

city high school had three feeder middle schools."

P1, P4, and P6 said they just remember being treated like the other students. As

P1 stated, "No, actually, one of the positive aspects of – they just treated us as part of the

class – just let us settle in and get to know the class and the kids in the class." P4 had a

similar response, he stated, "Not that I know. I stayed through high school in one spot."

As P6 stated,

"I don't remember anything for me. I do remember when a new kid would move

in, the teacher would simply announce that they were a new student and

get on with the lesson. I started each of my placements at the beginning of

the school year – the same time as most of the other kids – so no one

expected me to be a foster child. There were no differences in the way the

teacher treated me compared to a student that lived with their bio-family."

The response from P3 was unique from the other participants. He stated, "I did

have some very good teachers and teachers that did care – don't get me wrong. I did

have some very frustrated teachers. I wasn't an angel, but I did have some good

teachers."

Most Interesting Topic

When participants were asked, what did you think the most interesting topics

were in this interview, participants had to think about this question before responding.

Because the questions were developed for a focus group, question five appeared to be

more difficult to answer. Thinking about the most interesting topic each participant

discussed did result in short responses from P5 and P8. P5 stated, "It was all interesting."

P8 stated, "All of it."

Longer responses were recorded from the remaining participants. P1 stated,

"Thinking about what worked for me in school – I want to alleviate problems for other

people. I want to let them know that education helped me and it can help anyone else in

foster care."

P2 commented, "The most interesting topic for me was thinking about how I

needed to advocate for myself. How – if I didn't do it for myself – nobody maybe would

have stepped in to help me."

P3, who was concerned with anonymity, but still felt compelled to participate when noting, "I think giving a voice to foster children, but being able to remain anonymous is important. For so long, no one has heard us." He continued, "That's why I'm P3 so I can say these things and be anonymous."

P4 stated, "I was thinking - dealing with everything and getting through it is the hardest part – you will be proud of yourself when it is done." He also stated, "It feels like you are never going to be out on your own. That no one knows what you are going through. That's what I think is interesting about being in foster care."

As P5 stated, when discussing how his institutional placements were different versus being in a typical classroom,

"Again, I was rarely in the school system. I was in the institutional setting. I
do remember one time having enough script to participate in a special
activity with one of the staff people at the institution. We did some arts
and crafts projects. I remember thinking how nice it was to be doing
something constructive and participating in a positive way."

As P6 stated,

"I think – for me – it was thinking about if I was treated differently. I don't think
I was. I also think that thinking about how important my art teacher was –
was interesting. I helped him with extra projects, too. I guess between art
and sports, I was accepted at school. The only thing that was different was
that I was living in a foster home. I didn't mention it before, but my house
was the house that everyone came to – my foster parents were both home
every evening and my foster mom cooked – she cooked for me and some

125

of my friends – it seemed like I always had a friend or two over for dinner.

My foster parents didn't just help me – they helped my friends, too. I was

really lucky to have had them in my life. That's what I was thinking."

When discussing what was the most interesting topic discussed, P7 stated,

"I guess thinking about how important education is and how – if it wasn't

for my foster parents pushing for a regular high school experience

– for me and my sister – I don't know if it would have been – you

know – foster care – positive. I guess I was pretty lucky to have

foster parents who were on top of it. They knew what I needed to

do to be successful – I would like to be more successful – not

worry so much about bills and stuff – but I have a job, I can take

care of myself and my kids – I can make it."

P9 thought for thirty seconds before stating,

"I was lucky to have foster parents who let me have a stable life just when

needed it. I was eleven when I got to their house and stayed until I

was almost sixteen – five years – it was tough, but I was glad I was

at their house. I was really lucky."

P10 paused and stated,

"Realizing someone wanted to hear what it was like for me with my education

while I was in foster care. It was all interesting – but knowing you were

listening – that was important to me."

Results of Participation

When asked what the participants hoped will happen as a result of participation in this study, the participants stated varied reasons. Overall, each participant wanted to help other foster children who may be struggling with emancipation or with educational experiences. The responses, discussed in the subsequent sections, included communication, personal accomplishment, and releasing harbored anger.

Communication

In the area of communication, four participants (P1, P2, P3, and P9) spoke of the lack of communication between the social worker, school, and foster parents. P1 discussed a partnership and communication between all the adults representing a child in foster care's educational career. She spoke of the social work system when she stated,

"As far as, what I hope would happen, I would like to see more help to the child during transitions, either going from home to home, or getting ready to be on their own. The educational system should have a stronger partnership with the state and offer more support to the child – emotional support especially. If you don't have emotional support, you are dead in the water – how can you expect a child to do well if they don't have this?"

P1 continued by remarking,

"I do hope that actually that the state and the school system will have more of a partnership. I didn't even get to go to YMCA camp until I was 16. There were many programs that the state had for kids in foster care, but I didn't find out about them. More so I think just really taking an active interest in a person's development."

127

As P2 commented when discussing a positive educational experience for children in foster care, "For foster parents, family judges, and caseworkers to see how important it is. If the foster parents, social worker, and judges worked together to help you reach your goal – it will happen." She also stated, "I want it to make an impact because there isn't a lot of educational resources for kids in foster care and what they can do."

P3 commented that it felt like the social workers were like the characters in the movie, *Men In Black*. He said, "I don't want the social workers to come in like *Men In Black* and just take you somewhere. Separate you from your siblings. I want them to act like they care." He also discussed communication in a different way and stated,

> " I think that they should – this a real experience, my experience – I'm 42 years
>
> old and I've been in foster care since I was three. The information that
>
> you get – the next three-year old – I wish it was in place when I was
>
> little – but the information you get could really help."

P9 stated, "I just wanted everyone to talk to each other. So if anything – I would hope all the teachers, foster parents, social workers – everybody would talk to each other and do what is best for the kid."

Personal Accomplishment

When discussing education, all ten of the participants discussed how important it was to continue toward goals. Five (P1, P2, P4, P6 and P7) of the participants commented that setting goals keeps you focused to accomplish additional goals. P1 stated, "I think that my intrinsic motivation is what pushes me – I learned how to stand up for myself and so things changed at home a little bit. I learned how to not take what

people were just giving." As P2 stated, when discussing a positive attitude, "say you CAN do this and you CAN do this."

Additionally, P4 stated,

"I would hope that the kids in foster care would know that it gets better. I guess everyone says that, but it is true. It feels like you are never going to be out on your own. That no one knows what you are going through. It feels like it is all you with the support – or not – I know lots of foster kids that had little support from their foster family. I want kids to know that it is tough at the time, but they will get through it and be on their own before they know it. I'm happy to be on my own, my foster family set me up with the skills I would need – like managing money, getting and keeping a job. They even helped me find an apartment. Dealing with everything and getting through it is the hardest part – you will be proud of yourself when it is done."

P3 reinforced personal accomplishment by stating, "When you finish and you are out on your own, you will be proud of yourself." P1 also stated, "Education was my focus. It can be the ticket out of your current situation."

P6 and P7 had similar comments about personal accomplishments. They focused on being in control of their education, behavior, and keeping a stable foster care placement. P6 stated,

"I really want other foster kids to know that you are responsible for yourself. I

want them to strive to be better – always better – don't be part of the

system. Don't be the victim. You can do it – you can be a successful

adult. You must focus on your education, but you can do it."

When discussing the results of participation, P7 stated,

"Without all this that I had – I probably would not be where I am today. I didn't

think I would get through it sometimes, but I did. Foster care kids need to

know that it gets better. You don't have to be the victim. Be better. It

can be tough at times, but you will get through it. You'll be proud of

yourself when it is done."

Negative and Positive Feelings Regarding Foster Care

In responding to the questions during the interviews, participants were willing and

comfortable discussing foster care experiences. P5 was the most vocal about his negative

feelings toward his birth family and the social work system. He stated, "I participated in

this study to hopefully let go of my harbored anger and resentment toward my family and

the system – I felt like I was abandoned by everyone."

P3 stated, "Try to make a good match between the foster parents and the kids so

they don't have to move." Similarly, P8 stated, when discussing what he hoped would

change as a result of participating in the study, "I don't want the courts to move us so

much."

P7 was positive during her interview about her foster care experiences. She

commented, "Education is important. Without it, it is more difficult to succeed." P1 was

also positive about education, and commented, "I needed more emotional support. I

didn't get that." P2 also stated, "It would be good to have support groups on college campuses – to know you aren't alone – there isn't a lot of support on campus for me right now. You kind of feel pity for myself sometimes – but I get over it – I want there to be outreach."

As P10 stated,

"As a result of participating, I want other foster kids, foster parents, and social
workers to know I am valuable. I'm not going to college, but I am getting
more schooling through *school omitted.* Stop telling me if I am not going
to college, I am not valuable. We still need a path – a goal – something to
reach for."

Future Hopes For Educators

When asked what they hoped educators might do differently, the participants had many comments. This question provided a wide range of answers. Participants needed more time to think about answering this question than the previous questions. The participants appeared to want to make an impact on future generations of teachers, social workers, foster parents, and children in foster care. Participants commented about communication, education of the foster system, and fostering success.

Communication

Communication was a theme that was mentioned throughout the interview questions. Participants discussed communication as it pertained to educators and what they could do differently. P3 stated, when discussing communication when he was in foster care over 30 years ago,

"I don't think anyone communicated with the school back when I was in

foster care. I don't think there are any excuses now. With all the

technology, social workers, teachers – and foster parents for that matter –

should be able to communicate."

P1 discussed communication on a more personal level. She wanted teachers to be able to communicate with the student, " Have a one-on-one conversation with me. General questions – get to know me."

P4 stated,

"I could do without a whole day of testing. Sometimes it felt like the teachers

would gang up on homework – like they didn't know what the other

teachers were assigning – when you were in sports, church, family, and

you were swamped. I felt like they could communicate to each other more

about what they were assigning. It felt like sometimes - on top of

extracurricular activities – you were doing homework. Over all, my

experience was mostly normal. Outside of school was a little hectic -

going through foster care was stressful."

As P5 remarked,

"This question goes back to number two for me. I am related to two

educators and as I grow older, I feel – I feel an honest disappointment in

them for not explaining to me how important school really is. Instead they

stayed away from me with indifference – with fingerpointing – a finger

pointed at me wanting to always say that I was just a bad kid – I wasn't a

bad kid."

P7 wanted the teachers to know children in foster care can succeed, "I hope educators can take my personal experiences and share them with other educators. Educators need to know that foster children can and do succeed. I am proof."

Education About the Foster System

When discussing what educators could do differently, participants wanted the teachers to be more educated about what it is like to be in foster care. Two participants, P1 and P2, specifically discussed the lack of knowledge teachers seemed to have about foster care. P1 stated, "The teachers need to learn more about foster care." When discussing what educators needed to know about foster care, P2 stated, "They need to be more aware of it.

P3 wanted educators "to educate themselves. Find out how the system works and communicate. Reach out and talk to the social workers – the parents – see what is going on with the student."

P10 discussed how teachers did not really know that she was in foster care and when they found out, she stated, "I saw a slight shift in their attitude towards me. They didn't know who to contact – even though they had been working with my foster mom and dad for two years – it seemed like everything changed."

Fostering Success

When asked what educators might do differently for children in foster care placed in their rooms, P1 and P8 discussed how educators needed to focus on student strengths. P8 stated, "I wanted someone to see me as a person. I wanted them to acknowledge my strengths and talents."

As P2 also stated, when talking about teachers, "I wanted to know that it could be done. I wanted them to tell me I could do it." P1 also stated, "Push me. I can do it. Push me. I want to do it. Push me. I want to be successful."

As P6 stated,

"My experience in school was pretty normal once I was in foster care. I just appreciated that the teachers didn't make me feel weird because I was a foster kid. I still don't know if they knew I was a foster kid – and even if they did – I was treated like anyone else. I guess if you were moved around a lot and had to start a new school at a different time of the year than the beginning – I guess that might be a different story – that didn't happen to me – thank goodness – I was really in a stable environment. Really great foster parents – it was SO much better than staying with my birth mom. I remember thinking how mad I was that I couldn't stay with my birth mom, but after I was in care for a couple of months – I was thanking my lucky stars that I wasn't still in that situation. My birth mom couldn't take care of me – it was a real blessing to be taken out and put in a foster home. I just wish I could have stayed longer and finished college – I only took a few semesters before I decided I was ready to be out on my own – dumb – now – at the time, I thought I was ready to be on my own. I hope to go back when my kids are grown up. It'll be harder, but it will be worth it."

Summary

This chapter summarized the collected data from the transcriptions of interviews. The participants provided insight about their educational experiences, a topic based on academic literature, for which there is little information. As stated in Chapter 2, the lack of research about areas regarding education and the child in foster care demonstrates the need to continue researching. Giving a voice to children in foster care in their educational lives is an area of research that should continue. In Chapter 5, the collected data from this exploratory study are summarized and areas of need were identified.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and analyze the collected data obtained on the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care after graduation from high school from the viewpoint of the youth. Research questions included (a) How do youth emancipated from foster care perceive their educational experiences? (b) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement? (c) What did teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

To organize the data from the participants, codes were developed based on the perspectives held by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). All questions focused on what participants thought about their educational experiences as a child in foster care. Multiple words and phrases were common among participants these phrases were developed into the themes.

Event codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) were developed from the interviews as participants discussed movements in placement, emancipation, and living independently. Each participant had previously moved through these life events.

Participants met with the researcher for an interview that lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes. During the interview, the participants were asked questions specifically targeting their educational experience. Additional probes were used to garner information from participants regarding the topic of the individual questions. Following transcription of the audio-recorded interviews, six main themes emerged.

Themes

Six main themes were developed from the data contributed by the participants. a) There were supportive adults in the lives of the participants, which included school staff or foster parents. b) The effect of school behaviors, both positive and negative, and the relationship of those behaviors to placement stability. c) Feelings about school experiences including a feeling of normalcy and the inability to feel successful. d) School staff's knowledge of a participant while placed in foster care, which included knowledge of and no knowledge of being a foster child. e) The impact of classroom teachers was evident including if there was an easy or difficult transition into the classroom. f) Participating in the study to help children in foster care consider their educational process with subcategories including positive aspects of foster care, self-advocacy, communication, transition services, and ameliorating negative feelings.

Supportive Adults

The theme of supportive adults was developed based on the answers participants gave to the questions: What did teachers do to help you feel welcomed and part of the classroom community? And, what can you tell me about your educational experiences as a foster child?

When participants discussed their educational experiences, it was difficult for some of them to recall overall perceptions for their educational career. However, each participant was able recall a specific adult in his or her life who was instrumental in providing educational success. Of the comments made, five of the participants (P2, P4, P6, P7, and P9) recalled how committed and supportive their foster parent(s) were to

them and their education. Five participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P9) stated that foster

parent(s) wanted them to do their best academically and had high expectations for them

in the classroom. For example P2 stated,

> "It is tough being a foster kid and trying to graduate from high school. There are
>
> so many obstacles in your way that you kind of lose your drive, but
>
> luckily I had people to help me."

At school, six participants noted an adult who had high academic standards. The

teachers mentioned included a counselor (P1), a drama teacher (P1), a music teacher (P2),

an art teacher (P7), a vocational-educational culinary arts teacher (P10), a Jr. ROTC

instructor (P9), and a football coach (P3). Two participants considered school a safe

place in their lives. P9 stated it was "a place where you could be a student, not a foster

kid because you were abused. You were like everyone else – learning things in the

classroom." The participant's interviews highlighted the need for a supportive adult in the

life of a child in foster care. When a child in foster care has been removed from his/her

birth home and placed in foster care, each participant indicated a specific supportive

adult. When asked what you can tell me about your educational experiences, the

participants did not talk about the school building, friends, transportation, or the cafeteria

food. Their interview comments focused on the adults that impacted their lives during

the time they were in foster care, specifically teachers, counselors, and coaches.

Foster parents also were supportive in the educational role for the child in foster

care. Five of the participants (P2, P4, P6, P7, and P10) stated that they felt their foster

parent was committed to them. Participant comments noted the stability of staying in one

foster home during all four years of high school provided the emotional and educational

support needed. Those participants that commented about foster parents as their supportive adult recalled the educational support the foster parent gave including the structure to be successful in school. In addition to a school staff member, the support of a foster parent was also evident during the participant interviews. Indicating that having a supportive adult, whether at school or home, impacts the child in foster care positively.

Two of the participants (P6 and P7) agreed that their foster families stressed skills for independence. These two participants stated that they had to get a job, learn how to budget money for the things they wanted, and save money. Three (P4, P6, and P10) stated that they continued a connection to their former foster parents years after emancipation from foster care.

This theme, having a supportive adult, is one aspect of the study completed by Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003). The researchers found that children in foster care who did better in school, attended events like football games, and participated in sports, did so because they had an adult that the student felt was supportive. All ten of the participants commented on having a supportive adult during placement in foster care, indicating it to be an important factor in a child in foster care's life.

Effect of School Behaviors

Behavioral experiences in school included those that can be considered typical and atypical. The comments for this theme were derived from the questions What can you tell me about your school experiences? What would you like educators to know about your experiences? What do you hope educators do differently, if anything?

In terms of the subcategory of typical behaviors, five of the participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, and P9) stated that they were good students. P1 stated, "I did well in school from the beginning." P3 commented, "I did well in school – you know – As and Bs." P6 and P7 commented that they felt they had to prove themselves as a child in foster care. P1, P6 and P7 discussed their personal motivation to do their best and consistently performed well academically. P9 and P10 both commented that they tried to get into classes in high school that played to personal strengths. As demonstrated by P9 who said, "I tried to capitalize on what I did good in. I really enjoyed the Jr. ROTC program, so I threw myself into training." Both of these participants (P9 and P10) also mentioned that they loved school.

One participant stated that if life at home was good, life at school was also good. P3 stated,

> "If my foster parents were taking an active interest in school, I wanted to do my best. When my foster family stopped paying attention to my schooling, I stopped caring. I lacked motivation."

There were few atypical behaviors associated with school. Two of the participants did not complete high school (P3 and P5); one dropped out (P3) and the other studied for the GED and graduated out of school early (P5). However, both participants have completed college degrees. P5 discussed his route to getting a college degree,

> "It was a bit of a journey to get to that point. I wish I had done it the regular way – finish high school and then go to college. I didn't have the support during my education that I would have needed to do that."

140

Some behaviors were related to changing placements. Three of the participants (P3, P6, and P7) commented that when they moved to a placement in high school it was considerably further away from the last placement resulting in no continued social connections as they entered high school. P6 discussed, "My foster parents invited some of my old friends down for a sleep over weekend once a month." P6 said she only needed a few sleepovers until she realized, "I was making enough new friends – I didn't need to do the sleepovers any more."

No studies in current academic literature have specifically investigated the academic behavior of the child in conjunction with the stability of the placement. Only one study, by DeGarmo, Chamberlain, Leve, and Price (2009) studied the behavior of children in foster care with a severe emotional disability as it related to preventing placement disruption. In this study, the researchers offered training to foster parents in dealing with the severe behaviors exhibited by the foster children. The skills given to the foster parents through specialized training aided in fewer placement disruptions. Participants noted how important it was to stay in one placement during high school so avoiding placement disruptions may have been a concern.

Seven of the participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10) in the current study self-reported performing well academically, as well as remaining in the same foster home during their high school years. Of these seven, one completed a college degree (P1), one completed some course work toward a degree (P7), and one is currently enrolled in college (P2). Additionally, at the time of the interview, one of the participants was attending school to be a chef (P10), and one participant was in the military (P9). Three of the participants (P4, P6, and P8) did not report any higher education classes, but at the

time of the interview were employed and supporting themselves. Two of the participants (P3 and P5) did drop out of school, but subsequently obtained a GED and college degree.

Children in foster care may feel marginalized in school, however, by earning good grades, avoiding suspensions, and maintaining a current placement, stability in the foster home appeared to be a priority for the children formerly in foster care. These behaviors are typically categorized as positive school behaviors. There is a juxtaposition of views in the self-reporting of the participants stating they "liked school," "got good grades," and "made the honor roll," but still felt as if they were a failure. Having a stable environment was indicated by 70% of the participants. This is an area that is supported by P3 and P8. Both stated that they wished they "didn't have to move so much."

By understanding the perspective of the child formerly in foster care, social workers, judges, and teachers can support the child in foster care by considering the educational disruption caused by changes in placement. The effect of a stable foster care placement on the educational outcomes would be an area in need of further research. Additionally, the effects of a stable foster care placement on the ability of a child formerly in foster to be self-sustaining or independent should be examined.

Feelings About School Experiences

Subcategories of school experiences included a normal feeling and inability to feel successful. This theme was derived from four different questions: What would you like educators to know about your experiences? What could the teachers have done differently to assist you when you first arrived in the classroom or when you were

moving to another placement? What did teachers do to help you feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

Seven of the participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10) commented that they attended the same high school from ninth grade until graduation. These seven participants stated that they felt successful. The participants did not perceive a change in expectations from their teachers. P4 said,

"I was at the same high school all four years. My foster parents enrolled me, they came to all of my meetings with the teacher - they were in the stands cheering me on. I didn't feel any different than any other kid in school. My foster family *was* my family."

In commenting about the subcategory of feeling unable to be successful at school, two participants (P5 and P9) stated that they were in a more institutional setting so the school attended had different expectations. One participant, P9 stated, "I had to work for privileges. I couldn't have snack time unless I had enough points." P5 also stated that he worked for script or privileges.

P3 and P5 did not finish high school. P3 officially dropped out of school. P5 chose to take the GED since the institutional setting in which he was placed was not serving his academic needs. Both went to college and earned degrees, but they stated it was harder than if they had completed school the traditional way.

This area has little research support. Johnson, Yohen, and Voss (1995) conducted a study to determine how children in foster care coped. It did not focus on educational issues, but on the birth family, dynamics of the foster family, and other issues with which a child in foster care had to cope. White, O'Brien, Pecora, and Supulveda (2009) and

Evans (2004) each did a study, but did not focus on educational issues, they focused on adjustments after a placement disruption involving the new family, friends, neighborhood, and adjusting to the new school. Other researchers support the need for investigating the educational experience of children in foster care including the studies by Brodie (1999), Flynn and Brodie (2000), Goddard (2000), Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003), Johnson, Yohen, and Voss (1995), and Pecora, Kessler, O'Brien, White, Williams, Hiripiti, English, White, and Torres (2006). This current exploratory study addressed this overlooked area and created an initial conversation with a population that appears to be marginalized within themselves and their perception of society.

Little academic research is available that addresses educational issues that surround children in foster care. Because foster children are a large at-risk population, with over 500,000 children in care during the year, this is an area that teachers and pre-service teachers should attempt to understand. The number of children in foster care is greater than some of the low incidence disabilities such as children with autism. Foster care is a complex process with many individual parts including social workers, judges, birth families, foster parents, and the foster children themselves who need to navigate the process to reach adulthood and independence. Understanding this process from the educational point of view adds to the body of scholarly knowledge for those children in foster care and possibly improve the levels of support offered by the adults charged with their care including.

Six participants (P1, P2, P3, P8, P9, and P10) discussed how important the role of the teacher is in the life of a child in foster care. P1 and P3 both commented that teachers

should learn more about the foster care process and reach out to the other personnel associated with the foster child to be educated about foster care. P2, P8 and P10 wanted teachers to be aware of the need to be successful, to acknowledge strengths and talents, and to be "pushed." P10 commented about the need to feel valued even though she wasn't going to college. She still needed to be prepared to live independently. P9 supported her statement during his interview commenting that "everyone needed to sit down with school staff to plan for the future." Additional research findings could serve as a foundation for pre-service and continuing educational training for educators, as well as encouraging support during post-secondary schooling.

School Staff Knowledge About Experiences In Foster Care

Subcategories about the school staff's knowledge about experiences in foster care included knowledge of and no knowledge of being a foster child. This theme was developed based on three questions. What can you tell me about your school experiences? What would you like educators to know about your experiences? What could the teachers have done differently to assist you when you first arrived in the classroom or when you were moving to another placement?

Four participants (P4, P6, P7, and P9) stated that the teachers probably did not know that they were in foster care. One (P2) stated that the teachers knew she was in foster care during her senior year because they were planning for independent living. P2 commented,

"I was planning for independent living starting in my senior year, so all of my

      teachers knew about me being in foster care. It was a little different than

      when I was in the first part of high school. The teachers still expected me

      to do my work, but they were a little more lenient if they knew I had a

      court date coming up or had just happened. My counselor was the most

      valuable at this time. She really set me up for college."

Seven of the participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10) commented that they attended the same high school from ninth grade until graduation. Three participants stated an academic expectation by the teachers. Three participants felt they put the pressure to succeed on themselves.

Participants reported they did not feel as if they were treated any differently from their peers. However, without interviewing the teachers to find if they had knowledge of the child in foster care, there is only the self-reporting by the participants.

Impact of Teachers Was Evident

Subcategories for evidence of a teacher's impact included an easy or difficult transition into the school. This theme was developed from the question: What could the teachers have done differently to assist you when you first arrived in the classroom or when you were moving to another placement?

When discussing the transition, four participants (P1, P4, P9, and P10) stated that it was easy if the teacher took the time to work with students who were behind. P9 stated, "When I got there, if the teacher took the time to find out what I knew and didn't know and then work with me, I felt like I belonged in the classroom real quick."

Three participants (P1, P3, and P9) commented that the teacher paired them with another student in the class and then monitored their progress. P1 commented,

"The teacher didn't make a big deal out of me being a new student. She asked for a volunteer to help me out the first week of school. Whoever I was paired with was in charge of me. That teacher made my transition the easiest."

P1 also remembered a fifth grade teacher when stating,

"My fifth grade teacher made me feel instantly loved an accepted in class. She gave each of us a hug before school started and when it ended. That was back when you could actually touch a student. I remember feeling such great acceptance with her,"

In discussing teachers who made the transition into the classroom difficult, four of the participants (P3, P4, P5, and P10) commented that in high school, no one seemed to care. They also stated that there appeared to be no communication between teachers for tests or homework. P10 stated,

"I talked to my other friends and they felt the same way so I'm not sure it had anything to do with me being a foster kid or that was just the way the high school operated for everyone."

The findings in this study suggest that teachers make a difference in the lives of children in foster care. Transition in the classroom was noted in each participant's interview. Participants stated feeling as if they were part of the classroom environment and that the teacher made them feel welcome. Pre-service and current teachers realize the need to make each child feel accepted, but children in foster care may need more attention as they transition in the classroom. Children in foster care may be entering the

classroom after a change in placement including removal from the birth home or from one foster home to another. All children respond to placement changes differently, but a child in foster care typically had more trauma associated with the placement change (Goerge, Voohis, Grant, Casey, & Robinson, 1992; National Council on Disabilities, 2008; Pecora, et al., 2006; Scheer, 2007, van Wingerden, Emerson, & Ichikawa, 2002).

Helping Children in Foster Care Consider Their Educational Process

Subcategories in helping children in foster care consider their educational process included positive aspects of foster care, self-advocacy, communication, transition services, and ameliorating negative feelings. This theme was constructed from the question, what do you hope will happen as a result of participating in this study?

Six of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, and P10) wanted other foster kids to know there are positive aspects of foster care and transitioning to adulthood can be done. P7 responded, "I know it felt impossible when I was in foster care, but now that I am out, I know it can be done."

Another positive aspect that seven participants mentioned was most clearly stated by P6,

> "No one knows what I am going through, but I know now that they did. I did not
> > think that anyone could understand how hard it was to be in foster care,
> > but knowing that there are so many emancipated foster children who did it
> > makes it easier – now."

Two participants (P1 and P2) wanted future foster children to know about self-advocacy, that education should be the focus during the time in foster care. They stated

that education could be the way to improve your current situation. P1 stated, "I knew what kind of life I wanted and education was the ticket out of the situation I was in."

Two other participants talked about self-advocacy in a way that was different than the other comments. P7 stated, "Don't be the victim. Don't try to be part of the system in the future. Strive to be better."

In the subcategory of communication, all ten participants discussed how the schools, social work system, and state needed to work together in a better way. Five participants also discussed the need for transitions to be better planned. Both P6 and P7 discussed a sudden placement change. P6 commented, "I was taken from one place and stuck in another placement without any warning." P7 said, "I was not expecting to move – so when it happened I was surprised." P9 also stated, "My change in placement was abrupt. One day I was here and the next day I was in my new placement." P10 commented, "I wish they had at least warned me that they were going to move me. The social workers just decided that they wanted me to move – so I had to move."

These results are consistent with the results reported by Zetlin, Weinburg, and Kim (2003). These researchers stated greater communication between the child welfare agency and the school is crucial if the educational needs of foster children are to be addressed. To advocate more effectively for children in foster care, the researchers stated that a greater focus on education, caseworkers, and caregivers is needed. Stone, D'Andrade, and Austin (2007) reported similar findings to the comments made by the participants in this study. They found that the goal of foster care should be an uninterrupted education of the foster child. Keeping the foster child in the same school regardless of placement changes should be a priority. Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge,

& Sinclair (2003) also recommend being focused on meeting the physical and emotional needs to develop educational opportunities for children in foster care.

As P3 commented during his interview, "I'm 42 years old and have been in foster care since I was three." P3 has been independent for over 20 years, but still appears to be emotionally tied to being a foster child. This study highlights the need for meeting the emotional needs for children in foster care even after graduating from high school and at the college level. P2 stated that it would be helpful if "there was a support group on the university campus." It would be a recommendation that colleges develop services of groups for students formerly in foster care to assist in the transition into adulthood.

All ten participants also stated that the transition into adulthood was difficult and that it would be helpful to be educated about supports that are available. As P2 stated, "I wish there was a support group on campus. I sometimes need to know I am not the only foster kid going to college." Both P4 and P3 discussed the changes that should have occurred from the time they both were in foster care over 30 years ago. P3 stated, "I don't know if there even were any supports in place for us back then. I think we just did what we had to do." Similarly, P4 stated, "I just didn't think anyone cared."

Five participants stated that they wish they had more educational resources to navigate the transition into adulthood. They stated that they wondered if there was a place where they could get answers and help during transition. This is consistent with the study conducted by Geenen and Powers (2007). The study explored the transition from foster care to adulthood and concluded more innovative services needed to be applied to make independent living successful. This is also the conclusion of Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, and McCready (2008). They state that providing transitional services to

150

emancipated foster children through the age of twenty-one, will have cost-benefits outweighing the negative outcomes experiences by current foster children.

States should implement the provisions stated in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (PL 106-169) that funding be available to assist youth as they transition out of foster care. States are encouraged to create programs that support youth in finding housing, addressing finances, health care, education, and employment (Hill, 2009). Although this Act was passed 13 years ago, many states do not have the programs outlined in the law as the states are *encouraged,* not mandated, to create these programs. P5 illustrates the importance of knowing about the educational experiences of children in foster care when commenting, "I felt like I was abandoned." Coupled with the remarks "education is so important," "I needed to advocate for myself," and "I needed more emotional support," the need for more research is clear.

Children in foster care have a voice and need to be heard. The researcher in this study asked participants about their educational experiences, a topic which has not yet been fully explored in academic literature. Children in foster care are a marginalized group, protected by the court system and social workers. To protect the rights of the child, the courts and social workers maintain a level of anonymity, but the voices of those who have been a foster child need to be heard. Without their perspective, social workers and the court system will continue to place foster children without regard to educational stability or foster parent acceptance and educators will be ill-equipped to provide the emotional and educational support needed.

Four participants (P2, P3, P9, and P10) discussed the need for someone on the school staff in high school to sit down and talk to every senior about what is going to

happen after college. P9 stated, "They just talked to the kids who were going to college. I was going in the military, but it was still a transition – a shock – I needed to be told what would happen once I was out on my own." These viewpoints are supported by the study conducted by (McMillian and Tucker, 1999) who found that 63% of foster children were leaving care through unplanned means. P3 was concerned with anonymity, but felt that "giving a voice to foster children" was important.

Even though Public Law 106-169, the John H. Chaffe Act or the Foster Care Independence Act of 1989 has been enacted for over 23 years, the children emancipated from foster care still have difficulty navigating the opportunities for housing assistance, additional education or training, counseling, and other services that could last until 21 years of age. The self-reported difficulties of the participants indicate this law has not had the desired outcomes in relation to the participants in this study. Public Law 106-169 should be revisited to examine the effectiveness the law has had. For example, having a central location with all the services that could be provided to those transitioning out of foster care would be helpful and would address the purpose of Public Law 106-169. Foster children emancipated from care would benefit from adults skilled in the process of obtaining independent opportunities such as housing and educational assistance.

In the subcategory of ameliorating hard feelings, one participant stated that he was very angry at the system. P5 thought the foster care system failed him. At the time of the interview, P5 had been emancipated from foster care for over 20 years, obtained a GED, earned a college degree, and was seeking information about earning another degree. He still held the foster care system accountable for his inability to obtain an education. This is important to note because P5 appears to be successful in his

independence and yet still harbors anger. An outreach from educational personnel could have profound implications on each child in foster care. The establishment of a central location at which emancipated children in foster care could access information would be a start in supporting independence. Experienced transition workers providing their expertise to those seeking information about housing assistance, educational questions, transportation issues, and other areas would increase the level of support to recently emancipated foster children and scaffold down these supports as the independence level increases.

Additionally, three participants (P1, P5, and P8) felt that the foster parents were not screened as carefully as they should be. One participant stated that she was removed from an abusive situation in the birth family only to be subjected to more abuse in the foster home. P1 stated, "I was scared because the abuse came out of nowhere. I didn't know when it might happen – what would trigger the anger from my foster father." Entities working with the child in foster care may want to develop an avenue for children in foster care to add to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the current placement. The child's component could assist in determining the type of foster parents that may be best suited for that child.

Encountered Complications

This study encountered complications including the need to change the methodology of the study from a focus group format to individual interviews. When speaking to potential participants, the researcher noted reluctance on the part of the participant to discuss foster care with others. Two participants were available for the

study but declined to participate in a focus group. These two participants contacted the researcher prior to the change to interview format. Additional studies need to be conducted to explore the viewpoints of this apparent isolated group and identify the reason or reasons for the reluctance to participate in focus groups.

Having a longer recruitment period in subsequent studies may produce more participants from whom data could be collected. Allowing the open recruitment to continue over a period of 18 months could produce additional participants as one potential participant contacted the researcher after the conclusion of the study. The researcher was unable to determine if the potential participant recently learned about the study, or had procured the advertisement in the fall semester and chose to call in the spring semester. However, an extended recruitment period would likely have resulted in additional participants.

A second encountered complication was the format for data collection. The proposed study included six focus groups with four to six participants in each group. Based on the number of foster children serviced in the large, urban city in the Southwest of the United States, 24 participants appeared to be a reasonable number to expect. However, only 10 volunteered to be interviewed. Participants appeared to be nervous about discussing foster care in a focus group, which may have provided a different set of data. Additional studies of varied formats need to be conducted to add to the academic body of knowledge.

A third encountered complication occurred when participants were unable to meet face-to-face for an interview. Two participants were willing to participate, but did not have the transportation or time to meet for an interview. These two interviews were

conducted over the phone with consent forms mailed to and received signed from the participant. This was a complication that was easily overcome, and provided another opportunity to discuss the educational experiences with complete anonymity. The participant may have not participated if he or she was required to have a face-to-face meeting with the researcher. This adds to the perceived isolation of the group of children emancipated from foster care.

A final complication was the number of participants from one source. Seven of the participants were recruited from an advertisement placed in a large urban university newspaper. The remainder was recruited through a suggestion to participate. The researcher sent flyers to 15 agencies servicing children in or formerly in foster care, with no reported participants. A second advertisement was placed in another large urban university's newspaper with no results. Even though the advertisements and flyers potentially reached over 40,000 people attending a local university, only seven participants responded. Additionally, the 15 agencies service the current population of 3,500 children in foster care and would have serviced the children recently emancipated from foster care, yet no participant was recruited through the flyers. It appears that children emancipated from foster care are reluctant to discuss their educational experiences. It also appears that service agencies need to be encouraged to support research in the field of foster care.

Future Research Directions

Given the small sample of children formally in foster care in this study, additional research exploring the educational experiences of children in foster care is needed.

Because little research has been conducted to explore this area, to improve the delivery of services to this marginalized population, additional research should be conducted. Researchers support this position, as indicated in the studies by Brodie (1999), Flynn and Brodie (2000), Goddard (2000), Harker, Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, and Sinclair (2003), Johnson, Yohen, and Voss (1995), and Pecora, Kessler, O'Brien, White, Williams, Hiripiti, English, White, and Torres (2006) who found little is known about the educational experiences of children in foster care.

One participant, P3, commented that his voice needed to be heard. In his interview he was concerned with anonymity, but still felt compelled to participate and noted,

> "I think giving a voice to foster children, but being able to remain anonymous is important. For so long, no one has heard us. That's why I'm P3 so I can say these things and be anonymous."

The need for the perspective of a child in foster child is also contained in the comment by P10. She said,

> "Realizing someone wanted to hear what it was like for me with my education while I was in foster care. It was all interesting – but knowing you were listening – that was important to me."

Although appearing to be initially reluctant to participate at times, the participants were vocal about giving a voice to those in foster care who were not yet emancipated. The children formerly in foster care want to be heard, it is imperative that additional opportunities are given to examine this phenomena to continue to give a voice to this population.

The proposed age for the study was 18-24, those foster children who had been recently emancipated. The majority of the participants (N=7) were over the age of 24. Two participants, at the time of the study, were over the age of 40. This suggests the lack of conversation available to those who have been in foster care, or could suggest the feeling of being considered a marginalized population. These participants were vocal about supporting those who would be emancipated from foster care in the future. They did not want the lack of support they experienced to continue thus validating the importance of this study to be exploratory to determine where the future research and support may be needed.

Replicating this study in different parts of the United States including rural areas should be considered. Replicating the study in a rural area may be difficult as fewer resources may be available or the number of participants may be spread over a large distance. However, the experiences of children in foster care living in a rural area could prove vastly different from those in large urban areas.

Educational Implications

Children still in the foster care system are an at-risk, vulnerable population, but their perspectives would add valuable information to the educational processes they are experiencing. The more that is known about a phenomena, the more informed decisions can be made to benefit the child in foster care. Adults who have the responsibility of placing, moving, and monitoring children in foster care should be aware of the educational impact they have when administering these changes. Replicating this study can provide educators with expanded information about how to best serve the educational

needs of this population. Educators can play an integral role in helping the social worker, judges, and foster parents give the child in foster care an uninterrupted educational experience.

Conclusion

This study investigated the educational experience of a group of children formerly in foster care. The majority of participants described similar experiences. When data were coded, their perspectives and events related to educational experiences showed that children formerly in foster care want their voices to be heard. This study provides the beginning of giving this population a voice.

The information collected in this study provides an initial point of reference for adults who work with children in foster care including social workers, foster parents, teachers, school staff, and counselors. The results of this study have implications for each of these groups seeking to understand a child's point of view and can give adults working with that child an enhanced perspective. Those adults who share the responsibility for children in foster care need to listen to the children as they seek opportunities to effectively meet the needs of each child.

Participants experienced a conflict during the interviews in wanting support while in foster care and wanting to be treated like everyone else. This is important for an educator to consider, as there is a need for a sensitive intervention to emotionally support while treating the child the same as others in the classroom. This support could take many forms including a nonverbal signal from the student or teacher or meeting with the

child before or after school. Because the children in foster care in this study appeared to want the same treatment as others, a more covert support should be employed.

Giving the child formerly in foster care a voice in his/her educational experiences could prove to be a powerful tool. This study highlights the need for further exploration into the educational experiences of children in foster care.

Appendix A

Interview questions: All participants introduce themselves including the researcher.

1. I am interested in your educational experiences as a foster child. What can you tell me about your experiences?

    a. Probe: (That) is something I am interested in, can anyone else add to his/her comments?

    b. Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

    c. Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

2. What would you like educators to know about your experiences?

    a. When you think about this topic, what do you want to tell them?

    b. Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more?

    c. Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else tell me more about this?

    d. Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

3. What could the teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another placement?

a. Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more or add to his/her comments?

b. Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

c. Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

4. What did teachers do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the classroom community?

a. Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more or add to his/her comments?

b. Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

c. Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

5. What did you think the most interesting topics were in the discussion?

a. Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more or add to his/her comments?

b. Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

    c.   Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

6.   What do you hope will happen as a result of participation in this study?

    a.   Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more or add to his/her comments?

    b.   Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

    c.   Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

7.   What do you hope educators do differently, if anything?

    a.   Probe: (That) is interesting, can you tell me more or add to his/her comments?

    b.   Probe: I've heard many participants discuss _____. Can anyone else give additional information?

    c.   Probe: If your experience was different from one of the others, I would like to hear bout it. All experiences are different. There aren't any right or wrong answers.

Appendix B

List of Agencies To Be Contacted for Exploratory Research Study

Local:

Nevada Partnership For Homeless Youth
4981 Shirley Street
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119
(702) 383-1332
(702) 372-6980

Apple Grove
8620 S. Eastern Avenue #16
Las Vegas, Nevada 89123
(702) 992-0576

Apple Grove
720 Center Street
Henderson, Nevada 89015
(702) 207-2273

Eagle Quest
7381 Prairie Falcon Road
Suite 110
Las Vegas, Nevada 89128
(702) 646-5437

Maple Star
1050 E. Flamingo Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119
(702) 733-8098

Clark County Family Services
500 South Grand Central Parkway
Las Vegas, Nevada 89155
(702) 455-5444
(702) 455-0181

Sankofa Group
3932 Carla Anne Road
North Las Vegas, Nevada
(702) 395-5748

St. Francis Group Home Care #8
1604 North Wildwood Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89108
(702) 648-3880

Bountiful Family Services
1481 West Warm Springs Road
Suite 129
Henderson, Nevada 89014
(702) 547-0201

Tranquilla Group, Inc.
5185 Camino Al Norte
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89031
(702) 633-9053

Trinity Youth Services
2760 Lake Sahara Drive
#108
Las Vegas, Nevada 89117
(702) 222-0792

National:

Stand Up For Kids
83 Walton Street
Suite 100
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
1-800-365-4KID
lasvegas@standupforkids.org

Foster Care To Success
21351 Gentry Drive
Suite 180
Sterling, Virginia 20166
(571) 203-0270

Foster Club
753 First Avenue
Seaside, Oregon 97138
(503) 717-1552

Foster Care Alumni of America
901 North Washington Street
Suite 208
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 299-677

Appendix C

The following advertisement was placed in two large, urban universities in the Southwest of the United States.

Former Foster Youth Needed. An exploratory study into the viewpoints on education from the perspective of former foster children is being conducted. The study will involve a focus group setting and will take about two hours of participation time. Participants over 18 can volunteer for the study. For more information, call *contact, universities, department, and phone number omitted.*

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational and Clinical Studies

TITLE OF STUDY: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EMANCIPATED
FOSTER YOUTH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
INVESTIGATOR(S): Michelle T. Tannock, Ph.D. and Cynthia Stunkard

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2966

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to obtain
qualitative data about the educational experiences of youth formerly in foster care after
graduation from high school from the viewpoint of the youth.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you are emancipated foster youth
who could provide information related to your educational experiences.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Participate in a focus group which consists of 4-6 other former foster youth to discuss
your educational experiences after graduation from high school. The focus group will be
audio recorded and additional notes will be taken about facial expressions, body
language, and position.

Benefits of Participation
There are few direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to
learn (a) How do youth emancipated from foster care perceive their educational
experiences? (b) What could teachers have done differently to assist the foster youth
when he/she first arrived in the classroom or when he/she was moving to another
placement? (c) What did teacher do to help the foster youth feel welcomed and part of the
classroom community?

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal
risks. The risks for participation in the focus group are minimal. Some subjects may
experience some discomfort when responding to a question if they had a negative
educational experience that he or she is discussing.

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1202-4044
Received: 03-28-12 Approved: 03-28-12 Expiration: 03-27-13

TITLE OF STUDY: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EMANCIPATED
FOSTER YOUTH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
INVESTIGATOR(S): Michelle T. Tannock, Ph.D. and Cynthia Stunkard

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-2966

___

Cost /Compensation
There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take
about two hours of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Michelle T.
Tannock, Ph.D. at **702-895-2966.** For questions regarding the rights of research subjects,
any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted
you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-
895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study
or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your
relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the
beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality
Confidentiality of the information you share cannot be guaranteed in a focus group
atmosphere, but as the research team we will maintain the confidentiality of this
information to the best of our ability. No reference will be made in written or oral
materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility
at UNLV for five years after completion of the study. After the storage time the
information gathered will be shredded and destroyed.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18
years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

I consent to be audio-taped for the purpose of this research study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1202-4044
Received: 03-28-12 Approved: 03-28-12 Expiration: 03-27-13

Appendix E

Demographic data for interview participants:

Current age _____

Age at emancipation _____

Years in foster care _____

Number of different placements _____

Gender   Male or Female

Ethnicity   Caucasian

African-American

Hispanic

Other or Mixed Race _____

Appendix F

I have read the transcribed comments from my interview. I have had the opportunity to retract and part of my statement or elaborate on my answers. I give my permission to use my comments in the study.

_____

Signature of Participant

REFERENCES

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. (2000). *Educational neglect: The delivery of educational services to children in New York City's foster care system.* Retrieved, February 5, 2007, from ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED443-910.

Allen, B. & Vacca, J. S. (2010). Frequent moving has a negative affect on the school achievement of foster children makes the case for reform. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32,* 829-832.

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2000). *Developmental issues for young children in foster care.* Retrieved, February 4, 2007, from http://aappolicy.aappublications.org

Barth, R. P. (1990). On their own: The experiences of youth after foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 17*(5), 419-440. Retrieved, August 6, 2010 from EBSCOHost database.

Berzin, S. S. B. (2008). Difficulties in the transition to adulthood: Using propensity scoring to understand what makes foster youth vulnerable. *Social Service Review 82*(2), 1710196. Retrieved, March 23, 2010, from EBSCO database.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods. 5th Edition.* Boston: Pearson.

Bruce, E., Naccarato, T., Hopson, L., & Morrelli, K. (2010). Providing a sound educational framework for foster youth: A proposed research agenda. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 4,* 219-240. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Butler, E. J., (1919). Standards of child welfare: A report of children's bureau

conferences. *U.S. Children's Bureau Conference Series 1*(60). 353-357.

Washington D.C.: Government Printing Offices. Retrieved, January 11,

2010 from EBSCOHost database.

Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. (2010). *Grappling with the*

gaps: Toward a research agenda to meet the educational needs of children and

youth in foster care. Retrieved, March 9, 2011 from EBSCOHost database.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2005). *Foster care: Numbers and trends.*

Retrieved, October 21, 2007, from

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/foster.cfm

Child Welfare League of America (2010). Definitions. Retrieved, September 7, 2010,

from www.tennhelp.com/RelCareGiver/definitions

Cook, J. F. (1995). A history of placing-out: The orphan trains. *Child Welfare, 74*(1),

181-197. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from EBSCOHost database.

Courtney, M. C., Piliavin, I., Grogran-Kaylor, A., & Nesmith, A. (2001). Foster youth

Transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care. *Child*

Welfare, 80(6)*, 685-717. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from EBSCOHost

database.

Degamo, D. S., Chamberlain, P., Leve, L. D., & Price, J. (2009). Foster parent

intervention engagement moderating child behavior problems and

placement disruption. *Research on Social Work Practice, 19*(4), 423-

433. Retrieved, August 9, 2010, from Sage Publications database.

Department of Health (2009). Promoting the health and well-being of looked after

    children: Revised statutory guidance. London: Department of Health

    Publications.

Dore, M. M., & Kennedy, K. G. (1981). Two decades of turmoil: Child welfare

    services, 1960-1980. *Child Welfare, 60*(6), 371-382.

Dozier, M., Lindhiem, O., Lewis, E., Bick J., Bernard, K., & Peloso, E. (2009).

    Effects of a foster parent training program on young children's attachment

    Behaviors: Preliminary evidence from a randomized clinical trial. *Child*

    Adolescent Social Work, 26, 321-332. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from

    EBSCOHost database.

Encyclopedia of the Health of Children Online. (2011). Formal and informal care of

    a child. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from www.fahcsia.gov.au

Evans, L. D. (2004). Academic achievement of students in foster care: Impeded or

    improved? *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(5), 527-535. Retrieved, August 10,

    2010, from Willey InterScience database.

Fernandez, E. (2007). How children experience fostering outcomes: Participatory

    research with children. *Child and Family Social Work, 12,* 349-359.

Fernandez, E. (2008). Unravelling emotional, behavioural and educational

    outcomes in a longitudinal study of children in foster-care. *British*

    Journal of Social Work, 38, 1283-1301. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from

    EBSCOHost database.

Geenen, S. & Powers, L. E. (2007). Tomorrow is another problem: The experiences

    of youth in foster care during their transition into adulthood. *Children and*

Youth Services Review, 29, 1085-1101. Retrieved, December 8, 2010, from

Science Direct database.

Gil, E. & Bogart, K. (1982). An exploratory study of self-esteem and quality of care

of 100 children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 4,* 351-

363.

Goerge, R. M., Van Voorhis, J., Grant, S., Casey, K., & Robinson, M. (1992). Special

education experiences of children: An empirical study. *Child Welfare, 71*(5),

419-437.

Harding, J. & Gabriel, J. (2004). Communities in the making: pedagogic explorations

using oral history. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 14*(3), 185-

201. Retrieved, December 8, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Lawrence, J., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2003). Who

takes care of education? Looked after children's perceptions of support for

educational progress. *Child and Family Social Work, 8,* 89-100. Retrieved,

August 6, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Hasci, T. (1995). From indenture to family foster care: A brief history of child

placing. *Child Welfare, 74*(1), 162-180. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from

EBSCOHost database.

Havalchak, A., White, C. R., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P. J., & Sepulveda, M. (2009). Foster

care experiences and educational outcomes of young adults formerly placed

in foster care. *School Social Work Journal, 34*(1), 1-27. Retrieved, August 6,

2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Hill, K. (2009). Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 and the John H. Chafee

    Foster Care Independence Act of 1999: What are the policy implications for

    youth with disabilities transitioning from foster care? *Child Welfare, 88,*

    5-23.

Holland, P., & Gorey, K. M. (2004). Historical, developmental, and behavioral factors

    associated with foster care challenges. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*

    Journal, 21, 117-135. Retrieved, October 11, 2007, from EBSCOHost database.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA),

    42U.S.C.§P.L. 108-446, 108th Congress.

Johnson, P. R., Yoken, C., & Voss, R. (1995). Family foster care placement: The

    child's perspective. *Child Welfare (74),* 5, 959-974. Retrieved, December 10,

    2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Kapp, S. A., & Propp, J. (2002). Client satisfaction methods: Input from parents

    with children in foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 19*(3)*,*

    227-244. Retrieved, December 10, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Keller, T. T. K., Cusick, G. G. C., & Courtney, M. M. C. (2007). Approaching the

    transition to adulthood: Distinctive profiles of adolescents aging out of the child

    welfare system. *Social Service Review, 81*(3). Retrieved, March 23, 2010, from

    EBSCOHost database.

Klee, L., Kronstadt, D., & Zlotnic, C. (1997). Foster care's youngest: A preliminary

    report. *American* Journal *of Orthopsychiatric Association, 6,* 290-299.

    Retrieved, October 11, 2007, from EBSCOHost database.

Lee, B. & Barth, R. P. (2009). Residential education: An emerging resource for

    Improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care? *Children and*

    Youth Services Review, 31, 155-160.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Macmillan Dictionary (2010). Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from

    www.macmillandictionary.com

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research. 4th Edition.*

    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McMillen, J. C., & Tucker, J. (1999). The status of older adolescents at exit from out-

    of-home care. *Child Welfare, 78(3),* 339-362. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from

    EBSCOHost database.

McNeil, C. B., Herschell, A. D., Gerwitch, R. H., & Clemens-Mowrer, L. (2005).

    Trainingfoster parents in parent-child interact ion therapy. *Education and*

    Treatment of Children, 28, 182-196. Retrieved, February 7, 2007, from

    EBSCOHost database.

Mersch, J., William, C., & Shiel, D. Jr., (1999). Child abuse. Retrieved, August 6, 2010,

    from www.medicine.net.com

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research. 2nd Edition.* Qualitative

    Research Methods Series. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Packard, T., Delgado, M., Rellmeth, R., & McCready, K. (2008). A cost-benefit analysis

    of transitional services for emancipating foster youth. *Children and Youth*

    Services Review, 30, 1267-1278. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from ScienceDirect

    database.

Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., O'Brien, K., White, C. R., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., English, D., White, D., & Herrick, M. A. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest foster care alumni study. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28,* 1459-1481. Retrieved, January 4, 2011, from Science Direct database.

Pecora, P. J., Williams, J., Kessler, R. C., Hiripi, E., O'Brien, K., Emerson, J., Herrick, M. A., & Torres, D. (2006). Assessing the educational achievements of adults who were formerly placed in family foster care. *Child and Family Social Work, 11,* 220-231. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Price, J. M., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J., & Reid, J. (2009). KEEP foster parent training intervention: Model description and effectiveness. *Child and Family Social Work, 14,* 233-242. Retrieved, August 6, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Sailor, W., Dunlap, G., Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2009). Handbook of positive behavior support. In W. Sailor, G. Dunlap, G. Sugai, & R. Horner (Eds.), *Issues in Child Clinical Child Psychology* (pp. 282-282). New York: Springer Science and Business Media.

Scarborough, A. A., Spiker, D., Mallik, B., Hebbler, K. M., Bailey, D. B., Jr., & Simeonsson, R. J. (2004). A national look at children and families entering early intervention. *Council for Exceptional Chilren, 70,* 469-484. Retrieved, February, 2007 from EBSCOHost database.

Scherr, T. G. (2007). Educational experiences of children in foster care: Meta-analysis of special education, retention and discipline rates. *School*

Psychology International, 28(4)*,* 419-435. Retrieved, August 10, 2010, from Sage

Publications.

Shea, N. M., Zetlin, A. G., & Weinberg, L. A. (2010). Improving school stability:

An exploratory study of the work of the AB 490 liaisons in California.

Children and Youth Services Review, 32, 74-79.

Sim, K. E., Emerson, J., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P. J., & Silva, L. (2008). Post-Secondary

education and training support utilization by students from foster care:

Findings from scholarship recipient interviews. *Journal of Public Child*

Welfare, 2(1)*,* 109-129.

Smuker, K. S., Kauffman, J. M., & Ball, D. W. (1996). School-related problems of

special education foster care students with emotional or behavioral disorders: A

comparison to other groups. *Journal of Emotional and*

Behavioral Disorders, 4(1), 30-39. Retrieved, January 4, 2011, from

Sage Publications database.

Stock, C. D., & Fisher, P. A. (2006). Language delays among foster children:

Implications for policy and practice. *Child Welfare, LXXXV,* 445-461.

Retrieved, October 11, 2007, from EBSCOHost database.

Stone, S., D'Andrade, A., & Austin, M. (2007). Educational services for children in

foster care: Common and contrasting perspectives of child welfare and

education stakeholders. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 1*(2), 53-70. Retrieved,

August 10, 2010, from EBSCOHost database.

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). Foster care

statistics. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, fro www.childwelfare.gov

United States Government Accounting Office. (1999). Foster care: Challenges in

helping youths live independently. Retrieved, August 10, 2010 from

EBSCOHost database.

Warren, A. (1996). *Orphan train rider: One boy's true story.* Boston: Houghton

Mifflin Company.

Warren, A. (2001). *We rode the orphan trains.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Wilson, K., Fyson, R., & Newstone, S. (2007). Foster fathers: Their experiences and

contributions to fostering. *Child and Family Social Work, 21*(1), 22-31.

Retrieved, August 10, 2010 from EBSCOHost database.

Zetlin, A. (2006). The experiences of foster children and youth in special education.

Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 31(3), 161-165.

Zetlin, A., Wienberg, L. & Kimm, K. (2003). Are the educational needs of children

in foster care being addressed? *Children & Schools, 25*(2), 105-119. Retrieved,

January 4, 2011, from EBSCOHost database.

Zetlin, A., Wienberg, L. & Kimm, K. (2004). Improving education outcomes for

children in foster care: Intervention by an educational liaison. *Journal*

of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 9(4), 421-429. Retrieved, August 10,

2010, from EBSCOHost database.

Zetlin, A. G., Weinberg, L. A., & Shea, N. M. (2006a). Improving educational

prospects for youth in foster care: The educational liaison model. *Intervention*

inSchool and Clinic, 41(5), 267-272. Retrieved, August 10, 2010, from

EBSCOHost database.

Zetlin, A. G., Weinberg, L. A., & Shea, N. M. (2006b). Removing barriers to educating

children in foster care through interagency collaboration: A seven county

multiple-case study. *Child Welfare, 88,* 77-111. Retrieved, August 10, 2010,

from EBSCOHost database.

Zetlin, A. G., Weinberg, L. A., & Shea, N. M. (2006c). Seeing the whole picture:

Views from diverse participants on barriers to educating foster youths.

Children and Schools, 28(3), 165-173. Retrieved, January 11, 2011, from

EBSCOHost database.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Cynthia Joyce Stunkard

9815 Ocotillo Falls Ave.   702-524-3900 (home)
Las Vegas, NV 89148   Email: cjstunkard@gmail.com

EDUCATION

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV
      Ph.D. (2013) Specializations: Learning Disabilities
                                 Early Childhood Education
                Dissertation: *Educational Experiences of Emancipated*
                             Foster Youth: An Exploratory Study

Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
      M. Ed. (1989) Specialization: Learning Disabilities

      B. S. (1988) Specializations: Educable Mental and Physical Disabilities
                                 Learning Disabilities
                                 Elementary Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Clark County School District, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada (2006 – present)
- Paradise Professional Development School
- Marion Earl Elementary School
- C. H. Decker Elementary School

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV
- Part-Time Instructor, Department of Educational and Clinical Studies (2011 – 2012)
- Research Assistant (Summer, 2009)
  - Collected and transcribed data from Early Childhood Teachers regarding viewpoints of *Rough and Tumble Play*

Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA
- Adjunct Faculty in Special and Elementary Education (2005-2006)

Jamestown School District, Jamestown, PA
- Jamestown High School
  - Teacher of Students with Learning and Emotional Disabilities, Grades 9-12 (2001-2003)

King William County Public Schools, King William, VA
- Hamilton-Holmes Middle School
    - Teacher of Students with Learning and Emotional Disabilities, Grades 3-8 (1989-2001)

United Methodist Family Services, Richmond, VA
- Therapeutic Treatment Foster Care Parent (1991-2001)
    - Trainer for Prospective Foster Families (1997-2001)

UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Courses Taught at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Undergraduate
    - EDSP 474 Curriculum Development in Early Childhood Education
    - ESP 772 Family Education in Early Childhood Special Education
    - ESP 411 Introduction to Special Education

- Distance Education
    - ECE 457 Working With Families in Early Childhood Education

Courses Taught at Slippery Rock University
- Undergraduate
    - SPED 455 Student Teaching Supervisor
    - SPED 202 Educational Aspects of Physically Handicapped/Brain Injured Students
    - SPED 100 Introduction to Special Education

REFEREED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Stunkard, C. (2013, February). *Supporting All Students Through Enrichment.* Presented at the National Conference of Professional Development School's Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Stunkard, C. (2013, February). *Virtual Museums: An Inquiry Project.* Presented at the National Conference of Professional Development School's Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Stunkard, C. (2012, March). *Reaching All Learners: Enrichment.* Presented at the National Conference of Professional Development School's Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2012, January). *Flat Stanley: Connecting to Math Standards.* Presented at the Southern Nevada Math and Science Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2012, January). *Flat Stanley: Connecting to Science Standards.* Presented at the Southern Nevada Math and Science Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2011, February). *Flat Stanley: Connecting to the Content Standards.* Presented at the National Conference of Professional Development School's Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Stunkard, C. and Jaramillo, M. (2011, February). *21ˢᵗ Century Technology: Virtual Museums.* Presented at the National Conference of Professional Development School's Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Mancl, D., Heinrich, S., Stunkard, C., and Campbell, P. (2010, October). *Practical Approaches to the Co-Teaching Model.* Presented at the National Conference for NNER, Normal, Illinois.

Stunkard, C. (2010, April). *Flat Stanley: Beyond the Postcards – Connecting to Content Standards.* Presented at the Nevada Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. and Mancl, D. (2010, March). *Inclusion: Best Practices.* Presented at the National Professional Development School's Conference, Orlando, Florida.

White, E., Campbell, P., Stunkard, C., and Mancl, D. (2010, March). *University Partnerships: A Round Table Discussion.* Presented at the National Professional Development School's Conference, Orlando, Florida.

Campbell, P., Stunkard, C., and Mancl, D. (2010, March). *PDS Journal: Role as a Reviewer.* Presented at the National Professional Development School's Conference, Orlando, Florida.

Stunkard, C. (2009, April). *Foster Care: Teachers Offering Support to Students In Foster Care.* Presented at the Nevada Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2009, March). *Flat Stanley: Beyond the Postcards – Meeting Intermediate Math Standards.* Presented at the Southern Nevada Math and Science Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2009, March). *Flat Stanley: Beyond the Postcards – Meeting Intermediate Science Standards.* Presented at the Southern Nevada Math and Science Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2009, January). *Foster Care: Navigating the Special Education Process* Presented at the International Conference on Education, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Stunkard, C. (2000, October). *Collaboration: Media Specialists Augmenting the Curriculum.* Presented at the Virginia Educational Media Association Conference, Richmond, Virginia.

Stunkard, C. & Mitchell, A. (1998, October). *Working Together: General Education Teachers and Media Specialists.* Presented at the Virginia Educational Media Association Conference, Richmond, Virginia.

Mitchell, A. & Stunkard, C. (1994, October). *Earth Day Extravaganza.* Presented at the Virginia Educational Media Association Conference, Richmond, Virginia.

NON-REFEERED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Stunkard, C. (2011, March). *Student Based Inquiry Projects – Connecting to the Standards.* Presented at the Department of Special Education and Early Childhood's Poster Session Symposium, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Stunkard, C. (2010, March). *Flat Stanley: An Inquiry Based Project.* Presented at the Department of Special Education and Early Childhood's Poster Session Symposium, Las Vegas, Nevada.

GRANTS

Stunkard, C. (2010). Classroom Worm Farm and Composting Grant. Donor's
      Choose. (*funded* $557).
Mitchell, A., Stunkard, C., Beverage, T. (2001). Christa McCaulliff Grant.
      (awarded $32,186).
Jones, T. & Stunkard, C. (2001). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Grant. (awarded $250).
Mitchell, A., Stunkard, C., Nachman, J. (1996). Rural Technology Grant. (awarded
      $178,537).

MANUSCRIPT REVIEWER

School – University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association For
      Professional Development Schools

SERVICE

National

- President-Elect, National Association for Professional Development
  Schools

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

- Doctoral Mentor
- Doctoral Colloquium presentation: Poster Session Experiences

Local

- Paradise Professional Development School
  - Research Committee
  - Technology Committee
  - RTI Committee
  - Technology Committee
- Marion Earl Elementary School
  - RTI Committee
  - Grade Level Chair

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- *Council for Exceptional Children*
- *NSTA*
- *National Association for Professional Development Schools*
- *Southern Nevada Science Teachers Association*

AWARDS

- 2010 Distinguished Educator, Area 3, Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV
- 1992 Teacher of the Year, King William County School District, King William, VA
- 1992 PTA Member of the Year, Hamilton-Holmes Middle School, King William, VA