What is school like? An exploration of the experiences of school from the perspectives of adoptive parents and adopted children

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Declaration

This work is being submitted for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. This piece contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other university module or degree. To the best of my knowledge, this work contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Overarching Abstract

Most adopted children in the UK today are adopted from Local Authority (LA) care having been removed from their birth families due to trauma, abuse, loss and neglect. The impact of the early adversities is likely to affect the child's ability to access education. It is important that educational professionals are aware of the potential long-term impact of early adversities on adopted children, and adapt their approach to supporting them. This thesis explores the education of adopted children. It is comprised of three chapters: a systematic literature review, a bridging document and a piece of empirical research.

The systematic literature review focuses on adoptive parents' experiences of their child's school. A meta-ethnography was conducted to synthesise five qualitative papers. A model was developed to express the synthesis suggesting sharing information and knowledge and understanding of adoption and pre-adoption experiences facilitated trust between school staff and adoptive parents, and ensured the child's unique needs were met in the classroom. This also enabled adoption to be made salient within the school curriculum. Furthermore, a greater understanding and acknowledgement of the different types of adoptive families enabled diversity to be discussed in lessons, thus supporting the adopted child to feel included in school and the wider school community.

The bridging document offers commentary on the literature review and the development of the empirical research and discusses my philosophical position, methodological decisions and ethical considerations of the empirical research.

The empirical research aimed to fill the gap in the area of researching educational experiences from the perspective of adopted children. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three secondary school aged adopted children. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants. Three superordinate themes were identified: *Relationships, Adoptive Status* and *Inclusion*. These superordinate themes are discussed in consideration of the findings of the Systematic Literature Review and wider research.

The findings of this research reflect wider research highlighting the importance of relationships with staff and peers in addition to the child's adoptive status to their sense of self and identity, including the importance of having agency over the disclosure of their adoptive status.

These findings have relevance to Educational Psychologists (EPs) who can support schools to facilitate relationship development, highlighting relational approaches and the positive impact these can have on children's sense of belonging in school. It is important to raise the profile of adoption in educational psychology research. To date, very little has been written about the role of the EP in relation to adopted children and their experiences of school, and this piece of research adds to this gap in the field.

Each chapter is presented at a length suitable for publication in the Adoption and Fostering journal.

Chapter 1: Systematic Literature Review

How do adoptive parents experience their child's school?

Abstract

A meta-ethnography was used to synthesise current literature focussing on adoptive parents' experiences of their child's school. The views of adoptive parents and adopted children about their experiences of education is an internationally under-researched area. Literature in the areas of attachment and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are considered to offer some insight and context of the possible challenges adoptive parents may face and their implications for their child's education.

Five qualitative papers formed the basis of the meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988), which comprises seven phases. Synthesis of the studies suggests a foundation of '*Information Sharing'*, and '*Knowledge and Understanding of Adoption'* form a bi-directional relationship creating a '*Cycle of Communication and Relational Trust'*. The cycle was interpreted as influencing and informing school staff's understanding and awareness of the child's unique needs and ensuring these were understood in the context of their pre-adoptive experiences. Having this foundational knowledge was found to promote adoption within the school curriculum.

It is anticipated the model of parent experience developed here, will encourage educational professionals to consider their relationship with adoptive parents and the impact of this on the adopted child.

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this review is to explore adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school. The views of adoptive parents and adopted children about their experiences of education is an internationally under-researched area (Farr, Oakley, & Ollen, 2016; Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, & Moyer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014; McDonald & Morgan, 2019). Therefore, this research is of theoretical significance.

I will first give a brief context of adoption in the UK, followed by an exploration of research and theory currently used to explore adverse early experiences. To conclude, I will focus more specifically on the views of adoptive parents and their importance.

1.1.1 Adoption in the UK

The term 'adoption' refers to the process that severs all legal ties and permanently transfers the rights and responsibilities from the biological parent(s) to the new adoptive family (First4Adoption, 2019). In the UK, an Adoption Order is granted by the courts, which legalises the adoption (Adoption and Children Act, 2002).

Most children in the UK are adopted out of Local Authority (LA) care for a range of reasons (Department for Education, 2018a). Many are involuntarily removed from their birth families due to trauma, abuse, loss or neglect (Adoption UK, 2014; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Dann, 2011; Department for Education, 2012; Dunstan, 2010; Gore Langton, 2017; Selwyn, Wijedasa, & Meakings, 2014). In the year ending March 2018, 3820 children were adopted from LA care in the UK (Department for Education, 2018a).

Adopted children are not a homogenous group; however, when children become adopted, they share the same legal status and label of 'adopted'. The consequences of early adversity are wide-ranging, impacting children and families at home and school, in different ways. Families may face unexpected or ongoing challenges after an Adoption Order has been granted (Goldberg, Moyer, Kinkler, & Richardson, 2012). The potential

vulnerability of adopted children is often overlooked due to misconceptions that once adopted, all previous difficulties cease (Gore Langton, 2017).

Literature in the area of attachment and early trauma (Dozier & Rutter, 2016; Hartinger-Saunders, Jones, & Rittner, 2019; Razuri et al., 2016) can offer insight into the potential difficulties families may experience following adoption.

1.1.2 Attachment Theory and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

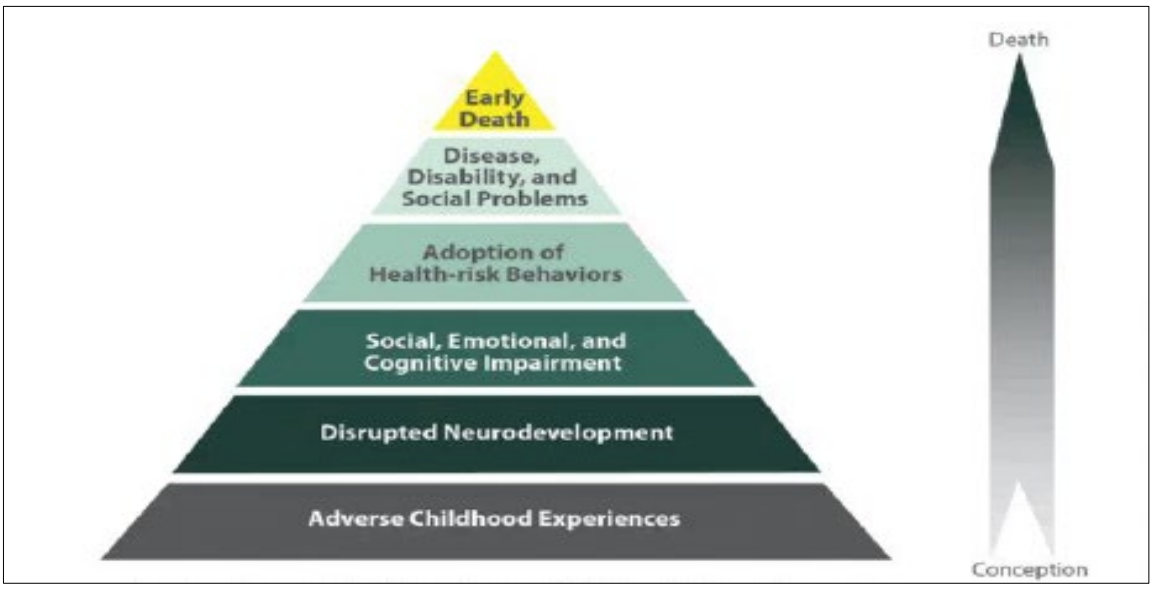
Attachment theory highlights the importance of the child-caregiver relationship to children's early development (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Pianta, 1997; Rutter, Kreppner, & Sonuga-Barke, 2009; Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999; Crowell, Fraley & Shaver, 2008). Attachment figures are considered to provide a secure base from which children can explore and learn about social interactions (Bowlby, 1969). It is contended that children internalise their experience with these figures as an 'internal working model' (IWM) of attachment relationships, which fosters children's trust in others (Bowlby, 2010). The quality of attachment relationships is suggested to influence a child's social, emotional and mental health (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). It is suggested that where new caregivers are provided, some children who have experienced 'conditions that are beyond those which the attachment system is designed to deal with' (Dozier & Rutter, 2016, p. 710) such as institutionalisation, are more likely to experience later difficulties.

Attachment theory focusses on relationships with caregivers and does not account for other influential relationships inside and outside the home (friends, relatives, teachers, siblings) (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dozier & Rutter, 2016; Sroufe, 2016; Williford, Carter, & Pianta, 2016). Adopted children live within complex interacting systems which can be conceptualised using Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Millward, Kennedy, Towlson, & Minnis, 2006). Ecological Systems Theory is a developmental theory that aims to explain how children and their environments interact with one another. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests these bi-directional interactions influence how children grow and develop over their lifetime, emphasising how wider economic,

political and cultural factors impact upon children's learning (Darling, 2007). The systems around the child range from those that are in closest proximity to them, such as the home environment (microsystem), to the larger school system and to the wider, more distant systems including society and culture (macrosystem, with changes over time being considered through the chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These nested systems (the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems), while named discretely, are interrelated and influenced by processes (biological, psychological, relational, cultural and environmental) that occur within and between these systems. These interactional systems expand and become more intricate as the child grows, to involve peers, schools and other systems which affect the child as well as their adoptive parents and the family as a whole. Children spend a large proportion of their time in school and therefore schools feature within most adopted children's microsystem and mesosystem. It is reasonable to infer that the school environment in addition to the personal relationships within school, such as peers and teachers, are likely to impact on the child's learning development. While attachment theory focuses on primary caregiver relationships, ecological systems theory acknowledges the wider influence that other environments and relationships may have on the child. However, despite this limitation, Dozier and Rutter (2016) emphasise that attachment theory continues to be helpful as it provides a powerful way of thinking about the role of early relationships.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are considered 'stressful experiences occurring during childhood that directly harm a child or affect the environment in which they live' (Bellis et al., 2016, p. 4). ACEs may be categorised under experiences of abuse, neglect and household dysfunction (Felitti et al., 1998). The effects of ACEs are considered to be cumulative, correlating with increased risk of problematic outcomes (Figure 1) (Felitti et al., 1998) such as mental health difficulties (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2015); poorer physical health (Johnson, 2002); involvement with the criminal justice system (Baglivio et al., 2014; Malvaso, Delfabbro, & Day, 2018) and poorer educational outcomes (Bellis, Hughes, Leckenby, Perkins, & Lowey, 2014; Felitti et al., 1998).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of ACEs. Mechanism by which ACEs influence health and wellbeing throughout the lifespan (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020)



Researchers have also studied the long-term impact of early deprivation through studies of children adopted from Romanian orphanages. A large proportion of Romanian adoptees experienced cognitive delays and difficulties with executive functioning after adoption (Rijk, Hoksbergen, & ter Laak, 2008, 2010). However, many demonstrated extensive 'catch up' in a range of domains (physical, cognitive and social growth) after spending a prolonged period with their adoptive family (Dozier & Rutter, 2016; Rijk et al., 2010). Although adopted children in the UK are unlikely to have experienced institutionalisation, this research highlights the mitigating role of protective factors, neuroplasticity and the human capacity for resilience (Wastell & White, 2012).

Researchers have expressed concern about the definition of ACEs and the items identified within the ACEs framework. Maynard, Farina, Dell, and Kelly (2019) note there is no consensus for the terms used for trauma, and the items in the checklist are varied and ambiguous (Smith, 2018). Furthermore, the ACEs model does not account for socioeconomic disadvantages (Houtepen et al., 2020), which are also associated with admission to the care system (Berridge & Saunders, 2009). Other researchers have argued the impact of ACEs may not be the same across all young people, and protective factors are ignored (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2014; Smith, 2018). It is important to note, the factors involved in increasing or mitigating risk are not yet completely understood, as not all children who have experienced ACEs will have experienced them equally or will

be impacted in the same way (Crouch, Radcliff, Strompolis, & Srivastav, 2019; Smith, 2018).

Despite the limitations, research on attachment and early adversity offers an understanding of early life trauma and some of the important factors that promote the development of healthy relationships (Golding, 2008; Thompson, 2016). Stable relationships with caring and supportive adults, can be protective and help moderate the effects of adversity. Understanding this may support adoptive parents manage some of the challenges they may experience when parenting an adopted child. As Sroufe, Coffino, and Carlson (2010, p. 4) note 'early experience is not deterministic yet always remains a part of the developmental landscape'.

1.1.3 Challenges experienced by adoptive parents

The demands placed on adoptive parents can be varied and extensive (Syne, Green, & Dyer, 2012). Different parenting skills may be required by adoptive parents when caring for children with complex needs, arising from their early experiences. They need to find ways of providing a safe and nurturing relationship that meets their child's unique needs (Gore Langton, 2017; Hull, 2016).

Children's needs and their ability to understand and process their previous life experiences change over time as they grow and develop. New and changing behaviours may not become apparent straight away or may occur at significant transitional points, such as moving schools or adolescence (Simpson & Fowler, 1994; Sorin & Iloste, 2006). Adoptive parents may need to support their child with 'coming to terms' with being adopted (Grotevant, 1997, p. 4) and help them to integrate their history as an adopted person into their emerging sense of identity (Bejenaru & Roth, 2012; Grotevant, 1997).

1.1.4 Adoptive parents and their experiences of their child's education

Research with adoptive parents about their experiences with schools is limited; however, research with parents more generally, indicates parental involvement with school positively influences children's academic achievement and attainment (Barnard, 2004; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wilder, 2014).

Adoptive parents commonly identify schooling as a challenge and sometimes assume a 'combative role' (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009, p. 307) to advocate for their child's needs, as they are often parenting children with 'multiple and overlapping difficulties' (Selwyn et al., 2014, p. 88). This challenge is echoed by adoptive parents in the UK who report they have to fight for access to appropriate educational provision for their child (Adoption UK, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007). This perspective may be promoted by adoptive parents' perceptions that teachers do not have the relevant understanding of attachment or ACEs to support their child (Adoption UK, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Dunstan, 2010; Syne et al., 2012). The majority of adoptive parents consider their child needs more support in school than their peers due to their early life experiences (Adoption UK, 2014), with parents reporting education consistently their highest priority (Adoption UK, 2019).

Some adopters actively seek the support of their child's school (Rolock, Blakey, Wahl, & Devine, 2018). Parents recognise the importance of school staff in supporting and promoting the wellbeing of adopted children in school (Cooper & Johnson, 2007), mainly through positive teacher-pupil relationships and an understanding of adoption (Adoption UK, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007). Positive relationships between pupils, teachers and parents, is considered a contributing factor to educational progress (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Beveridge, 2013; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

The increase in 'trauma-informed' practice in schools (Rossen, 2020; Walkley & Cox, 2013) suggests increasing recognition of the role schools have in providing stability, and understanding the impact of trauma on children's learning (Carello & Butler, 2015; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). However, here is a lack of consensus in the research

literature of a definition of trauma-informed practice (Hanson & Lang, 2016). Being trauma-informed is suggested as an understanding of the 'ways in which violence, victimisation and other traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved' (Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 264). Schools developing an understanding of the impact of trauma and working together with families may serve to reduce some of the stress adoptive parents feel about school (Walkley & Cox, 2013). However, school staff may not always be aware a child is adopted as parents may choose not to share this information, potentially reducing the opportunities for home-school collaboration.

1.2 Research Aims

Adoptive families represent understudied family groups who may experience complex challenges at home and school. There has been little published research exploring adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). This review aims to explore this under-researched area. However, the purpose of this review is not to present an understanding of adoptive parents' experiences as a homogenous group, but to allow their diverse experiences to be heard. Hearing adoptive parent's experiences may inform future practice for schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs).

1.3 Meta-Ethnography

The focus of this literature review is to explore adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school.

As these perspectives are subjective, therefore, an interpretive approach is required to generate rich meanings. I have adopted a meta-ethnographic approach (Noblit & Hare, 1988) to synthesise qualitative studies which explore the experiences of adoptive parents with their child's school.

Meta-ethnography is a systematic qualitative method, which allows for comparison and synthesis of studies into a new interpretation through translations. The translation of studies into one another allows for a deeper understanding and transfer of 'ideas, concepts and metaphors across studies' (Britten et al., 2002, p. 210).

1.3.1 Review Process

I have used the seven phases of a meta-ethnography as described by Noblit and Hare (1988) for synthesising qualitative research (see Table 1).

Table 1: The seven phases of meta-ethnography as described by Noblit and Hare (1988)

Phase	Process
Phase 1	Getting started - identifying an intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform
Phase 2	Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest
Phase 3	Reading the studies
Phase 4	Determining how the studies are related
Phase 5	Translating the studies into one another
Phase 6	Synthesising translations
Phase 7	Expressing the synthesis

1.3.1.1 Phases 1 and 2: Getting Started and Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest

My initial scoping research focussed on adopted children's perspectives of their experiences of school. Despite significant search efforts, it was evident there was minimal literature in this area. My searching, therefore, broadened to the experiences, attitudes and thoughts of adults who may be involved with adopted children (e.g. adoptive parents, teachers, social workers, and EPs). Research with adoptive parents had a more extensive literature base than other adult groups, leading to the review question of: ***How do adoptive parents experience their child's school?***

A systematic search was used alongside additional hand searching and reference harvesting of key articles. Further details of the search process, including search terms, can be found in Appendix A: Search process and Search Terms (p.85). A PRISMA flow chart representation of the search process is demonstrated in Figure 2. After an extensive screening process, five studies were selected for synthesis based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2 below).

Table 3 details the included studies.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria for Inclusion	Criteria for Exclusion	Rationale
Written in English	• All other languages	• Accessibility
Empirical design	• All other types of design, reviews, meta-analysis, discussion papers etc.	• Appropriateness for meta-ethnography
Qualitative design	• Quantitative or mixed-method	• Appropriateness for meta-ethnography and to fit with my epistemological position and research question.
Published and peer reviewed	• Non-published, non-peer reviewed papers	• To maintain an assumed high level of quality
Refers to adopted children	• Looked After Children • Special guardianships	• The relevance to the research question
	• Internationally adopted children (IA)	The following points may impact on the meta-ethnography as IA children may provide adoptive parents with a different experience with their child's school to those who have adopted children domestically. IA children are a heterogeneous group with a wide range of pre-adoptive experiences which are not always known about: • IA children often come from state-run orphanages where conditions of deprivation, poor nutrition and poor education exist (Gindis, 2009). • Length of time in an institution has been found to impact on children's cognitive abilities and development (S. Smith & Riley, 2006). • IA children generally have language difficulties in their first language and experience first language attrition (Baker, 2013; Gindis, 2005).

		• IA children have to cope with the loss of their culture as they are adopted into a different country potentially leading to difficulties with their divergent identity (Juffer & Van Ijzendoorn, 2005). • International adoptions are rare in the UK (Midgen, 2011).
Focus on schooling/ education	• Focus on adoption process	• The relevance to the research question and area of research interest
From the perspective of adoptive parents	• Adopted adults retrospective perspective • Adopted children's views • Any other adults perspective e.g. teachers or school counsellors	• Adults' retrospective perspective may be positively biased (Reed & Carstensen, 2012) • Education has changed over time (Rodolfo, 2011) • There is a scarcity of literature from adopted children's perspective (Dance & Rushton, 2005; Neil, 2012; Thomas, Beckford, Lowe, & Murch, 1999)

Figure 2: PRISMA Flow chart documenting search process

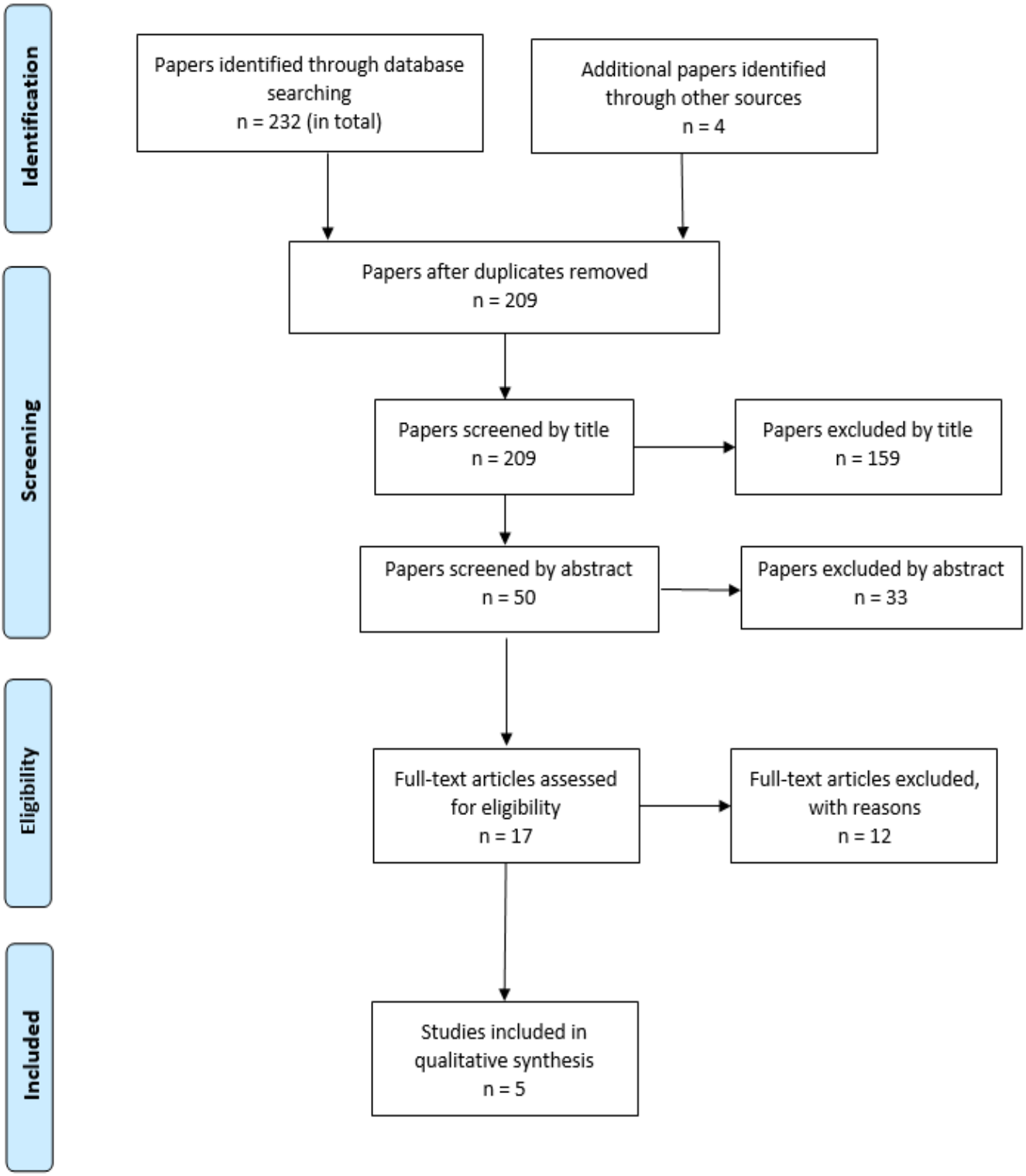


Table 3: The five studies selected for inclusion for the meta-ethnography

Study	Country	Sample	Method: Data Collection
Goldberg, Black, Sweeney and Moyer (2017)	USA	90 adoptive parents in 45 couples *Participants were recruited from a previous study carried out five years prior and families were contacted for a follow up.* *(15 lesbian, 15 gay male, 15 heterosexual parent families)*	Questionnaires A subsample then participated in a 1 hour telephone interview
Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)	USA	32 adoptive parents in 18 couples *Participants were recruited from a previous study carried out five years prior and families were contacted for a follow up.* *(8 lesbian, 2 gay male, 7 heterosexual parent families)*	1 hour telephone interviews
Hill and Koester (2015)	USA	8 adoptive families	Semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed. A review of the child's IEP pre and post adoption.
Goldberg (2014)	USA	266 adoptive parents in 142 families (*79 lesbian, 75 gay male and 112 heterosexual parents)* *Participants were recruited from a previous study carried out three years prior and families were contacted for a follow up.*	Postal self-report questionnaires *(Members of same-sex couples were provided with additional questions that addressed unique aspects of their experience as sexual minority parents)*
Cooper and Johnson (2007)	UK	100 adoptive parents	Postal questionnaire

1.3.1.2 Phase 3: Reading the studies

This stage involved the repeated reading of each study (Atkins et al., 2008; Lee, Hart, Watson, & Rapley, 2015). Through repeated reading and noting of interpretive metaphors and concepts, a synthesis of the papers emerged (Noblit & Hare, 1988). To explore each paper systematically and support my understanding of the papers, I used the quality appraisal framework by Walsh and Downe (2006) (Appendix C (p. 92)). It was not used as a tool to eliminate studies from the synthesis (Major & Savin-Baden, 2011; Yardley, 2000).

A 'mapping table' was created to highlight contextual and demographic data of each study (Britten et al., 2002) (see Appendix B p. 86) which facilitated the interpretation process and identification of key concepts (Britten et al., 2002).

1.3.1.3 Phase 4: Determining how the studies are related

Schütz (1962) refers to different levels of interpretation (first-order, second-order and third-order). The quotes used within any paper are selected and interpreted by the author (Atkins et al., 2008), making it difficult to distinguish between the participant's true 'voice' and author interpretation. I therefore found it problematic to consider first-order interpretations existed independent of the researcher's interpretation (France et al., 2019). Consequently, I merged first and second-order interpretations, as demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: My interpretation of Schutz's (1971) notion of different levels of interpretation.

Level of interpretation	Explanation	My interpretation
1st Order	Participants' views and understandings as reported in the study	1st and 2nd order interpretations merged to form 2nd order interpretations due to the selective process undertaken by the research authors.
2nd Order	Interpretations of participants' understandings made by the authors of the study	
3rd Order	Synthesis of both first and second order interpretations into a new model or theory.	

The initial identification of ten key concepts represented analysis of my interpretations from the papers. Each initial key concept and their paper is presented in Appendix D (p. 103). I reviewed these key interpretive concepts in determining the relationships between the studies (Britten et al., 2002; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Appendix F (p. 119) demonstrates the second and third-order interpretations in detail.

It was clear to me the studies did not refute one another even when a key concept from one study was not identified in different studies (Britten et al., 2002) The relationships between the papers appeared to be reciprocal.

1.3.2 Findings

1.3.2.1 Phase 5 and 6: Translating the studies into one another and synthesising translations

These two phases merged, where translation and synthesis occurred alongside each other. Through this process, I decided only concepts that arose in at least two studies were taken forward and included for reciprocal translation. The process of reciprocal

translation involves translating papers into one another by comparing the key concepts from one account across the studies (Britten et al., 2002; France et al., 2019; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Please see Table 7 (p. 22) for details of the reciprocal translations. The translations were compared and synthesised to identify five overarching concepts, shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Translation of initial concepts into final overarching concepts

Initial Key Concepts	Final Overarching Concepts
• Knowledge and understanding of adoption • Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs • Sharing information • Inclusion and Diversity • Curriculum • Experience with adoptive families • Understanding the impact of pre-adoptive experiences • High Expectations • Advocacy • School as a system	• **Knowledge and understanding of adoption and Understanding of the impact of pre-adoptive experiences** • **Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs** • **Sharing information** • **Inclusion and Diversity** • **Curriculum**

The terminology used to label the overarching concepts aimed to encompass as best as possible all the constituent concepts and nuances from each paper, using original terminology where possible (Britten et al., 2002). In this phase, I interpreted the second-order constructs being synthesised to develop a new interpretation; the third-order construct (Schütz, 1962). This stage emphasised the final five overarching concepts in adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Final Overarching Concepts

Overarching Concepts
1. Knowledge and understanding of adoption and the impact of pre adoptive experiences 2. Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs 3. Sharing information 4. Curriculum 5. Inclusion and diversity

The five overarching concepts were used as a basis for developing a line of argument, which is demonstrated in Figure 3 (p. 27).

Table 7: Reciprocal Translations

Construct	Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Cooper and Johnson (2007)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney and Moyer (2017)	Goldberg (2014)
Sharing Information	Two-way communication between home and school: parents share information about their child to school - teachers ask for background information about the child from the parent so that they can better understand the child's background and "where they come from".		Most parents shared some information with the school about their child's adoption. Parents felt uninformed by school or believed that communication was ineffective.	Four types of disclosure practices from parents to school about their child's adoption : • Implicit disclosure ("it's obvious" – racial differences) • Proactive disclosure (families wanted to be honest and open, reduce confusion, for staff to be aware and respond sensitively) • Reactive disclosure (disclosure due to being confronted with questions and comments) • Non-disclosure	Implicit disclosure Proactive disclosure Non-disclosure Uncertainty around how much information to share with schools "finding ways to let the school know about his history/issues without prejudicing them before they get to know him"
Knowledge and understanding of adoption and the	Parents described how staff lacked knowledge about the impact trauma has on		Teachers blame children's difficulties on their adoption and expect rapid recovery.	Teachers had assumptions that adoption involved "the rescuing of children"	"I feel that once his old preschool found out he was adopted, all of a sudden they started having problems with

impact of pre adoptive experiences	development and functioning.		Teachers had misunderstandings about adoption and its antecedents led to poor judgements.	and parents were “saints for adopting” "I just don’t think they're super educated about it. They don’t know the language to use"	him. He got kicked out...” Teachers blame children’s difficulties on their adoption. Parents educating the educators about adoption Teachers demonstrating insensitivity or ignorance due to their lack of knowledge around adoption Misconceptions and assumptions about adoption “from the perspective of the school, her child was "expected to be 'thankful' about being adopted"
Identifying and understandin g the child’s	School was not meeting the SEN needs of the adopted children often not recognising the impact of trauma.	Families reported pursing additional testing as their child’s disability had been	Half of parents did not think that their child’s school had a good understanding of their		

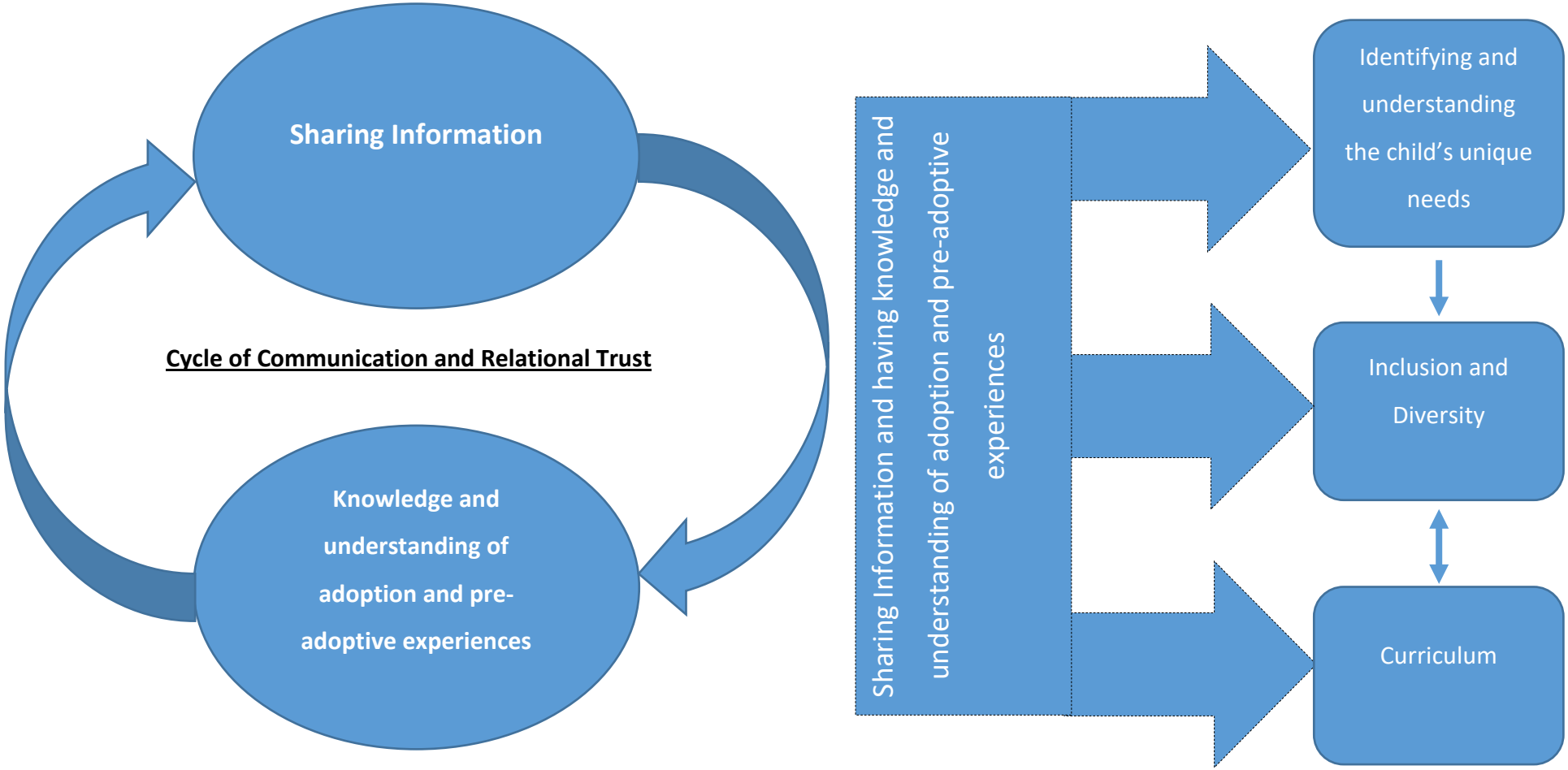
unique needs	Some children were labelled as 'bad' rather than recognising the impact that trauma has on functioning. Switching schools was common due to dissatisfaction with schools awareness of and accommodations to children's unique needs.	misdiagnosed or misidentified in school. Following correct identification of needs, the children's school work and school experience improved.	child's needs/difficulties. 39% of children had been identified as having SEN, with up to 30 different diagnostic labels. A range of professionals were involved with the children demonstrating the complexity of the children's needs. Parents voiced frustration about delays in having needs identified.		
Curriculum	Family related assignments, such as bringing in baby photos "create a lot of unhappiness". Books in school were not reflective of adoptive families.			Parents donated resources such as books but did not think school were doing enough to include the materials. Some parents gave specific examples of how racial ethnic and cultural issues were infused meaningfully into the curriculum	Parents educating the educators about adoption. Parents donating books and resources about adoption "participants note that they felt that it should not "on them" to

	Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted.			The teacher "asked for homework involving a baby picture of the child and the child's birth weight and height" which they did not have A lack of diversity in the curriculum	provide such books; rather it should be up to the schools to ensure that inclusive materials should be in the classroom”
Inclusion and Diversity	Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted. School forms using terms such as ‘moms and dads’ made the children feel 'like they didn’t belong'. Switching schools was common due to dissatisfaction with schools awareness of	Paraprofessional support in class enabled the children to be more integrated into lessons rather than isolated in SEN settings.		Systemic practices such as forms did not allow parents to accurately describe their family. [parents] tended to describe teachers oversights and exclusions as reflecting ignorance or "lack of education" about LG parent families "inclusion and diversity go hand in hand"	Systemic practices such as forms did not allow parents to accurately describe their family and used terms such as mother and father. Feeling included and accepted in the school community "no other preschool we looked at felt as supportive and inclusive as this one" Having a diverse school community "The school has been very accepting; they

	and accommodations to children’s unique needs.				pride themselves on their diversity"

1.3.2.2 Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis: Line of argument

Figure 3: A model of adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school



Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis

The line of argument illustrated in Figure 3 above, demonstrates my interpretation of the influence of the Overarching Concepts from the synthesis upon one another

Through my analysis and subsequent synthesis, I considered '*Sharing Information'* and '*Knowledge and understanding of Adoption and pre-adoptive experiences'* as two inter-related concepts. I interpreted them being linked by a dynamic, bidirectional relationship between adoptive parents and school staff, which I have termed 'Cycle of Communication and Relational Trust'. This relationship is presented as a cycle and is suggested to generate an understanding of the adopted child. When parents and school staff share information with each other, both develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the child.

The cyclical relationship is a key component to my line of argument. I interpreted the cycle as impacting upon the concepts of *'Identifying and Understanding the Child's Unique Needs',* '*Curriculum'* and '*Inclusion and Diversity'*, through the understanding of the child generated through the relational cycle. The large arrows demonstrate the direction of influence.

The smaller arrows between the three concepts indicate the direction of influence between them. As can be seen, the relationship between '*Inclusion and Diversity'* and '*Curriculum'* is reciprocal. Ignorance around adoption was suggested by parents to be evident through the absence of reference to adoption in the curriculum (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017). A foundation of communication and relational trust may facilitate the growing salience of adoption and diverse families within the school curriculum. The sharing of information and a shared understanding of the child may also support in identifying, understanding and supporting a child's needs in the classroom, which could influence a sense of classroom inclusion.

1.4 Discussion

The following section discusses the findings concerning the research question, exploring the line of argument in greater depth with reference to broader literature. Discussion of the research limitations and conclusion follows.

1.4.1 Sharing Information

When families consider sharing information with schools, they need to make several decisions; whether they want to share, what to share and with whom (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017; King, 2009). In all studies, parents reported challenges when sharing information.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) found 90% of adoptive parents in their survey shared information with their child's school mainly disclosing adoptive status, family structure and their child's story. Disclosure practices tended to be categorised into proactive, implicit or reactive (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017).

Most parents were proactive in their disclosure of information about their child's adoption, choosing to share adoptive status straight away (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017). For some, however, deciding *how much* information to share was more difficult (Goldberg, 2014) with one parent "feeling stuck" about what exactly to share with school (Goldberg, 2014, p. 676). Those who shared information did so for different reasons. Some adoptive parents "didn't want to hide anything" (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 147) and wanted to be open with staff to pre-empt potentially difficult or sensitive situations for their child. They considered difficulties would be alleviated if the teacher knew their child's history (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017). For some, sharing information with school relieved their personal feelings of anxiety, with one parent commenting "I got it out there as early as I could so that it's not something I'm stressing over" (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 149). Gore Langton and Boy (2017) stress the importance of reciprocal information sharing to alleviate worries, concerns and to address assumptions (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). For some

parents, disclosure was implicit, where they chose not to actively share their child's adoptive status deeming it was "obvious" (for example the child was of a different race to the parents) (Goldberg, 2014, p. 676). Adoptive parents are not obligated to share their child's adoptive status. However, King (2009) highlights, when parents share information, there are often inconsistencies in how schools disseminate this information to staff, with some staff questioning why the information would be relevant to them. Reactive disclosure took place in response to an incident that had occurred, such as school forms which did not allow the family to accurately describe themselves (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017).

Parental concerns over who they should share information with were also highlighted by Cooper & Johnson (2007). One paper reported finding that parents appreciated being asked for background information (Goldberg, Frost, & Black, 2017). It helped them feel teachers were supporting their child, which boosted their confidence in the teacher's knowledge and understanding of adoption issues (Adoption UK, 2014; Howard, 2019). Furthermore, a named contact in school may allow for better control of parental disclosure practices and dissemination of information to wider staff. The expanded role of the Designated Teacher in England may help to alleviate some of the communication concerns for adoptive parents.

1.4.2 Knowledge and understanding of adoption and pre-adoptive experiences

A key construct interpreted from the studies relates to the adoptive parents' perception of school staff's lack of knowledge and understanding of adoption, and the potential long-term impact of pre-adoptive experiences (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017). There may be an assumption by adoptive parents that school staff *should* be aware of attachment theory and ACEs (Dunstan, 2010). Findings by Smyth (2017) and Stewart (2017) however, suggest teachers often have limited knowledge of a child's pre-adoptive history despite considering this helpful information (Taymans et al., 2008). This perceived lack of

understanding often led to school staff being considered ignorant about adoption, including the misconception that adoption was “rescuing” the children (Goldberg, 2014, p. 675; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 152) and the parents were “saints” for adopting (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 152). Wider research reflects these misconceptions, suggesting there may be a common belief that once a child is adopted, all previous problems cease (Barratt, 2012; Dunstan, 2010; Gore Langton, 2017; Syne et al., 2012). Misconceptions such as these, meant some parents considered their child's learning and behaviour were not fully understood at school and were even labelled as 'bad' (Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017, pp. 195-198) as their behaviours were not understood in the context of early adversity (Alisic, Bus, Dulack, Pennings, & Splinter, 2012; Barratt, 2012; RB-Banks & Meyer, 2017). This led to perceptions of unfairness in the expectation that the children should conform to school behaviour policies (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Gore Langton, 2017).

One parent described frustration, commenting "it's taken until this year for them to…appreciate the impact trauma has…I don't think they took it seriously” (Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017, p. 196). This finding is reflective of the Adoption UK (2014) survey reporting that two-thirds of surveyed parents felt school staff did not understand the impact of pre-adoptive experiences. They described schools as “not adoption savvy” (Goldberg, 2014, p. 675) expressing the need for further information or training in attachment and trauma (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017; King, 2009).

It is also suggested teachers lack confidence in their understanding and skills in this area (Alisic, 2012; Flemister, 2019) which may reflect a lack of comprehensive teaching about the needs of adopted children and Looked after Children (LAC) in initial teacher training (Comfort, 2007; Dunstan, 2010; Hepburn, 2018; King, 2009). Adoption UK (2018a) suggest the recent statutory guidance in the Children and Social Work Act (2017) expanding the role of the DT in schools to include adopted children will help to develop a greater understanding of the impact of early adversity on adopted children across schools. Furthermore, there is a requirement for DT's to receive training to ensure school staff can support these children. Developments such as this reflect an increasing recognition of the complex and long-term needs often experienced by adopted children.

1.4.3 Cycle of sharing information and knowledge and understanding of adoption and pre-adoptive experiences

The concepts of '*Sharing Information'* and '*Knowledge and understanding of Adoption*' are considered as two related concepts, linked by a dynamic, bidirectional relationship, termed 'Cycle of Communication and Relational Trust'.

The Cycle of Communication and Relational Trust

Research suggests teachers can develop a more thorough understanding of children's needs when they have a good relationship with and encourage parental involvement in school (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Parent-school relationships are considered to develop through successful reciprocal communications (K. Adams & Christenson, 1998) and rely on openness, honesty, competence and reliability from both parties (C. Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). The quality and content of contact are also important in the development of the parent-school relationship (K. Adams & Christenson, 1998; Ames, 1993).

The concept of 'relational trust' develops over time through repeated interactions (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) and the reciprocal, interactive process of sharing information (K. Adams & Christenson, 1998). Bryk and Schneider (2002) assert relational trust as developing between two individuals; however, Adams et al. (2009) develop this concept further as 'inter-role group relational trust'. This type of trust forms through interactions occurring within and between groups, such as parents and teachers. Underpinning inter-role group relational trust, are interactions which are congruent with the expectations of that person and their role (C. Adams et al., 2009). Parents having to 'educate the educators' about adoption and adoption issues could be argued as being incongruent with parents' expectations of the role and responsibilities of school staff, believing they should already know about these issues.

Information sharing about adoption may support the development of relational trust between the adoptive parents and school staff, which may subsequently improve home-school relations, which may further support for the child (K. Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; King, 2009). It is widely recognised that parental involvement with school is important for all children's education, not just for adopted children. Parental involvement is linked to positive academic attainment for non-adopted children and child development in addition to improving parent-teacher relationships (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Wilder, 2014).

I will now explore how the Cycle of Communication and Relational Trust impacts on the remaining constructs and how they interact.

1.4.4 Identifying and Understanding the child's unique needs

This overarching concept refers to adopted children's learning or educational needs. I interpreted this as a separate construct to that of having knowledge of adoption specific needs.

The papers reported that many of the adoptive parents referred to their child as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017; Hill & Koester, 2015). Some parents also noted the involvement of external professionals such as EPs, doctors and therapists (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). Wider research suggests adopted children are more likely to be labelled as having SEN than their peers (Department for Education, 2018b; Hill & Koester, 2015; Van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2005, 2006). Adopted children are also suggested to be more likely to experience difficulties in the area of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (Adoption UK, 2014; Department for Education, 2018b) due to their experiences of early adversity, which could manifest as behavioural challenges at school (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Law & Woods, 2018).

Lack of understanding of adoption among school staff and limited knowledge of the child's history could impact on how needs are interpreted in school. Some adoptive

parents said their children's needs were misidentified or identified too slowly (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017) suggesting that some adopted children may not have received support following the parent initiating concern. For the children whose needs were later identified and supported in school, parents considered their child's schoolwork had improved (Hill & Koester, 2015). While advocacy itself was not an overarching concept in the review, parents advocated for their child by 'fighting' for support and services (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017; Hill & Koester, 2015) to ensure their child was supported in school.

Taymans et al. (2008) found that only 34% of early childhood educators who were aware of adopted children in their class and made adjustments to their teaching such as modifying the content of assignments and activities. This may be an area worthy of future research.

1.4.5 Inclusion and Diversity

This construct is interpreted as involving both the parent's perception of being included within the school community and their child's inclusion within the classroom.

Adoptive parents described being introduced by school staff to other adoptive families as supporting their sense of inclusion and acceptance in the school community (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017). Adoptive families considered that where there were already adoptive children in a school, there was a greater understanding of adoption. Where there are no other adopted children, the burden on parents educating staff on the child's needs may be greater (Goldberg, 2014).

As described above, adoptive parents perceived that by ensuring their children's educational needs were met, their inclusion in the classroom was supported. One parent described how her son spent much of his day isolated from his peers. His inclusion back into the classroom was facilitated with the support of a paraprofessional in class (Hill & Koester, 2015). The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015b) promotes the inclusion of all children within mainstream settings and advises schools to make the

reasonable adjustments necessary to support the child in school. The ideology of inclusion assumes all children as equal, and schools are responsible for establishing a full and rich educational environment for all (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2017). However, it may be that the inclusion of adopted children has received less attention.

1.4.6 Curriculum

Understanding of adoption is required to ensure its salience within the curriculum (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017). Adoptive parents considered it important to share their child's adoptive status with staff in case there were any curriculum sensitivities. Family projects can be distressing for an adopted child (Barratt, 2012) with assignments involving baby pictures and family tree exercises creating feelings of discomfort and isolation for some families (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017). Adaptation of activities and assignments and incorporating diverse families into the curriculum helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted (Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017). One parent described their celebration of "Gotcha Day" (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 151) and suggested their child could talk about it in class to inform their peers about their story.

Parents appreciated prior communication about potentially sensitive assignments (Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017, p. 197) so they and school can decide how best to approach the task. The absence of such communication and a lack of understanding that parents may experience from school staff could lead to parents feeling disrespected and not heard.

Parents reported they often donated resources such as books about adoption or featuring diverse families as they felt their children and families were "not reflected in the materials" at school (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 149). Through the donation of resources, parents aimed to highlight the diversity amongst families, not only by raising the profile of adoption but also different family structures and emphasised the importance of incorporating discussions of family diversity into the curriculum (Goldberg 2014). Parents suggested diverse families be discussed in lessons so the child "doesn't

feel odd" (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017, p. 153). The parents wanted to normalise adoption and the diversity of families. Schools that are welcoming and inclusive of diverse families can support children's identity development and enhance family-school rapport (Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017; Grotevant, 1997).

1.5 Limitations

It is acknowledged there are some limitations within this meta-ethnographic review of the literature. The process of a meta-ethnography involves subjective interpretation (Lee et al., 2015; Noblit & Hare, 1988). It is acknowledged that a different researcher may have interpreted the accounts differently as each individual brings their own biases, objectives and beliefs, which a meta-ethnography acknowledges.

I recognise that this review cannot capture the complexity and variety of adoptive parent's views and experiences. As there has been little empirical research carried out to explore the experiences of adoptive parents with their child's school, there were limited papers from which to include in the review. The purpose of this review however, was to provide a rich picture of adoptive parents' experiences.

In terms of the review papers, it is acknowledged there was limited diversity between three of the studies. Three studies had the same lead author (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017; Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017), which all drew from the same original US-based sample. Only one study was based in the UK (Cooper & Johnson, 2007) which could have implications for the findings and conclusions, as US adoptive parents may have different experiences due to a different education system. The studies which specified details of their sample included different types of family structure (for example, same-sex and transracial adoptive parents). Different types of family structure could add further layers of complexity, in addition to being adoptive parents, which I did not specifically explore. It might be pertinent for future research to coordinate research on the views and perspectives between adoptive parents' teachers and adopted children for a more detailed exploration of perceptions from the perspectives of those involved.

1.6 Conclusion

My meta-ethnography highlighted *'sharing information'; 'knowledge and understanding of adoption and pre-adoptive experiences'; 'identifying and understanding the child's needs'; 'inclusion and diversity'*; and '*curriculum'* as key aspects of adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school.

The review highlighted that these concepts are part of a complex interplay with the sharing of information and knowledge and understanding of adoption, forming a reciprocal cycle of communication and relational trust between parents and school staff. Developing this cyclical relationship appeared to influence the other aspects of their experiences. Adoptive families represent understudied family groups who may experience complex challenges at home and school. Adoptive parents' experiences with their child's school is an internationally under-researched area, and it was hoped this review might add to the limited literature body in this area.

My initial scoping research for this literature review aimed to explore research from the adopted child's perspective of their experiences of school; however, there was minimal literature in this area. For this reason, my empirical research (Chapter 3) aims to contribute to this gap in the field.

Chapter 2: Bridging Document

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to document the bridge from my systematic literature review (Chapter 1) to empirical research (Chapter 3). It covers my motivation and rationale for focussing on the educational experience of adopted children. Consideration is given to my philosophical assumptions that have underpinned the research. I also explore the decision-making involved in the focus of the research and the methodology used to answer my empirical research question. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations made throughout.

2.1.1 My personal motivation for this area of study

When deciding upon a research topic, I took inspiration from my role before becoming a Trainee EP (TEP). I previously worked in a secondary school as a mentor and coordinator for Looked after Children (LAC). Adopted children were not part of my remit at the time; however, an adopted young person wanted to be part of my 'cohort' and spend time with other children who he perceived were 'just like him'. I realised there appeared to be less discussion in school about the potential needs of adopted children in comparison to those of LAC, a challenge reflected in the slow realisation from Government to recognise the potential vulnerability of this group of children in schools and adjust legislation appropriately.

As I progressed through my educational psychology training and was required to identify a professional area of interest for my research, it seemed a natural step for me to explore the educational experiences of adopted children in school.

2.1.2 From Systematic Literature Review to Empirical Research

Throughout the initial research scoping, I noticed a sparsity of published research from adopted children's perspectives of their experience of school. I found just one unpublished thesis in the UK (Crowley, 2015) which explored adopted children's lived

experience of school, further highlighting a significant gap in the literature. Due to this scarcity of literature from the adopted child's perspective, the focus of my literature review needed to broaden to adults' perspectives. I chose not to specify specific adult groups in my search terms and allowed this discovery to emerge through the scoping process.

I considered adoptive parents were a suitable population for providing a unique view of their experiences with their child's school. An ecological perspective suggests the bi-directional interaction between parents and school can be influential on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Difficulties or strengths within one of the interconnected contexts such as home, can positively or negatively shape the child's experience of another context, such as the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Syne et al., 2012). To attempt a synthesis at all may appear to assume adoptive parents are a homogenous group, regardless of their experiences, family context and interpretations. Despite sharing the characteristic of being an adoptive parent, I believe that individuals' realities and experiences are subjective and unique (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). The variance between adoptive parents' experiences can give greater richness to their stories and remain valuable to explore.

Based on the findings of the literature review and the identified literature gap, I decided to explore the perspectives of adopted children's experiences of school using semi-structured interviews. It was felt this would add to the limited literature base and consider the educational experiences through valuing the voices of adopted children rather than those around them. While my empirical research is similar to that of Crowley (2015), I have differentiated my research by my research question. Crowley's (2015) research focussed more on social relationships in school; I endeavoured to keep my interview questions broad, allowing an inductive approach to exploring children's experience of school. The sample who participated in my research was a mixed group of secondary school-aged children. My research also took place in a different LA, and UK county. In seeking the views of adopted children, this study offers a contribution to this small body of work. While the perspectives of adoptive parents are important to consider, only the adopted child can share their unique perspective on their personal experience.

In this next section, I will explore in more depth the importance of the child's voice in research and offer some critique.

2.1.3 Child Voice

The views and wishes of children are central to my values, underpinning my practice and approach to research. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the importance of involving children in decisions about their own life. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was instrumental in instigating a landmark change in the rights for children, stating every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously (UN General Assembly, 1989). Furthermore, Gersch (1996) suggests young people have a moral right to be heard and have much to contribute to the consideration of their educational experiences.

Spyrou (2011) comments some children have been intentionally excluded from research by adult gatekeepers due to their perceived vulnerability. While adult decision-making may be borne out of care and what they regard as best for the child, this assumes the adult knows best, and the child is too young to competently provide their view (Danby & Farrell, 2004). Such assumptions about children may constrain or influence their voices (Spyrou, 2011) rather than regarding them as active participants who can interpret their own world and shape their experiences (Danby & Farrell, 2004; M. Hill, 2006). Children could be considered as 'experts' in their own lives who have a valuable contribution to make (Clark & Statham, 2005) when they are positioned as 'competent witnesses to their own lives' (Danby & Farrell, 2004, p. 44). Marginalised groups such as adopted children have often been excluded from research leaving their voices missing (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016). By disregarding their voice, it could diminish their feelings of value and worth and could reduce their sense of autonomy (J. Murray, 2019).

When asking questions about children's experiences, the best person to ask is the child (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Martin and Jackson (2002) suggest that children who have been in care have a 'wealth of practical knowledge and experience' (p. 124) with which

to advise professionals. It is, therefore, important children are given the opportunity to share their voice (Hart, 2002). I believe that listening to the views of adopted children can help increase our understanding of the potential needs and experiences of this group. To explore and understand what it is like to be an adopted child in school, it is necessary to ask an adopted child. Only they can provide an account of their lived experience of going to school with the adoptive label.

2.2 My Research Paradigm

Research paradigms guide decisions about how to carry out research and are characterised through their ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigms are considered to be the foundations upon which research is built (Grix, 2004).

It is important to consider the philosophical assumptions of the current research to contextualise the methodology used and how this links to the purpose of the research and the method employed (Carter & Little, 2007). This section aims to explore my developing thinking concerning my world view and the approach this research comes from.

2.2.1 Philosophical Assumptions

Each stage of the research process, from identifying my initial area of interest to all the research decisions made throughout the process, have been influenced and guided by my philosophical assumptions which underpin my world view as an applied Educational Psychologist and researcher. This section outlines how my view led to my chosen method.

As a researcher, I was interested in building a rich picture of adopted children's meaning-making and lived experiences of school, rather than gathering large amounts of objective evidence. Qualitative research most often focusses on how people make sense

of the world and how they interpret and experience events (Willig, 2008). A qualitative methodology enabled me to explore in-depth, adopted children's subjective perspectives and experiences of school, rather than a quantitative approach such as questionnaires or surveys. Quantitative methods were incongruent with the aims of the study and would give a limited opportunity for the participant to share their personal beliefs and opinions.

Qualitative studies aim to describe phenomena by capturing people's experiences and understand how people make sense of the world and the events they experience in it, rather than generalising the findings to a wider population (Yilmaz, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research is based on the epistemological assumption that social phenomena are so complex, that they cannot be reduced to quantitative measures (Yilmaz, 2013). A qualitative methodology emphasises 'transferability' rather than generalisability (Slevitch, 2011). In my view, reducing the experiences of adopted children and adoptive parents to numerical values fails to capture the nuances of the individual's experiences, which is the primary purpose of this research.

Phenomenological approaches aim to understand experiences and assume there are multiple realities for individuals (Willig, 2008) where knowledge is created by an individual's social, cultural and contextual understanding (Bryman, 2016). In this context, adopted children construct their reality intersubjectively with those around them and holistically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Levers, 2013) based on their personal histories and their experiences within their adoptive family, meaning they each experience school in their own unique way. From a phenomenological perspective, people can perceive and experience what may be the same environment in very different ways (Willig, 2008). I, therefore, maintained there would be multiple realities of the adopted children's experiences of secondary school rather than one fixed view.

The research questions for the Systematic Literature Review and Empirical research project reflected subjectivist assumptions and aimed to explore rich experiences through idiographic, rather than nomothetic means. They focussed on exploring the lived experiences of school from the perspectives of adoptive parents and adopted children, therefore, qualitative approaches were considered most appropriate.

I considered it important to adopt a methodology which was congruent with my world view and one which would be appropriate in answering my research question. While I am aware there is a range of qualitative methodologies, I chose to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore and interpret the lived experiences of adopted children in rich detail about what school is like from their perspective to answer my research question and to have a good fit with the purpose of my research.

2.3 My Research Methodology

2.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a type of qualitative methodology. As I was interested in exploring the lived educational experiences of adopted children, a phenomenological approach, acknowledging individual experiences, was the most appropriate method for me to use. Pertinent to my empirical research and world view, IPA focuses upon perceptions and subjective experiences of the world, recognising that individuals can experience the same phenomena, but in very different ways (Willig, 2008). In this research, this would mean that being an adopted child at school would be a different experience for each individual regardless of which school they attend.

Phenomenology is explained by Willig (2008) to focus on the content of consciousness and the individual's experience of the world. IPA is an idiographic, qualitative approach to exploring how individuals make sense of their personal, lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Furthermore, IPA acknowledges the active role of the researcher within the study, and phenomenological analysis is always an interpretation of the participant's experience (Willig, 2008). It is important to me as a researcher and an applied practitioner that IPA is considered to be participant-centred research (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 2013). This means that people's experiences and perspectives are at the forefront and are of value to psychological research (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Due to its interpretative and phenomenological roots, IPA fits with my research question to

create phenomenological knowledge in understanding how adopted children experience school.

All research has challenges, and the following section will explore some key issues within this research, which were worthy of further discussion.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

When engaging in any research, there are many ethical issues to be considered. These issues are particularly important when undertaking research with vulnerable members of society, such as children (Flewitt, 2005). Before beginning the Empirical Research, full ethical approval was obtained from Newcastle University's Ethics Committee. The research also adhered to the ethical guidelines as outlined by the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (The British Psychological Society, 2018), the Code of Human Research Ethics (The British Psychological Society, 2010) and the Health Care Professions Council (Health Care Professions Council, 2016). Given the potential vulnerabilities of my participant group, it was important that ethical considerations were made throughout my research project and did not cease after obtaining ethical approval and initial consent. The primary ethical considerations and issues that arose are outlined below.

2.1.4 Adopted Children – A note on terminology

Within much of the wider body of literature, the term ‘adoptee’ is used to describe a person who has been adopted. I have chosen to use the broader term ‘adopted children’ within this thesis. As described by Clapton (2018), the terminology around adoption changes over time. Currently, the term 'adoptee' has fallen out of favour, as it is considered by some to be linguistically diminutive (Johnston, 2004). Furthermore, each of the participants in the study was under the age of 16. I therefore, chose to use the term 'child'.

I think it is important to note that the adoption of children is emotionally charged, and words can carry implications and assumptions. Johnston (2004) describes the notion of adoption as sometimes being perceived as second-best and highlights how terms such as 'real' parents further imply that adoptive relationships are somehow fake. The use of Respectful Adoption Language (RAL) serves to reduce the stigma associated with adoption and reduce the emotion in the terminology that is used when describing aspects of adoption (see Clapton (2018) for a full breakdown of common adoption words and alternate meanings and interpretations).

2.4.1 Recruitment and Gatekeeping

Interview studies often adopt purposive sampling methods to recruit participants who have experience of the phenomena under study (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). The group is homogenous to the extent that they share the experience of being adopted; however, their lived experiences and own personal interpretations of their situations will be different and subjective. When using IPA, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2013) recommend a small sample size of approximately three to six interviews to allow sufficient time for analysis, reflection and dialogue which are all central to successful research. Consequently, I carried out single interviews with three adopted children.

Recruiting children to participate in research is difficult due to the need for approval from multiple stakeholders and their willingness for children to actively participate in research about them and their lives (Powell et al., 2019). During the recruitment phase for my research, I came across several challenges, namely from gatekeepers. As described by Powell et al. (2019) and Campbell (2008), the multiple stakeholders involved with children such as parents, teachers and agencies can be perceived as ‘gatekeepers’ (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016). Gatekeepers may be avoiding the child's participation in research to protect them from potentially sensitive topics and the perceived vulnerabilities of the child (Danby & Farrell, 2004; Powell et al., 2019). However, they may be marginalising the child further and denying their voice being

heard (Campbell, 2008; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Powell et al., 2019). As adopted children have typically been excluded from research in the past (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016), I felt it imperative that their voices were heard. For this reason, I explored various recruitment opportunities from liaising with the LA Adoption Support Service, regional and national adoption agencies, online forums, contacting Virtual School Headteachers and attending SENCO network meetings.

There were some challenges during the recruitment phase. Some of the services I approached provided support to children and families who were in need and experiencing significant difficulties at home. As I was hoping to work with children who were settled at home, I determined it was not ethically appropriate for me to interview those children at that time. I recognise however, their perspectives could be invaluable in further understanding some of the difficulties adopted children may experience at home or school. Furthermore, while I posted my flyer on adoptive forums online, there may be some families who may not describe themselves as adoptive and may not follow such online forums, not be open to participation. These families may be less likely to participate in research exploring adoption, meaning that adopted children's voices are not represented in research.

Consequently, 12 parents, in total, expressed an interest in their child participating. Four subsequently withdrew their interest, and five were considered too young following the decision to interview adopted children in secondary schools. Findings by Powell et al. (2019) and Campbell (2008) suggest developing authentic relationships based on trust, serves to alleviate stakeholder concerns thus encouraging them to be more forthcoming providing consent for their participation. In order to establish a trusting relationship with the adoptive parents, I ensured I responded promptly to their emails and provided them with as much information about the research as possible (Appendix M p. 133). Openness about the project enabled the parents to decide as to the 'appropriateness' (Campbell, 2008, p. 40) and the sensitivity of the topic.

2.4.2 Power Dynamics

Within research, there is an inevitable power imbalance between researcher and participant (van der Riet & Boettiger, 2009). In this research, I was aware of not only the power imbalance between adults and children, but that this might be emphasised by the participants' prior life experiences (David, Tonkin, Powell, & Anderson C, 2005). This was also an important consideration of the school-based context of this study, a setting in which children typically follow the rules placed upon them by adults (Danby & Farrell, 2004). I was proactive in attempting to minimise potential power imbalances through consideration of the interview structure and procedure. For example, by interviewing the participants in school, in a setting they are familiar with (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009), offering them the opportunity to meet me before the interview and including a picture of myself on my letter, so they knew what I looked like. Furthermore, I emphasised at the start of the interview that my role was as a TEP, and they were free to choose if they did not want to respond to a question. Talking about a neutral topic of interest first, helped to model that the child was the expert in the room (Golding, Dent, Nissim, & Stot, 2007) and set the tone for the remainder of the interview.

I believe that maintaining an approachable demeanour and demonstrating warmth, empathy and genuineness (Rogers, 1965) can help to alleviate such power imbalances and develop a rapport and relationship (Beaver, 2011) as much as possible. Using IPA also allows for a flexible approach in the interviews where the initiatives of the participant can be followed when they wanted to discuss a particular topic further.

The use of visual 'Stop/Go' cards were presented as an alternative method of demonstrating when the participant felt comfortable to continue or not.

2.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves reflecting upon how my role as the researcher may influence and shape the research process (Willig, 2013). Reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research as it enables the rigour and ethicality of the study to be enhanced

(Berger, 2015) by accounting for researcher values, beliefs knowledge and biases (Willig, 2008).

Berger (2015) suggests three types of reflexivity positions; shared experiences with the participants, moving from outsider to insider during the research and, one that has no personal experience of the phenomena being studied. As someone who has not personally experienced adoption, nor have friends or family who has adopted a child, my work with LAC and adopted children in my previous role gave me some insight into adopted children's experiences of school. However, I acknowledge I may have been influenced by my own biases and beliefs of what it might be like to be adopted and brought my own assumptions to the research process. As Berger (2015) denotes, exploring an unfamiliar topic allows the interviewee to be in the expert position, which could be perceived as empowering. It could be argued that while I have no personal experience of adoption, this could present as a challenge in terms of my lack of understanding as to what it is genuinely like to be adopted (Berger, 2015). To counter this, my research question remained broad, and when interviewing the adopted children, I presented myself as honest and open, and with genuine curiosity about their experiences. I am also in an outsider position because I am from a different generation; I am a postgraduate student rather than a fellow pupil at their school, therefore to some extent, I was studying the unfamiliar.

Semi-structured interviews were used as they are considered to be the model method for IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2004). There is a broad literature base, which considers the supplementary use of visual methods in qualitative research as an important aspect of facilitating the exploration of children's views and perspectives (Clark, 2005; A. D. Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007; Punch & Oancea, 2014). I initially considered the use of visual methods to support my interviewing; however, I later decided against this. I found much of the research was directed towards young children, rather than adolescents. Given my prior experience of working with LAC and adopted children in secondary school, I contended that as the children were older, they might be able to answer my questions verbally. Furthermore, Shaw, Brady, and Davey (2011) suggest that creative visual methods may be less appropriate for older children who may consider a request to draw a picture to be patronising or may feel they are not 'good' at art.

Chapter 3: Empirical Research

An Exploration of Adopted Children's Lived Experience of School:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Abstract

Research exploring the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) suggest that children who have been adopted from care may be a vulnerable group, which may impact upon their experiences of school.

In the UK, many government initiatives have focussed on the educational experiences and outcomes for LAC (Dann, 2011; Department for Education, 2019), however, it is argued there remains limited empirical consideration of the lived experiences of adopted children in education (Berridge & Saunders, 2009; Midgen, 2011). The literature reviewed in Chapter 1 highlighted that while research has been carried out concerning adoption and education, the views and perspectives of adopted children were often missing.

This research aimed to address this literature 'gap' and generate a rich understanding of the lived experiences of adopted children in secondary schools, from their perspective, and offer a new contribution to the limited literature base. To gain insight into adopted children's lived experience of school, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three adopted children in three different secondary schools across the North East. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Three master themes emerged from the interviews, including ‘relationships’, ‘adoptive status’ and ‘inclusion’ which offer a unique insight into the layers of complexity surrounding adoption in schools. Findings indicated the adopted children valued their relationships with staff and peers, and at times appeared to experience cognitive dissonance between the privacy surrounding the disclosure of their adoptive status and the need for their status to be understood. Further to this, the children wanted to ‘fit in’ and be perceived as ‘normal’, implementing different strategies to support them with this.

The implications of the present study for the practice of educational psychology are discussed, together with future directions for research and the limitations of the present study.

3.1 Introduction

In the UK, several government initiatives have focussed on the educational experiences and outcomes for LAC (Dann, 2011; Department for Education, 2019), however, there remains a relative paucity of literature pertaining to the experiences of adopted children (Berridge & Saunders, 2009). Historically, children's views have been excluded from research (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016; Spyrou, 2011). This research aims to fill the identified literature gap by exploring adopted children's lived experiences of school to generate an in-depth understanding of their experiences. In seeking the views of adopted children, this study offers a new contribution to this small body of work.

Firstly, adoption and its impact on educational experiences are explored, followed by the research methodology. The discussion is then presented within the context of relevant literature, followed by the limitations of this research. Finally, implications for EP practice and conclusions are presented.

3.1.1 Adoption

'Adoption' describes the process whereby the rights and responsibilities of the biological parent(s) are permanently transferred to the new adoptive family (First4Adoption, 2019) and is legalised by an Adoption Order (Adoption and Children Act, 2002).

More than 3800 children were adopted in England during 2018 (Department for Education 2018a). While this number is relatively small in comparison to the total number of Looked after Children (LAC), many children are adopted from care and are likely to have experienced abuse, neglect or trauma prior to their adoption (Adoption UK, 2019; Department for Education, 2018b; Gore Langton, 2017; Midgen, 2011; Selwyn et al., 2014). The effects of early adversity may be compounded by experiences in the care system, such as frequent placement moves, inconsistency in caregiving, and intensive input from children's services (Barratt, 2012; Brodzinsky, 1993). While some research suggests being adopted also has many developmental benefits for children with histories of complex trauma (Van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006) such as increased stability in the family environment

(Harden, 2004; Mercy & Saul, 2009), many adopted children continue to struggle throughout childhood and adolescence (Selwyn et al., 2014). Children who have experienced significant or multiple early adversities are at potential risk for educational disadvantage including academic underachievement, difficulties with behaviour, learning and relationships (Berridge & Saunders, 2009; Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Chafouleas, Koriakin, Roundfield, & Overstreet, 2019; Dann, 2011; Perfect, Turley, Carlson, Yohanna, & Saint Gilles, 2016; Thomas, 2015; Veltman & Browne, 2001). I will now go on to explore in more depth some of the educational outcomes for adopted children.

3.1.2 Adopted Children and Educational Outcomes

As discussed in Chapter 1, adoptive parents identified schooling as a challenge (Adoption UK, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Selwyn et al., 2014). The majority of surveyed adoptive parents in the UK described their child as having difficulties with learning, SEMH or behaviour in school (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). A third of recently surveyed adoptive parents said their child refused to go to school with this figure increasing to 46% for secondary school-aged children (Adoption UK, 2019). Furthermore, children who have experienced early trauma are suggested to have difficulties in cognitive, socioemotional, and academic domains in comparison to their non-care experienced peers (Perfect et al., 2016).

3.1.2.1 Attainment

Adopted children have been identified as achieving on average lower 'Attainment 8' scores than their non-adopted peers at Key Stage 4, but achieve higher when compared to LAC (Adoption UK, 2018b; Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2017; Department for Education, 2019). However, a higher proportion of LAC and adopted children are suggested to have identified SEN such as speech, language and communication difficulties, as well as sensory and physical impairments (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Department for Education, 2018b). Furthermore, before their adoption, many adopted children experience several foster placement moves (McNeish & Scott, 2013). An increased number of home relocations and

instability is suggested to lead to increased behavioural and emotional difficulties, academic difficulties and school exclusions (Amato, 2001; Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Harden, 2004; Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, & Egolf, 2003; Simpson & Fowler, 1994). However, the increased stability provided by adoption could be a possible protective factor, offering a positive influence on adopted children's educational outcomes (Harden, 2004; Mercy & Saul, 2009; Sebba et al., 2015). In response to this growing literature base, the legislative context has changed to acknowledge the potential long-term impact of trauma and loss and its subsequent impact on their education. Changes to pupil premium funding (Department for Education, 2013, 2014, 2016) and the extension of the Virtual School Head teacher's (VSH) responsibility to include adopted children (Children and Social Work Act, 2017), provides further recognition of some of the distinctive needs of adopted children in school.

3.1.2.2 Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

More recently, there has been an increasing emphasis on the SEMH of adopted children, recognising the potential long term impact of early adversity on mental health and wellbeing (Department for Education, 2016). Dealing with the loss of birth parents is suggested to affect children's concentration, and their ability to cope with the social-emotional demands of the classroom, thus impacting upon their learning (Adoption UK, 2018b; McLaughlin, 2008; Van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005). SEMH difficulties can be manifested as low self-confidence and self-esteem, attachment difficulties and problems with bullying and friendships (Midgen, 2011; Selwyn et al., 2014). Brown et al. (2017) also suggested adoption was 'associated with…elevated levels of behavioural problems' in school (p. 346) when compared to non-adopted or non-care experienced peers. Increased behavioural difficulties may be detrimental to educational success and potentially the under-achievement of some adopted children in school. Key relationships in school with teachers and peers may help mitigate these possible negative impacts. I will now discuss the importance of relationships in school for adopted children.

3.1.3 The importance of relationships at school

Attachment theory suggests the age of 0-3 years is critical for children's development (Bowlby, 1969). The average age of children adopted in England is 3.4 years (Department for Education, 2017) which would suggest their early years are likely to have been unsettled and undermined by neglect, abuse, environmental disadvantage and instability during their most crucial years (Comfort, 2007). A range of complex factors contribute to the long-term outcomes for adopted children, however, relationships with teachers and peers are suggested to potentially help to mitigate possible negative outcomes (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

3.1.3.1 Teacher-pupil relationships

Stable relationships with caring and supportive adults such as teachers are considered important in helping to moderate the potential negative effects of early adversity and promote engagement and achievement in school (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). The student-teacher relationship is considered by some to be an extension of the parent-child relationship, which provides a foundation for students' social, emotional, and cognitive regulation at school (Davis, 2003; Myers & Pianta, 2008). Safe and stable relationships can also support children to develop resilience and have a positive impact on mental and physical health, academic performance, social skills and emotional functioning (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Beveridge, 2013; Crouch et al., 2019; Harden, 2004; Mercy & Saul, 2009) all of which are important for school.

Children who have experienced early trauma may experience difficulty forming attachment relationships with other people (Ainsworth, 1989; Golding, 2008). Children may be hesitant in forming relationships with school staff as their experience of abuse and neglect may reinforce their perceptions that adults are unreliable (A. Greig et al., 2008). Sensitive care from adults may help children to learn the world is safe and provide a 'secure base' from which children can become engaged in learning (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017; Musset & Topping, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011). The presence of a 'good enough' relationship, such as those provided by teachers, may help to counteract the negative effects of detrimental early relationships. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that student-teacher attachment is related to

academic and social competence for elementary students. For adopted children who have experienced early adversity, developing positive connections to adults in school may be a key factor in facilitating academic success and positive educational experiences (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Sroufe, 2016).

3.1.3.2 Friendships

Friendships, particularly during adolescence can be highly influential in supporting or hindering experiences of school (R. E. Adams, Santo, & Bukowski, 2011; Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2000). Adoptive parents cited difficulties with friendships and social skills as key difficulties for their children, with some also experiencing bullying (Adoption UK, 2014; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2015; Dunstan, 2010). Lansford et al. (2003) suggest positive peer relationships can be a protective factor for children who have had negative early relationship experience. Adolescents tend to spend more time with their peers and the nature of their relationships change during this time. Adolescents may therefore have more opportunities to mitigate the negative impacts of early adversity by increasing their network of support and opportunities for intimate disclosure (Lansford et al., 2003).

Quality of friendships and affiliation with friends could be protective against bullying and victimisation (Bollmer, Milich, Harris, & Maras, 2005). However, not all peer relationships in school are positive. Associating with peers who engage in anti-social behaviours is suggested to increase levels of aggression and lead to further anti-social behaviours (Lansford et al., 2003). It is therefore important for all children, including adopted children to have positive peer relationships in school to help support positive school experiences. Research on friendships has highlighted peer connections and a sense of relatedness as an important contributor to school belonging that enhances students' school experiences (Furrer and Skinner, 2003).

3.1.3.3 Belonging

Relationships with teachers and peers can contribute to children's sense of belonging in school and serve as a protective factor (Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013). School belonging is defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and valued by others within the school social environment" (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). A sense of belonging and connectedness might be particularly important for adopted children who may be more likely to have difficulties with relationships, which are a traditional source of a sense of belonging.

3.1.4 The importance of children's views

It has been proposed that EPs will often encounter situations where the voices of vulnerable children are not being heard (A. Greig, Hobbs, & Roffey, 2014). This may be particularly applicable to adopted children whose voice has often been missing from research (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016). Children have a moral and legal right to be heard and have much to contribute in consideration of their educational experiences (Gersch, 1996; UN General Assembly, 1989). Furthermore, statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2018b) refers to the importance of listening to and taking account of the child's wishes and feelings about their education.

The underpinning rationale for undertaking this research was based on the premise that listening to the views of adopted children can help increase our understanding of their educational experiences and how their educational experiences may be enhanced. Exploring individual's subjective experiences are invaluable and provide a unique insight into one's lived experience (Willig, 2008). Listening to the voices of children is the "bread and butter" of the EP profession (A. Greig et al., 2014, p. 7).

3.2 Relevance to EP Practice

There is little empirical literature about the role of EPs concerning adopted children (Midgen, 2011). The introduction of Pupil Premium Plus funding and the extension of the VSH role demonstrate increasing government recognition of some of the distinctive needs of adopted children in schools. Osborne, Norgate, and Traill (2009) explored the involvement of EP services with this population and found EPs predominantly work with LAC and fostering services, however, it may be that recent legislative changes for adopted children may not yet be well embedded (Adoption UK, 2019). More up to date research in this area is necessary.

3.3 Research Aims

This research aimed to explore adopted children's experiences of school from their perspective. Adopted children have individual and nuanced experiences. This research provides an opportunity for adopted children to share their 'voice' and explore their lived experiences of school. Creating a rich understanding of adopted children's experiences of school could be important to educational professionals such as designated teachers, school staff or EPs who may be looking to effectively support adopted children in school and improve their experience of education.

This empirical research explores the question '**How do adopted children experience school**?'

3.4 Methodology

In considering children as 'experts' in their own experiences (Clark & Statham, 2005; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005), this research seeks to generate an in-depth understanding and build a rich picture of adopted children's lived experiences of school by employing a qualitative phenomenological research method. Congruent with my interpretivist

epistemological position, semi-structured interviews were carried out and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to interpret and analyse the adopted children's views.

3.4.1 Method

This section outlines recruitment, gathering and analysis of data, and continual ethical considerations.

3.4.2 Participants

Participants were recruited through two routes; a regional adoption agency who contacted adoptive families on my behalf, and contact with local school SENCOs, who provided potential participants' parents with my contact details should they wish their child to participate. Parents were sent a flyer with initial details (Appendix H: Flyer sent to adoption agencies for initial recruitment p. 127). Eligible participants had to be adopted for over a year and be settled in their adoptive home. I defined being 'settled' as no concerns raised by welfare or educational professionals, and there was no current risk of the adoption breaking down. Parents, in collaboration with their child, determined whether it was appropriate for them to participate. I contacted the parents who expressed an interest to discuss the research.

My sample consisted of three secondary school-aged adopted children (see Table 8 below). Within IPA, a small sample is required to give detailed appreciation to each participants' perceptions and understandings of a phenomenon during the analysis stage (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2004).

Table 8: Details and rationale for participants

School	Gender	Year Group	Rationale for this population
School A	Male	Year 10	1. Likely to have attended at least two schools (primary and secondary school) 2. 74% of surveyed secondary aged adopted children said their teachers did not fully understand or know how to support their needs (Adoption UK, 2018b) 3. The 'achievement gap' between disadvantaged pupils is considered to widen in secondary schools (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018)
School B	Male	Year 8	
School C	Female	Year 8	

3.4.3 Data Generation

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an in-depth insight into participants' lived experiences and are considered to be the model method of data collection for IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2004).

An interview schedule (Appendix O: Interview Schedule p. 136) was designed following guidance provided by Smith et al. (2013). The funnelling technique was reflected in the interviews which involves asking broad questions and using follow up prompts to deepen the discussion on the points raised by the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

All interviews were verbal and creative visual methods were not used to gather data. Adolescents may consider a request to draw a picture to be patronising or may feel they are not 'good' at art (Shaw et al., 2011). Visual 'Stop/Go' cards were presented and available as an alternative method to demonstrate if the participant felt uncomfortable in answering a question or in continuing with the interview. Interviews took place in July 2019, at the child's school, in a quiet room.

The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone and transcribed by the researcher. Voice recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and only the researcher had access. Once transcribed, all recordings were deleted. Participants' names and other

identifiable information was changed, and pseudonyms used to preserve anonymity. The transcribed interviews were analysed using IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Additional information and justification of my research methodology can be found in Chapter 2. For ease of the reader, an outline of IPA is also provided in the following section.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative methodology which draws upon the fundamentals of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). IPA is concerned with how people make sense of their life experiences and attach meaning to those experiences (Noon, 2018; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Participants are considered experts in their own lives (Reid et al., 2005). The approach can offer researchers a unique insight into the participants' experiences in their own words.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Newcastle University Ethics Committee and adhered to the ethical principles as outlined by the British Psychological Society (2018) and the Health Care Professions Council (2016).

Given the potential vulnerabilities of my participant group, it was important that ethical considerations were made throughout the research. The main ethical considerations and issues that arose are outlined below.

3.5.1 Consent and Confidentiality

In accordance with the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2010), informed consent was sought from participants. As the participants were under 16 years of age, the additional consent of parents was sought and was a prerequisite for the children's participation.

Following initial parental consent, a consent form and information sheets detailing the aims, purpose, and requirements of participation were emailed to parents and a copy was included for their child (Appendix M: Cover Letter and Information Sheet for Parents p 128-p 135). This also explained the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw. This ensured participants had time to reflect upon their participation in the research. Due to the nature of the research, consent was reviewed throughout the process. Before the interview, I explained verbally, and in writing, that participation was voluntary and withdrawal from the research was possible at any stage until data had been analysed. Consent was sought verbally and in writing at the start of the interview. The 'Consent Flow Chart' in Appendix G: Consent Flow Chart (p. 126) demonstrates the different levels of consent graphically.

3.5.2 Power Dynamics

To address an issue of a potential power imbalance between myself and the participants, I stated I was not looking for any 'right' or 'wrong' answers and emphasised this by being clear about my role as a TEP and allowing the participants to call me by my first name. I also informed them I was genuinely curious to hear their views about school and emphasised that I would not ask about their past experiences. Furthermore, I aimed to establish a rapport and help the participants to feel comfortable by allowing them to play with the Dictaphone to get used to how it works and hearing their own voice.

3.6 Data Analysis

The six stage IPA analysis framework guided analysis of the interview data (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2013)) outlined in Table 9 below. The framework is not considered to provide a prescriptive procedure but should be applied flexibly and creatively to the data.

Table 9: Stages of IPA identified by Smith et al. (2013)

Stage	Description
Step 1: Reading and re-reading	Immersion in and active engagement with the data of each individual transcript including listening back to the audio recording several times to become familiar with the data.
Step 2: Initial noting	Making initial annotations and comments on each of the transcripts. I made comments on the language used (linguistic), content of the data (descriptive) and more interpretative comments (conceptual).
Step 3: Developing emergent themes	Identifying emergent themes for each transcript based on my initial comments and notations in stage 2. Interpretations should 'arise from attending to the participant's words' (p. 90).
Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes	Grouping and organising themes by considering how they might fit together by identifying commonalities across emergent themes acknowledging the Double hermeneutic process. These superordinate themes reflect my most salient, important and interesting interpretations of the participants accounts of their lived experiences. I checked that these themes linked to the original transcripts to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness.
Step 5: Moving on to the next case	Bracket the findings from analysis of the first case and repeat the process with each subsequent transcript.
Step 6: looking for patterns across cases	Looking across the themes from each case to identify similarities, difference and relationships between them. Identify any higher order connections present the final result.

3.7 Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion sections have been merged, following guidance provided by Smith et al. (2013).

This section is organised by the master themes, as identified in the analysis process (see Table 10). Each master theme aimed to capture the essence of participants' views about their lived experience of school as best as possible and are discussed alongside the super-ordinate themes. This section reflects the 'double hermeneutic' of IPA, where the findings convey my interpretation of the participants' interpretation of their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Whilst these themes are presented in distinct categories, I would suggest there are links and overlaps across and between themes and all these elements impact and influence the participants' experiences of school. I have attempted to highlight these in more detail in the following section.

Table 10: Summary table of themes

Master Theme	Super-Ordinate theme
Relationships	Relationships with school staff
	Friendships
Adoptive Status	Disclosure
	The need to be understood
Inclusion	The importance of 'fitting in'
	Coping strategies

3.7.1 Master Theme 1: Relationships

The participants' relationships with teachers and friends featured strongly throughout all of their accounts and therefore 'relationships' has been identified as a master theme.

3.7.1.1 Super-ordinate theme: Relationships with school staff

This theme reflected the participants' thoughts about their relationships with their teachers and wider school staff. Liam's comment suggests that he valued the social and emotional support received from his teachers. He was able to develop positive and trusting relationships, where he felt comfortable in talking about his problems or worries.

> *Liam: "In Year 7 and 8 there was a teacher called Miss T who was our head of year then and me and her were like that (gesturing closeness) really close. I was telling her what we'd done at the weekend so if I did have any problems I'd go straight to her and then she left […] now me and Mr M are like that (gesturing closeness) so I'm thankful for them that they're here so that I have someone to talk to during the day"*

Liam's comment reflects wider research that contends strong student-teacher relationships have a positive impact on children (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Pianta et al., 2003). Some of Liam's relationships with his teachers were based on having shared mutual interests. These teachers and adults became role models for him and provided him with aspirations for his future.

> *Liam: "He's one of them people that I have things in interest with him and he has things in, that things that I like and he likes so like during lesson time, if we have a bit of free time we just talk about that and err and that's what I like"*

> *Liam: "I see Mr G and he's like 22 now, he's quite young teacher, he's just one of those people that says, look, he failed his English twice but look where he is now. He says people can stop you in your tracks, things can stop you in your tracks but then those things start to disappear and then yeah, carry on with your next steps in life"*

Weinberg, Oshiro, and Shea (2014) suggest from their research with LAC that a staff member, who builds a relationship with the child, supports them to navigate the education system and helps to maintain stable school placements can have a positive impact on them by becoming an educational advocate. It is possible that the staff identified by Liam performed this role for him. Furthermore, having an emotional connection with teachers who have a thorough understanding of the challenges children face is noted as important for children who have experienced early adversity (Day et al., 2012; Sugden, 2013) and as such they may feel more connected to the teachers whom they perceive care about them academically and personally (Cooper & Miness, 2014). For adopted children who have experienced early adversity, developing positive connections to adults in school may be a key factor in facilitating academic success and positive educational experiences.

Matthew's relationships with teachers were more focussed upon academic support. Matthew noted he has additional educational needs and identified the importance of his teachers implementing the educational support he requires. Matthew discussed the difficulties he has had with one specific teacher who he perceives has not been supporting him, despite the support being necessary and important to him. His negative experience with this teacher suggests a fragile relationship, which he described as having a negative impact on his experience of school.

Matthew: "They're all nice to us and like follow my SEN plan really well, they all know that've got a problem and they respect that and they're like oh you'll need an iPad for this lesson cause I do have an iPad that I work on as it makes us work a bit quicker"

Matthew: "[He] put us down quite a lot coz like, he knows that I have a problem, like he doesn't really follow my plan as well sometimes…..makes me feel like he's not making my school experience the best that it could be"

As Matthew noted, relationships with teachers can influence a child's experience of school either positively or negatively. Wider research suggests a possible explanation for this finding, that student-teacher relationships are influential on engagement and achievement

at school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Pianta et al., 2003; Roorda et al., 2011) however, for children who may be considered as 'academically at risk' such as those with learning difficulties, student-teacher relationships are considered particularly crucial (Roorda et al., 2011).

From a motivational perspective, good relationships with teachers are suggested to reflect relationships that support motivation and learning in the classroom. Teachers can help students to feel successful in their education by supporting their autonomy (Davis, 2003; Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Reeve, 2006). In contrast, a poor relationship may have a negative impact on a student's feeling of success and motivation and may lead to feelings of incompetence (Davis, 2003). By not providing Matthew with the tools required to be successful in the subject, I would suggest Matthew's teacher was not supporting him to feel competent and thus becoming less motivated and disengaged in the subject.

Kate's narrative suggests she has a different perspective about her relationships with teachers.

Interviewer:	***Is there someone in school that you feel like you can talk to if there was an issue?***
Kate:	*All of my friends, I think they would be really understanding*
Interviewer:	***What about staff?***
Kate:	*Not really, I don't really speak to any of the staff.*

Kate considered her friendships as more important to her than her relationships with staff. It would be reasonable to infer from this extract that Kate may not have a close relationship with a specific adult in school and she may not perceive there to be a need to relate to teachers. I will now go on to discuss the importance of friendship for the participants.

3.7.1.2 Super-ordinate theme: Friendships

The participants all shared that they had friends in school and being adopted was not an issue in their current friendship circles.

Matthew: "nobody picks on us for being adopted"

Kate: "with my friends I don't see any difference to me and my friends, maybe it's just cause of the person I am but I don't think there's any difference to be honest"

As children get older, particularly into adolescence, often friendships can become more important than the relationships with their family (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder Jr, 2003). There has been little research about the importance or influence of peer relationships for adopted children (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000; Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, 2007), however, considering most children are adopted from care, it may be pertinent to draw upon the research about LAC. The importance of peer relationships for LAC has been explored by several studies (Ridge & Millar, 2000; Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013; Sugden, 2013). The benefits of peer relationships include a sense of belonging (Emond, 2014; Ridge & Millar, 2000), increased self-confidence and self-esteem (Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2007), social support (Ridge & Millar, 2000; Singer et al., 2013) and protection from peers (Emond, 2014; Ridge & Millar, 2000). However, as noted in the literature review, many adoptive parents cited difficulties with friendships and bullying as an issue (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). Further research draws attention to the stigma and bullying experienced by some children due to their adoptive status (Selwyn et al., 2014; Wijedasa & Selwyn, 2011) where children's perceived differences are negatively evaluated. Liam talked about some of the difficulties he had at school when he was younger.

Liam: "I was telling people that I was adopted and they were bullying us, that's up to them if they want to take the mick out of us"

Liam: "One of them was because I was adopted, they says that I was a test tube baby and all that so that was a tough time. I can't remember anything from when I was adopted but they just kept on saying you're a test tube baby"

Adoption research has referred to 'microaggressions' which are defined as "attitudes, judgements…and racism that are communicated in subtle, overt…ways in everyday life" (Baden, 2016, p. 5). In research with adopted adolescents, having adoption used against them to hurt them was rated as high in intensity and frequency (Garber & Grotevant, 2015), as Liam suggested. This type of microaggression has overlaps with the sub-*theme Disclosure of Adoptive Status* in the next master theme of *Adoptive Status* which I will go on to discuss in the next section.

Liam described the troubles he experienced in Year 7 and 8 with school exclusions and the police, however, he acknowledged that a new group of friends helped him to "*settle down*" and had a more positive influence on him.

Liam: "In Year 9 I […] sort of like settled down, found where my place was and that like getting a new set of friends, enjoying it, social time in school, outside school and cracking on with my exams"

Liam: "I have a good group of friends"

For Liam, his new friendship group could be considered a source of social capital (Coleman, 1988). Social capital is where resources are accessed through the development of relationships, therefore by forming relationships and friendships, individual's access the resources that person has (Crosnoe et al., 2003). Newly acquired resources from their friends could include social support, academic knowledge and skills. As demonstrated by Liam's comment, these resources can promote achievement and encourage involvement at school (Crosnoe et al., 2003).

3.7.2 Master Theme 2: Adoptive Status

This master theme depicts how the participants felt about their adoptive status and how others came to know about their status. Comments reflected two general themes: 'disclosure of adoptive status' and 'the need to be understood'.

3.7.2.1 Super-ordinate theme: Disclosure of adoptive status

This sub-theme centred on the disclosure of the participants' adoptive status to their peers and staff in school. Disclosure was a topic that all of the participants discussed and whilst they had all been adopted for several years at the time of the interview, it remained a dominant aspect of their school experience with others frequently approaching them asking questions and questioning the authenticity of their adoptive status.

Matthew: " someone will just walk up to us and say, who didn't know would just walk up to us and say 'Oh I heard from somewhere that you're adopted is that true?' and I'll just say yeah, alright"

Kate: "People come up to me a go like 'are you adopted?' and I'll say 'yeah'. It's not the sort of thing that 'no one can find out'"

Liam: "I don't go round wearing a badge and one of those microphones shouting out Oh I'm adopted! But if people don't believe me, I'll just say ask brothers"

Whilst participants were open about their adoptive status, it was important they had agency over the disclosure, preferring to be able to tell people themselves.

Liam: "Staff shouldn't just blurt it out, they have to get the student's permission or the parents' permission or whatever to tell like other students and say look they're adopted. […] It's not really the parents that can speak, they're not adopted, they're the ones who have adopted erm…, if the student doesn't want that to happen then that's their decision"

Matthew: "I'd probably tell them myself cause if somebody else tells them they might not believe it something like that"

It may therefore be important for adopted children to choose how, when and to whom to disclose their personal information to (Bauminger, Finzi-Dottan, Chason, & Har-Even, 2008). Having agency over the disclosure may provide feelings of control and ownership of their adoptive status, as Liam suggested. Remaining in control of the information being shared may help to avoid feelings of vulnerability when information is shared without their permission, particularly as adopted children in general, may have less control over whom, and under what circumstances others were told about their family set up (Gianino, Goldberg, & Lewis, 2009). However, as Liam stated, he wished he had not told people when he was so young. Whilst it appears having control and ownership over one's status disclosure is important, it may also be important to consider the emotional maturity of the child and their peers at the time of the disclosure.

Liam: "I wish that I didn't say that I was adopted so young. If I didn't say it in Year 7 and said it when I was in Year 10, more people would've like, matured from Year 7 to Year 10 and understood in Year 10"

As described in the literature review, parents were often proactive in sharing their child's information with school to support teachers to understand their child's needs in the context of their pre-adoptive experiences (Goldberg, Frost, et al., 2017) however, this could be seen as taking away the child's agency over the sharing of their adoptive status. Kate described an experience of being publically 'outed' (Garber & Grotevant, 2015) when she was younger, by someone she considered a friend. This type of public 'outing' meant the control over her disclosure was taken away from her.

Kate: "there was a girl who in assembly was just like told the whole class, I started crying, I dunno, it's just different if you say it in front of loads of people instead of just one. […] everyone was like looking at me. When it's just one person it's just between you and them but when it's like the whole class it's a bit frightening. […] back then it was sort of like, I still didn't really mind but if I'd have told the whole class then it would've been my choice instead of her just telling everybody."

‘Public outing’ was described by Garber and Grotevant (2015) as another example of a microaggression. Kate may not have interpreted the situation as a microaggression, but she seemed to suggest that she was upset over the disclosure not being her 'choice' thus she lacked control and agency over that situation.

For some adoptive children, disclosure of their adoptive status may be challenging and stressful (Cloughessy, Waniganayake, & Blatterer, 2018). Individuals may experience a feeling of tension between risking rejection by telling others about their family set up but also relief from the burden of secrecy (Goldberg, 2007). From a broader perspective, literature about the disclosure of sexual abuse and medical needs suggests a fear of stigma and fear of peer rejection may prevent some children from disclosing information (Benson et al., 2015; Fehler-Cabral & Campbell, 2013; Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Petronio et al. (1996) suggest it is important to manage the boundaries around private information, as disclosing personal information involves risks to oneself. Having agency and control over the disclosure may serve to manage the boundaries of their information.

Following self-disclosure of her adoptive status, Kate described having a ‘closer bond’ with her friends. Self-disclosure involves sharing private thoughts and feelings with others (Bauminger et al., 2008; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003) which is suggested to increase throughout adolescence and is a salient feature of friendships (Bauminger et al., 2008; Rose, 2002; K. H. Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2008).

In order to develop an adoptive identity, Grotevant (1997) suggests it is important to accept one’s adoptive status and ‘come to terms’ with being adopted. For adopted children, identity development may however be a sensitive topic when trying to understand who they are and where they come from (Grosso & Nagliero, 2004). Adolescence is an important time for identity development and as described in the next master theme, a time where being accepted by peers is paramount (Gianino et al., 2009; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Wainright & Patterson, 2008).

Matthew: "It doesn't really matter to me whether they know or not […] I would probably prefer them to know to be honest"

Kate: "It's not the sort of thing that 'no one can find out' and if I'm close friends with someone then I'll obviously tell them cause I don't know, I just like people knowing who I am"

Liam: "I didn't really want other people knowing that I don't trust, then it gets round the school, but I am [happy about disclosure]"

All three participants referred to themselves as '*normal*' and did not perceive themselves as different from their peers despite their adoptive status. Kate referred to being adopted as "*part of who I am*", suggesting she perceives her adoptive status to be a fundamental aspect of her identity.

3.8.2.2 Super-ordinate theme: The need to be understood

This theme represents the participants' perception of other people's understanding of adoption, recognising that sometimes people may not understand adoption. As Matthew commented:

Matthew: "Adoption isn't really that common for some people, they're not really familiar with it"

This links with the findings of the literature review whereby parents reported teachers as lacking awareness of adoption (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, et al., 2017). Matthew identified that there appeared to be a general lack of understanding about adoption, which he suggested could be a learning opportunity for everyone.

Matthew: "To be honest the more people that know about it the less people will think it's a bad thing coz there's things all over that make it sound like a bad thing"

Both Matthew and Kate alluded to the negative perceptions that some people may have about adoption and adopted children. Some studies highlight how adopted children and their mothers report other people perceiving them as abnormal or second-rate (Hollingsworth, 2000) and negative presentations of adoption in the media. Kate contended that she did not fit the negative perspective, as she was not 'naughty' or 'troubled'. As described previously, Kate appeared to perceive her adoptive status as a fundamental aspect of her identity, but it would be reasonable to infer that her construct of being adopted has connotations of being naughty, which she rejects.

Kate: I'm not sure, I wouldn't say that I'm very naughty but people are just surprised cause the way that I act and the way that I am, I don't think they can tell. Like the teacher that was in here before was asking why I was doing an interview and I was like cause I'm adopted' and she was like 'you're adopted?! I never knew that'.

Kate: I think it would be different if I was sort of like naughty cause then they probably should know, like that's why I'm being naughty cause I'm troubled, I wouldn't say that I am, I'm just like a normal person"

Many adopted children experience difficulties with their social, emotional and mental health which may impact upon their behaviour in school (Brown et al., 2017; Stewart, 2017).

3.7.3 Master Theme 3: Inclusion

This theme is my interpretation of the participants' views about their inclusion in school and what they do to support their inclusion, either consciously or subconsciously. I interpreted this as wanting to fit it and implementing strategies to support themselves.

3.7.3.1 Super-ordinate theme: The importance of 'fitting in'

Participants all referred to the importance of 'fitting in' and being a 'normal' teenager while at school.

Liam: "I was like trying to fit in with the 'in' crowd"

Kate: "I'm just normal like, I don't think it would be different if I wasn't adopted"

Research on transition suggests children are aware of social groupings in school and they place great importance on fitting in (Tobbell, 2003). Adolescence is a time when developing a social identity and a sense of community outside the family is of utmost importance (Eckert, 1989; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2008) and Liam recognised how he changed when he started secondary school.

Liam: "You change when you go to high school, you want to fit in with other people"

These comments relate to the seminal work of Tajfel (1974) on Social Identity Theory which posits that individuals want to be part of a group, which gives them a positive view of themselves. Some individuals may also modify their identity to fit into groups (Rubin et al., 2008) as groups are suggested to give us a sense of social identity and a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging can be developed through friendships and peer relationships, which were considered highly important for the participants. Furthermore, it is important to adolescents to conform to the norms of their peer group to avoid peer rejection (Allport, Clark, & Pettigrew, 1979; Brewer, 1991; Mikami, Lerner, & Lun, 2010).

3.7.3.2 Super-ordinate theme: Coping strategies

A sense of vulnerability was interpreted when the participants talked about how they protect themselves from discrimination, which I interpreted as coping strategies.

> *Matthew: "if I'm having a good day and nobody knows then nobody can ruin it for us"*

Matthew preferred to keep things private to prevent others from ruining his day, whereas Liam preferred to be open and face any victimisation head on. The implementation of strategies may be protective against stigma as described previously. In studies of adolescents in foster care, Kools (1999) found they employed strategies to protect themselves from feelings of devaluation, disappointment and loss. Self-defence strategies such as making comments like "*I don't care who knows*" are suggested to be used to hide vulnerability from potentially hurtful exchanges and to protect one's self-concept (Kools, 1999; Zeigler-Hill, Chadha, & Osterman, 2008). Avoidant coping strategies, such as those implemented by Matthew, are suggested to be used in response to situations where the individual perceives they have little or no control (Chaffin, Wherry, & Dykman, 1997; Hardy, Power, & Jaedicke, 1993). Perhaps Matthew feels he has no control over the comments other people may make, but he can protect himself by being less open with others.

> *Liam: "If I don't tell anyone, then if they make a joke, I get upset, they be like why's he getting upset but if I tell them, that prevents that joke from coming out their mouths and them saying it and it stops me from getting angry and upset and kicking off. So, I think speaking out and saying yeah look I'm adopted, so what, I'm happy having a nice life now. I think that is really important for kids to do"*

Liam regarded accessing extra-curricular activities as important to him and important for him to maintain his social, emotional and mental health.

Liam: "Without rugby or fire cadets I think I would need to keep getting appointments to the doctors and say I'm feeling like this or feeling like that so that's what fire cadets and rugby are there for me"

Resilience is an ecological concept (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which develops over time (Anderson, 2004). A supportive climate, high expectations and an orderly structure with consistent rules and discipline such as those found in sports or activities such as fire cadets is suggested to help develop resilience for the general population, which may also be helpful for adopted children to develop their resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lafavor, 2008; Shih, 2004). Furthermore, the adults involved in these activities can play a central role in facilitating resilience development through helping to develop children's adaptation skills (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten et al., 2008; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Perhaps Liam has developed resiliency skills, which support him to feel empowered to confront experiences of discrimination at school.

3.8 Limitations

As an interpretative phenomenological study, this research did not aim to be generalised to a population wider than those who contributed to it. The findings reflect the double hermeneutic process whereby the interpretation of the phenomena is constructed by the participant and the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

All participants were verbally capable, but in future, I would consider the use of visual methods to facilitate interaction further.

The sampling method started as purposive, but due to limited engagement through initial recruitment methods, the sampling method became opportunistic. Recruitment primarily took place through a regional adoption agency, and it is acknowledged the agency may have identified children and families who could provide a positive account of their educational experiences. It is also acknowledged there is a population of adopted children who may be experiencing difficulties at home or at school, such as disruption to their placement or school exclusions who were not included for participation in this study. I considered it unethical to explore their experiences of school while they were experiencing difficulties. Although, their views should not be discounted entirely from research in the future as adopted children who are going through difficult times may provide a different perspective on their experience of school. This study, however, provides some insight into the way these three adopted individuals experience school; an area which has been identified as a noteworthy gap in the research field.

3.9 Implications for EP practice

The rationale for undertaking this research was based on the view that listening to the voices and perspectives of adopted children would help to increase our understanding of how they experience school and how they feel about being an adopted person in school.

Changes in legislation, such as the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund (Department for Education, 2015a), access to Pupil Premium Plus funding (Department for Education, 2014) and the recently extended responsibilities of the Designated Teacher to include adopted children (Children and Social Work Act, 2017), have all helped to raise the profile of adopted children in school. Although the children in this research wanted to fit in with their peers and be perceived as 'normal', it was also important to them that there was an understanding of adoption and challenges to some of the assumptions about adopted children.

EPs have been described as being in an “optimal position to support adopted children in school” (Midgen, 2011) and there are many opportunities in which there could be a role for educational psychology involvement. In the table below, I have outlined some of the implications of my findings for EPs in practice and how EPs might work together with schools to provide information, advice, guidance, training and support for adopted children and school staff. It could be argued that the findings here could be considered important for all children, not just adopted children. These were the views of three adopted children and are not expected to be generalised to the wider adoptive population. However, it is important that staff are aware of the child's adoptive status and understand some of the implications it may have, such as bullying, stigma and identity development.

I think it is important to raise the profile of adoption and adopted children in Educational Psychology research. To date, very little has been written about the role of the EP in relation to adopted children (Gore Langton, 2017; Midgen, 2011). As cited by MacKay and Greig (2011), the field of adoption research “may be seen as a growth area for the profession for the future” (p. 6).

Table 11: Implications for EP practice

Relationships	Adoptive Status	Inclusion
As noted by Kate, she did not have a specific key relationship with a member of staff; therefore it is important these relationships are chosen by the children themselves. An EP could support with whole-school policies, which focus on active listening or attuned relationships (H. Kennedy, Landor, & Todd, 2011).	Based on this study's findings, an EP could highlight the personal nature of adoptive status disclosure to teachers and pastoral staff to support schools to recognise that for some adopted children, it is important for them to have agency and control over who has information about them and how this is shared amongst pupils and staff. Advise staff for the need for this to be done sensitively as adopted children may not perceive themselves as different or in need of different support to their peers.	When meeting with SENCOs or Designated Teachers for planning meetings, the EP can use inclusive language (for example, "tell me about your looked after children and children who have left care into adoption and special guardianship"). This can help staff to keep these children in mind. Furthermore, this may also help ensure that if adopted children do have an educational need, that it is being met.
Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) is an intervention, which has been recommended for enhancing positive relationships and communication between school staff and pupils (H. Kennedy et al., 2011; NICE, 2015). S. Murray (2017) suggests that EPs are ideally placed to use VIG in schools as we work with children and families at all levels.	The participants wanted adoption to be understood by school staff and recognised there were sometimes misunderstandings and misconceptions about adoption. EPs can deliver staff training on the potential needs of adopted children highlighting there are some potential similarities to LAC (King, 2009). Training could focus on educating school staff on the research evidence about the possible impact of early trauma such as ACEs and attachment as well as	Liam noted he experienced bullying as a result of his adoptive status. An EP may support schools to develop evidence based anti-bullying policies and highlight the personal nature of adoptive status disclosure and the privacy boundaries around such information.

	increasing understanding of contemporary adoption (NICE, 2015).	
Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP) could be used with teachers and teaching assistants to support them in their communication and interaction skills (Fukkink, Huijbregts, & Todd, 2015).	EPs could facilitate discussion about how to offer informed pastoral support in school and adoption sensitive curriculum delivery.	EPs often work collaboratively with schools, parents and others to ensure the 'voice' of the child is heard. EPs may be therefore be skilled and well placed to support and promote the voice of adopted children.
An EP can facilitate and lead small group interventions to support friendship development and social skills such as 'Circle of Friends' (Pearpoint, 1992) which also facilitate inclusion in the classroom and wider school.	EPs can share their knowledge of psychology to support staff in order for them to understand the underpinning psychological principles and skills related to the potential social and emotional and academic needs of adopted children.	
Encourage staff to adopt a holistic view of adopted children.	Systemically, there could be a role for the EP to work with the Designated Teacher. Given that adopted children have only recently become part of their role (The Children & Social Work Bill, 2016), it may be necessary to highlight the specific needs of some adopted children and their families.	
	EPs can help to develop the pastoral provision within secondary schools to include a designated, safe place, where both emotional and practical support is readily available.	

3.10 Conclusion

Research suggests there is a risk that professionals in school overlook adopted children due to the assumption that once they are adopted, all problems will cease (Gore Langton, 2017). As children spend a large proportion of their lives in school, there is a responsibility for schools to support children adopted from care, recognising that some are likely have experienced early childhood adversity in a similar capacity to LAC (Department for Education, 2018b; Gore Langton, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2014). It is argued that there is limited empirical consideration of the lived experiences of adopted children in education (Berridge & Saunders, 2009; Midgen, 2011).

The findings of this study highlight the importance of relationships with staff and peers and the child's adoptive status to their sense of self and identity, including the importance of having agency over the disclosure of their adoptive status. Participants acknowledged a lack of understanding of adoption from peers, resulting in being questioned about their adoptive status and sometimes bullied for it. Most importantly however, this research highlights that for these adopted children, there was a real sense of tension between wanting to 'fit in' at school and be perceived as 'normal', whilst simultaneously wanting to ensure that their adoption was understood by staff. Furthermore, while the participants all shared the label of being adopted, they all described different experiences and different interpretations of those experiences, of what it was like to be an adopted young person in secondary school.

This research emphasises the importance of exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of adopted children in secondary school in order to increase our understanding of their educational experiences and recognise where additional support may be required. For these participants, it appears the social and emotional aspects of school were at the forefront of their experiences and it will be important for school staff to recognise that these children want to be perceived the same as their peers, to not be 'othered' due to their status, but for there to be an underlying understanding of the potential impact of their early experiences. This research supports the existing literature and highlights some of the strengths and challenges that some adopted children may face during their time in education.

This research also specifically brings a nuanced critique of attachment and highlights the tension of the label of adoption for adopted children in secondary schools to the limited existing literature body. Attachment is a complex process which cannot be assumed to be deterministic and linear, in conjunction with ACEs, it is about an increase in risk for children and young people due to their early experiences. From an attachment perspective, relationships are key and if the challenges come from disruptions to key attachments, then it follows that reparations can also be found in those important relationships. As the line of argument in the Systematic Literature Review highlights, the cyclical relationship between parents and school staff is important in order to build relational trust and have a positive impact on the child at school.

This thesis brings relational practice and the importance of this to the forefront of discussions. While this may not necessarily be new, the value of this is paramount and deserves ongoing discussion and increasing evidence. It is therefore important that EPs continue to research this area and promote the views and experiences of adopted children in schools.

Appendix

Appendix A: Search process and Search Terms

The following initial systematic searches were completed:

1. Electronic databases were searched using a combination of keyword search terms
2. Controlled Vocabulary searches were also undertaken
3. Journals *'Adoption Quarterly'* and *'Adoption & Fostering'* were hand searched for articles
4. The process of 'reference harvesting' on key articles

Several electronic databases were searched (EBSCO, ERIC, British Education Index, Education Abstracts, Child Development and Adolescent Studies and PsychInfo) between April and June 2018. Searches consisted of both, keyword vocabulary, and controlled vocabulary searches to ensure my searching matched as accurately as possible across databases. Boolean search terms 'and'/'or' were used to link search terms together. The following search terms) were used to explore the research:

	EBSCO	**Psych Info**
Target population	"Adopted children" Adopt*	"Adopted children" Adopt*
Education	Education* School*	Education* School*
Perceptions	View* Perspective* Voice* Experience*	View* Perspective* Voice* Experience*
'Controlled Vocabulary'	DE "Education" DE "Adoption"	Exp EDUCATION Exp "Adoption (Child)"

Appendix B: Mapping Table of Studies in SLR

Researcher and date	Title	Country	Sample	Purpose/ Research Question	Method: Data Collection	Data Analysis	Key Findings
Hill and Koester (2015)	An examination of the impact of permanency on young adults' special education experiences	USA	8 adoptive families	1. To investigate how being adopted has impacted on older adopted young people's experiences in education from the perspectives of the parents. 2. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of adoption on youth's education experiences and preparation for successful adulthood. 3. Impact of adoption on older youths educational experiences	Semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed. A review of the child's IEP pre and post adoption.	Content Analysis	Through parent interviews and examining the young people's IEPs pre and post adoption, 4 key themes were identified: 1. A change in youth's disability diagnosis in school settings post-adoption 2. An increase in youths' access to general education settings after adoption 3. A change in the subjective quality and tone of IEPs after adoption 4. An increase in the number and quality of youths' peer and community connections after adoption
Goldberg (2014)	Lesbian, gay and heterosexual adoptive parents' experiences in preschool environments	USA	266 adoptive parents in 142 families (79 lesbian, 75 gay male and 112	To explore: 1. The extent to which lesbian or gay and heterosexual adoptive parents disclose about their family structure (parent sexual	Postal self-report questionnaires (Members of same-sex couples were provided with additional questions that	Content Analysis	1. Most parents were open about their family structure with their children's school and few reported sexuality, adoption or race-related challenges at their children's schools. 2. Some parents reported challenges and suggested a need for school

			heterosexual parents) Participants were recruited from a previous study carried out three years prior and families were contacted for a follow up.	orientation/adoptive family status) 2. The challenges that lesbian or gay and heterosexual adoptive parents perceive to experience with regards to their child's school or teacher in terms of their family structure 3. The extent to which patterns of disclosure and reported challenges appear to be shaped by parent sexual orientation, adoptive status etc. 4. What suggestions do lesbian or gay and heterosexual adoptive parents have for schools in how the schools could improve their treatment of diverse families	addressed unique aspects of their experience as sexual minority parents.)		staff to have a greater awareness and preparation of working with diverse families. 3. Families suggested a number of strategies that school can implement to create more inclusive communities of family diversity. Such as: • Using inclusive language in the classroom and on forms • Provide examples of a range of family types when referencing families in the classroom • Use books and resources that are inclusive of diverse families • Celebrate events such as 'Adoption Month' to raise awareness and educate children and staff in school
Goldberg, Black, Sweeney and Moyer (2017)	Lesbian, gay and heterosexual parents' perceptions of inclusivity	USA	90 adoptive parents in 45 couples Participants were recruited	1. To what extent, and why, do parents choose to disclose, or not disclose, their adoptive family status, their child's racial background, and their	Questionnaires A subsample then participated in a 1 hour	Thematic Analysis	The main themes and sub-themes from the study were: **Disclosure practices: Adoption, race and sexual orientation** • Talking to teachers about children's adoptive status

	and receptiveness in early childhood education settings		from a previous study carried out five years prior and families were contacted for a follow up. (15 lesbian, 15 gay male, 15 heterosexual parent families)	sexual orientation to schools? 2. To what extent, and how, do parents feel that schools are inclusive/sensitive regarding their adoptive family status, their child's racial background and their sexual orientation.	telephone interview		• Talking to teachers about child's race **Talking to teachers about parent sexual orientation/family structure** **Teachers' practices: Adoption, race, family structure** **Parents perceptions of teachers' consideration of adoption** • Explicit consideration and incorporation of adoption and adoptive families • Adoption: Emphasis on universalising principles in regard to families • Implicit or explicit marginalisation of adoption: "teachers don't get it" **Parents perceptions of teachers' consideration of race/ethnicity** • Explicit consideration and incorporation of racial/ethnic diversity • Emphasis on universalising principles in regard to race/ethnicity

							• Race/ethnicity: Implicit or explicit marginalisation **Parents perceptions of teachers' consideration of sexual orientation/family** • Explicit affirmation and inclusion of sexual orientation/family diversity • Emphasis on universalising principles in regard to family structure • Family structure: Implicit or explicit marginalisation 1. The majority of parents explicitly disclosed their adoptive and lesbian/gay family status with teachers but few discussed their children's racial background. 2. Many parents viewed their children's schools and teachers as explicitly inclusive of all types of families. Some parents viewed schools as tolerant but not explicitly inclusive. Some parents viewed schools as marginalising towards their family's adoptive, lesbian/gay parent family and multi-racial status.

Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)	"There is so much to consider": School related decisions and experiences among families who adopt non-infant children	USA	32 adoptive parents in 18 couples Participants were recruited from a previous study carried out five years prior and families were contacted for a follow up. (8 lesbian, 2 gay male, 7 heterosexual parent families)	1. How do parents of children adopted post-infancy make decisions about and select schools? What considerations are most salient and why? How do they balance and prioritise considerations related to their children's and family's unique needs and characteristics? 2. What types of challenges do parents of adopted children navigate in the school setting? What strategies do they employ to handle these challenges?	1 hour telephone interviews	Thematic Analysis	1. School decision making and school selection • Practical factors such as cost and location were more pressing considerations for parents than race and family structure when selecting a school 2. Families' experiences in school • Parents sometimes had limited information on their child's academic background. This led to inappropriate placements and additional testing • Parents sought to educate the schools about the range of children's backgrounds • Parents reported 'fighting for services' to ensure their child was adequately supported in school 3. Adoption, family structure and race: experiences in the school setting • Parents reported challenges in terms of how adoptive families were/not covered by the curriculum e.g. lack of

							books about diverse families in school
Cooper and Johnson (2007)	Education: The views of adoptive parents	UK	100 adoptive parents	Follow up to a previous survey carried out by Burgar (2002) to explore the views of adoptive parents of their children's education and the kind of support they think would be helpful, with a view to assessing the extent to which their children experiencing difficulties in education, impact on family life.	Postal questionnaire	No details given	• Information received prior to adoption about educational needs and the possible difficulties in school adopted CYP may face, varied between adoptive parents. • 90% of parents shared adoption information with school • Most adoptive parents were satisfied with school but some had concerns over their child's education (learning/behaviour/friendships) • Adopted children are more frequently identified as having SEN than the national average Parents wanted more information about adoption specific issues and for there to be more knowledge and understanding of adoption in schools (e.g. a named person)

Appendix C: Quality Assessment Framework (Walsh and Downe, 2006)

Studies / Stages of appraisal	Hill and Koester (2015)	Goldberg (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney and Moyer (2017)	Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)	Cooper and Johnson (2007)
SCOPE AND PURPOSE	No clear reference to specific research questions. Explicit purpose given as exploratory. A fairly large body of literature drawn upon in the introduction.	Four research questions are clearly outlined. The study was exploratory in nature and aimed to add to limited existing literature base by 'examining the experiences of lesbian, gay and heterosexual adoptive parents of pre-school children'. The link between the research and existing knowledge was demonstrated through a substantive introduction covering a range of areas concerning the research questions background.	Two research questions are clearly outlined. The study aimed to 'examine the experiences of adoptive parents'. Rationale for the study is provided by acknowledging little previous research in the area. The link between the research and existing knowledge was demonstrated through a substantive introduction covering a range of areas concerning the research questions background.	Two research questions are clearly provided. Exploratory in nature, to add to limited existing literature base of parents' interactions with schools. Aimed to 'examine selection processes and experiences related to schools among adoptive parents'. Rationale for the study is provided by acknowledging little previous research in the area.	Building on a previous survey carried out. The aim was outlined in the context of the previous research by exploring parents' views in more detail. No specific research questions were given. Link between research and existing knowledge was provided and grounded in the local context however there was limited reference to previous research.

DESIGN	Rationale for qualitative designed outlined briefly as to 'gain an understanding of the impact of adoption…on youths' special educational experiences and preparation for a successful adulthood' but no further discussion of why that method was more appropriate or relevant to the aims. No discussion of epistemological/ontologi-cal position provided for justification of the use of semi-structured interviews or use of IEPs. Data collection method was appropriate for the type of data required. Semi-structured interviews used and it is clearly noted that the interview questions were a 'starting point'.	No explicit rationale provided for use of a qualitative design. No discussion of epistemological/ontologi-cal position or reasoning provided for the use of questionnaires. No explanation given for the use of questionnaires, however given the large sample size I am making the assumption that this was logistically the most appropriate data collection method. Questionnaires included open and closed questions. Same sex couples were also sent additional questions to address their experience as 'sexual minority parents'.	No explicit rationale provided for use of a qualitative design other than to 'examine experiences of adoptive parents'. Study was informed by an 'ecological perspective' in relation to the 'intersecting contexts of development'. The study is also stated to be informed by 'queer theory'. No discussion of epistemological/ontologi-cal position or reasoning provided for the use of telephone interviews. No explanation given for the use of telephone interviews over face to face interviews however given the sample was gathered from various	No explicit rationale provided for use of a qualitative design. No discussion of epistemological/ontologi-cal position or reasoning provided for the use of interviews. No explanation given for the use of telephone interviews over face to face interviews or questionnaires. Data collection method was appropriate for the type of data required. Through interviews, complexity of their experience could be sought however it is unclear if participants were allowed to talk beyond the posed questions (i.e. semi-structured interviews)	No rationale provided for use of a qualitative design. No discussion of epistemological/ontologi-cal position or reasoning provided for the use of questionnaires. Data collection is assumed to mirror the previous data collection method (survey) on which this study builds on. Data collection is appropriate and can reach a large number of people, however a questionnaire is unlikely to capture the complexity and diversity of their experience of the challenges their children face in education and how that impacts the family.

	Through the use of a semi-structured interview where further discussion and elaboration is usually encouraged, the complexity and diversity of the adoptive parents' experiences should be captured. Triangulation between interview responses and details in the IEPs was used.	Given the questionnaire also included open questions, it is possible that extended responses may have been collected which captured some of the complexity/diversity of their experiences but it is unknown whether these would've covered it in sufficient detail. No triangulation of data from multiple informants.	regions across the US, it may not have been logistically or financially possible to carry out face to face interviews.	and the time scale of one hour.	
SAMPLING STRATEGY	Selection criteria outlined and the sample was gathered from a placement agency. The sample consisted of those who had used the agency's services and were willing to participate having been contacted by a member of agency staff. All families had adopted at least one year prior to the start of the study.	The sample used for this study was drawn from a previous large study couples were adopting their first child and parents were becoming parents for the first time. They were recruited in the pre-adoptive stage and were asked to participate in a study about the transition to adoptive parenthood. It included parents who adopted	The sample used for this study was drawn from a previous large study where couples were adopting their first child and parents were becoming parents for the first time. They were recruited in the pre-adoptive stage and were asked to participate in a study about the transition to adoptive parenthood. These participants were	Sample was gathered from a larger sample which was originally used in a previous study. Participants were contacted 5 years post-adoption. Clear criteria for selection of this sample of parents was provided and rationale for the 24 month (age) cut off point was also given.	300 questionnaires distributed using database information of adoptive parents from the Family Placement Service. • Unknown whether this was a selection of the available adoptive parents details or that this was their entire known population of adoptive parents.

	Justification for this sampling strategy was not given. No explanation or details given for intended sample and actual sample. Comment provided regarding potential participating families were not required to identify as having adopted a child with a disability.	children under the age of 5.5 years (the original sample has been used in other published studies). These participants were followed up 3 years post-adoption. Clear criteria for selection of this sample of parents was provided with details given on how the sample were recruited including agencies and US census data. Descriptive statistics provided for the sample giving very clear details as to the variance of schools the children were in and diversity of the sample.	followed up 5 years post-adoption. (The original sample has been used in other published studies). Clear criteria for selection of this sample of parents was provided with details given on how the sample were recruited including agencies and US census data. Descriptive statistics provided for the sample giving very clear details as to the variance of schools the children were in and diversity of the sample.	Justification for this sampling strategy was not explicitly given. Descriptive statistics provided for the sample giving very clear details as to the variance of adoptive experience and diversity of the sample.	• Also unknown as to whether further scrutiny of sample was carried out (e.g. only distributing to adoptive parents whose children are currently in school). No justification given for sampling strategy and no information given about the intended sample. Descriptive information given for the sample of respondents to the questionnaire.
ANALYSIS	Analysis of data (interviews and IEPs) was carried out using Content Analysis. No specific reasoning for	Analysis of questionnaires was carried out using Content Analysis with brief reasoning provided.	Analysis of interviews was carried out using Thematic Analysis which was informed by an ecological perspective and queer theory with	Interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis and the approach was informed by an ecological perspective. No specific	No information provided detailing the analysis approached used.

	this method was provided. Unclear as to whether the analysis was managed by hand or software – no software details given. The use of multiple coders was stated but no further details given. No discussion of how the coding system evolved, however it is noted that other people such as the agency staff and experts from child welfare and special education were included in the coding process. It does not state that any research participants were involved in the coding process. Researchers studied the IEPs and interview transcripts for words, themes or paragraphs	Not explicitly stated that the analysis was managed by hand, but no software details were given. The author coded all the transcripts and then hired a research assistant to independently code a random selection of responses to provide a reliability check. It does not state that any research participants were involved in the coding process. A discussion of the coding process has been provided with some explanation for the generation of themes.	no specific reasoning provided. Not explicitly stated that the analysis was managed by hand, but no software details were given. Four authors independently coded the data - 'analytic triangulation' which was an iterative process. The researchers used 'check coding' provide reliability checkers. Weekly discussions held to refine codes and clarify disagreements between the multiple interpretations between the researchers. It does not state that any research participants were involved in the coding process	reasoning for this method was provided. Unclear as to whether the analysis was managed by hand or software – no software details given. Descriptive details given on the creation of the themes and discussion provided around the process of coding amongst the researchers. Three authors independently coded the data Weekly discussions held to discuss emergent themes, to refine codes and to cover the multiple interpretations between the researchers. No evidence of participants being	

	and sentences – although not explicitly stated, this may have been to ensure the subjective meanings of participants were portrayed. Researchers comment on the reliability and validity of their analysis method, claiming to have used multiple coders and checking of the content validity with previous literature.			involved in the process of analysis. No discussion of data saturation.	
INTERPRETATION	Interviews were held at a mutually agreed location and any documents the families provided were returned as soon as the study was finished. This suggests some consideration of the families involved and their context. The researchers used experts in child welfare	Evidence that the author spent time on the data analysis ensuring that coding was thorough and was reliable. Revisions of coding took place and applied to all responses. Discussion of the coding process and final codes are provided so some	No description of contexts of data collection or reason for telephone interview over face to face. Referred to both parents being interviewed and data examined as a 'unit' rather than selecting differences between them.	No description of contexts of data collection. Referred to both parents being interviewed and data examined as a 'unit' rather than selecting differences between them. Evidence that the author spent time on the data analysis ensuring that	No discussion of research process provided. Limited evidence of conclusions drawn from the data, however they appear to be plausible. No direct quotations from respondents provided, however summary notes of

	and disability, a student researcher, faculty and community mentors to support with interrater reliability and checking previous literature suggesting some consideration of 'dwelling with the data'(Walsh & Downe, 2006) Categories for the coding scheme were provided and listed however not much further specific detail was provided which would support the 'decision trail' being followed. Four key themes identified and listed. Some use of quotations in the findings section. Conclusions appear logical from the description of the findings.	link to the 'decision trial' could be made. Some of the findings and links are made tentatively. Direct quotations are used in the Results section. Conclusions appear logical from the description of the results.	Evidence that the author spent time on the data analysis ensuring that coding was thorough and was reliable. Revisions of coding took place and applied to all responses. Direct quotations are used in the Results section. Conclusions appear logical from the description of the findings. Findings are structured in response to the research questions.	coding was thorough and was reliable. No details provided of the emergent themes/codes therefore unable to follow the decision trail. Use of direct quotations within the main body of the text. Conclusions appear logical from the description of the findings	responses have been given.

REFLEXIVITY	Researcher implicitly suggested reflexivity through the use of multiple coders, however this may have been more to provide greater interrater reliability. No further evidence of reflexivity is provided.	Researcher implicitly recognised their influence on the analysis of the data and recruited a research assistant to support reliability and clarify categories. No further evidence of reflexivity is provided.	Researcher explicitly acknowledges the influence of their bias on the coding during the analysis stage. No further evidence of reflexivity is provided.	Researcher implicitly suggested reflexivity through the use of multiple coders, however this may have been more to provide greater interrater reliability. No further evidence of reflexivity is provided.	No evidence of reflexivity of the researcher has been provided.
ETHICAL DIMENSIONS	No reference to ethical approval was made. No explicit demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns: • No details provided about autonomy, consent, confidentiality or anonymity. However consent may be assumed by the participants taking part in the interview. • No details provided about dilemmas with	No reference to ethical approval was made however it may be assumed that as the participants were drawn from a previous study, the original study may have received ethical approval. Authors refer to the use of national LGBT organisations assisting in the dissemination of study information as some couples may not be 'out' to agencies, demonstrating some awareness and	No reference to ethical approval was made however it may be assumed that as the participants were drawn from a previous study, the original study may have received ethical approval. Authors refer to the use of national LGBT organisations assisting in the dissemination of study information as some couples may not be 'out' to agencies, demonstrating some awareness and	Study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Clark University. Names used throughout the study are pseudonyms. No explicit demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns: • No details provided about autonomy, consent, confidentiality or anonymity. However consent may be	The plan of the study conformed to the Research Governance Framework for Sheffield City Council which was approved by the Head of Access and Inclusion in addition to the managers of the Sheffield Family Placement Service. No explicit demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns: • No details provided about autonomy,

	participants or their resolution. • No explicit reference to equality, honesty, transparency and mutual respect in relationships with participants.	sensitivity toward participants. No explicit demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns: • No details provided about autonomy, consent, confidentiality or anonymity. However consent may be assumed by the participants providing a response to the questionnaire. • No details provided about dilemmas with participants or their resolution perhaps due to the data gathering being carried out via questionnaire. • No explicit reference to equality, honesty, transparency and mutual respect in relationships with	sensitivity toward participants. No explicit demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns: • No details provided about autonomy, consent, confidentiality or anonymity. However consent may be assumed by the participants partaking in the telephone interview. • No details provided about dilemmas with participants or their resolution. • No explicit reference to equality, honesty, transparency and mutual respect in relationships with participants perhaps due to no face to face contact with the participants.	assumed by the participants partaking in the telephone interview. • No details provided about dilemmas with participants or their resolution. • No explicit reference to equality, honesty, transparency and mutual respect in relationships with participants.	confidentiality or anonymity. • No details provided about dilemmas with participants or their resolution. • No explicit reference to equality, honesty, transparency and mutual respect in relationships with participants. • However, no names have been used at all throughout the study therefore assumed anonymity through the write up. • Consent is assumed through response to the questionnaire (100 responses to 300 questionnaires distributed)

		participants perhaps due to no face to face contact with the participants.			
RELEVANCE AND TRANSFERABILITY	Limitations of the small sample size and lack of diversity within the sample was addressed in addition to the acknowledgement that the young people's voice was not heard. The researchers also acknowledged the limitation that the sample was drawn from one agency and not necessarily reflective of all adoptive families.	Limitations of the study are acknowledged. Draws upon a range of other research in a field where there is limited evidence. The interpretation seems plausible and makes sense. The findings help to provide new insights and increase understanding of the challenges that	Limitations of the study are acknowledged in terms of the lack of teacher or child voice represented. A possible lack of diversity in the sample is also mentioned. Analysis was interwoven with other literature. The interpretation seems plausible and makes sense.	Limitations of the lack of diversity in the sample is addressed and the lack of child and school staff voice in this study is noted and suggested for future research. Analysis was interwoven with other literature. The interpretation seems plausible and makes sense.	No limitations are provided. The study provides additional insight into the challenges faced by adoptive parents and offers some practical solutions and ways forward.

	Analysis was interwoven with other literature. The interpretation seems plausible and makes sense. It outlines some future research possibilities and offers some suggestions to school staff and social workers. Explicit research questions were not provided therefore they were not referred to at the end however the researchers acknowledge the study as 'attempting to gain understanding of a complex issue'.	some adoptive parents face with their child's school and offers a range of suggestions as to how these may be improved. The study offers some suggestions for possible future research in the area. No explicit statement of whether research questions have been answered but findings are structured around the research questions. No specific assessment of value/empowerment for participating participants, however clear suggestions for educators of how they can educate about diverse families.	The findings help to generate new insights in understanding and supporting some of the challenges that diverse adoptive families face. The study offers some suggestions for possible future research in the area. The findings are structured in response to the research questions. No specific assessment of value/empowerment for participating participants, however it may be implicit through their suggestions for future through the inclusion and understanding of more diverse adoptive families.	The findings help to increase understanding of how adoptive parents try to balance the complex factors in deciding where their child should attend school and the challenges that add to these decisions. The study offers some suggestions for possible future research in the area. No explicit statement of whether research questions have been answered.	

Appendix D: Matrix demonstrating how the initial key concepts presented across each paper

	Knowledge and understanding of adoption	Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs	Sharing information	Inclusion and Diversity	Curriculum	Experience with adoptive families	Understanding of the impact of pre-adoptive experiences	High Expectations	Advocacy	School as a system
Cooper and Johnson (2007)	✓	✓	✓							
Goldberg (2014)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Hill and Koester (2015)		✓		✓				✓	✓	
Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
Goldberg et al (2017)	✓		✓	✓	✓					

Appendix E: Quotations from each study for each initial key concept (second order interpretations)

Goldberg, Frost and Black (2017)

Theme: Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
lack of understanding of needs	• "Ellie was "kicked out" because she was perpetually disruptive" • his prior teacher "didn't have that kind of mind-set" • "they had no concept of trauma, how to handle it" • Tia tried Catholic school for her son…it was a poor match. • "I think they just thought she was a shitty kid"
School not meeting needs	• "it became clear that Ellie needed a structured environment" • Brandy…described several school changes (poor fit), (failure to follow IEP) • "it's taken until this year from them to…appreciate the impact trauma has…I don't think they took it seriously • [teachers] did not know how to manage his behaviours
Understanding of need	• teachers with SEN backgrounds who "understand trauma" • His current teacher tried to minimize changes in his environment and routine.
Need needs to be acknowledged	• "our kids have lots of trauma"
negative response from staff toward child	• "they were like, he's a 'bad kid', … this poor kid is getting nothing but negative"
difficulty getting settled	• parents lack of knowledge of their child's academic ability led to inappropriate placement and not getting needs met
inaccuracy of child's academic ability	• "school said...he is only slightly worse in reading…we paid to test him…the scores were terrible
trauma informed	• teachers…offered advice and asked for background information
helpful teachers	• one of Lee's son's teachers saw he was "really struggling" and began tutoring him
recognising need	• Maura…felt that this context was important for school to know so that they could understand her son
knowing the individual child	• Serena did not thrive when…teacher…were too "nice"…Serena needed "structure"
misinformed staff	• parents…voiced frustration and helplessness when they felt that schools viewed their children as 'bad' rather than 'trauma'
educating schools	• Brianna…important to "explain to teachers where they came from"
lack of understanding of impact of trauma	• following disclosure of previous abuse…teachers lacked sensitivity to…the way in his trauma history contributed to his functioning
lack of awareness of diverse families	• half the families switched schools - typically because of dissatisfaction with schools awareness of and accommodations to children's unique needs

labelled as bad	• concerns that teachers misread their children as uninterested in school or labelled them as 'bad'

Theme: Inclusion and Diversity	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
inclusion	• some parents identified ways in which their child's adoption became salient in school – curriculum • the school is good about saying anyone can come in" • Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted.
not inclusive practice	• experiences…geared towards mom and dad were also experienced as unsettling by several LG parents • school forms…often invoked terms like 'moms and dads' which made their kids feel 'like they didn't belong'
lack of awareness of diverse families	• "heritage fair"…to bring in items "to show where they're from"…[parent] requested acknowledgment of adoptive families • half the families switched schools - typically because of dissatisfaction with schools awareness of and accommodations to children's unique needs • "gay people are just not on their radar"
educating schools	• LG parents had to be "vigilant" about explaining their family and educating school staff on the need for inclusive language
wanting inclusiveness	• parents found themselves advocating for more inclusive practices highlighting the powerful role of parents as advocates
flexibility	• school flexibility - the degree to which schools were willing to work with and accommodate families with diverse needs was important to adoptive families

Theme: Curriculum	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
curriculum	• some parents identified ways in which their child's adoption became salient in school - curriculum • some parents were unsettled about the way schools handled family-related assignments • "heritage fair"…to bring in items "to show where they're from"…[parent] requested acknowledgment of adoptive families • Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted. • parents complained that the books at school were not reflective of their family
lack of understanding around adoption	• parents reported difficulties with schools asking for baby pictures and other early documentation that they didn't have • Stacy voiced discomfort related to family timeline exercises…"create a lot of unhappiness"

Theme: School as a system

Sub-Theme	Quote
positive experience with school	• racialized bullying…school staff handled the situations well
lack of collaboration	• "hire our own psychologist to do an assessment...the principal was…not working with us"
standing in parents/child's way of accessing support	• schools reluctance to carry out assessments
financially driven not needs driven	• school resisted a reassessment [of need]…because it would qualify for less funding [following improvement] • "they don't want to do an IEP because it requires extra funding and extra services"
schools not meeting need	• "I know for a fact [what] they're supposed to doing…according to her IEP, but they're not implementing it"
Flexibility	• schools should be flexible with parents who are new to their children's lives and willing to reassess for services after a period of adjustment • school flexibility - the degree to which schools were willing to work with and accommodate families with diverse needs was important to adoptive families

Theme: Understanding of the impact of pre-adoptive experiences	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
lack of understanding of needs	• "they had no concept of trauma, how to handle it"
school not adequately addressing/meeting needs	• "it's taken until this year from them to…appreciate the impact trauma has…I don't think they took it seriously
Need needs to be acknowledged	• "our kids have lots of trauma"
recognising need	• Maura…felt that this context was important for school to know so that they could understand her son
lack of understanding of impact of trauma	• following disclosure of previous abuse…teachers lacked sensitivity to…the way in his trauma history contributed to his functioning
trauma informed is important	• when parents …saw school professionals as showing basic interest in and awareness of their children adoptive and trauma background, it meant the world to them

Hill and Koester (2015)

Theme: Inclusion	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Inclusion	• Child's desire to be more integrated… rather than isolated in SEN settings. • Peer relationships improved…his daughter is now active in her schools theatre department • Once the children were settled in a stable, permanent home, they had more opportunities to build healthy peer relationships…through participating in more extracurricular and community based activities. • Families encouraged youths and gave them the necessary requirements such as equipment, transportation and support to be involved.
In receipt of additional support	• identified paraprofessional support in class • access to behavioural rooms • “he does have to leave class a lot to go to the behaviour room but he has cut down on that and is learning to self-regulate”

Theme: Identifying and understanding the child’s unique needs	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
school not being aware of needs	• families reported pursuing additional testing…their child’s disability had been misdiagnosed or misidentified in the school setting
re-assessment of need led to improved outcomes	• "Her school work improved after she was diagnosed correctly. She could finally learn because they were addressing her actual needs" • “after my daughter was diagnosed with FASD, her grades improved because she was getting the right help"
home-school collaboration	• [parent] when she talked with school officials about his anxiety and ways they could handle it better, his grades and school experience improved

Theme: High Expectations	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
High expectations	• After adoption, postsecondary education or employment was not only encouraged, but also expected. • parents talked about planning for the future with their child… for many this was the first time someone explicitly expected this of them [college/job] • The children were in a safe, supportive, stable house where their needs were being met, and they could think about who they would become in the future
increased awareness of needs	• generally - quality of IEPs improved post-adoption

Theme: Advocacy	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Parent advocating	• Quality of IEPs improved post-adoption • The IEPs had a more respectful tone…the parent's and child's voices were clearly included in the IEP. Parents recognised this change in tone • …once the children realized that they had a future ahead of them and there was someone there to support them, they felt like they could plan for their own future
Re-assessment of need led to improved outcomes	• families reported pursuing additional testing…their child's disability had been misdiagnosed or misidentified in the school setting • "Her school work improved after she was diagnosed correctly. She could finally learn because they were addressing her actual needs" • "after my daughter was diagnosed with FASD, her grades improved because she was getting the right help" • "He has been on ADHD medicine since he has been with us. His foster mother didn't believe in ADHD medicine and took him off it. He is a lot more focussed because of it……he has made huge strides this year. He is now able to stay in the classroom, where he used to have to leave. He is getting As and Bs."

Cooper and Johnson (2007)

Theme: Sharing information	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Disclosure practice	• nearly all (90%) of parents had shared some information with the school about their child's adoption
home school communication	• communication between school and parents was raised as an issue by a third of parents who either felt uninformed … or believed it was not being effective • openness and confidence between parents and school • greater understanding and communication were the main recommendations
Information sharing	• sharing information to ensure realistic parental expectations

Theme: Knowledge and understanding of adoption	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
blaming issues on the adoption	• such as blaming all the child's difficulties on the adoption
curriculum	• information and guidelines for schools about curricular areas - need for sensitivity
training for staff	• [the survey highlighted the need for] awareness raising and training for school staff about the impact of pre-adoptive experiences • 95% of responses... would value access to a named person with knowledge of adoption issues • adults in school to explore with adopted children issues relating to friendships, social interactions and bullying
expectations	• [school staff] expecting recovery to be more rapid than it is • [teachers] setting low expectations that become self-fulfilling
greater understanding by school staff	• greater understanding and communication were the main recommendations • realistic school expectations and understanding of the adopted child • some also felt that teachers misunderstanding about adoption and its antecedents led to poor judgements • around 30 different diagnostic labels were specified…indicating the wide range of problems that parents and teachers might face
having to 'fight' for support	• having to 'fight' for recognition and support

Theme: Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**

Lack of understanding of need	• half of the parents felt that their child's school did not have a good understanding of his or her needs and/or the difficulties he or she experienced • parents indicated that over a third (39%) had been identified by the school as having SEN • around 30 different diagnostic labels were specified…indicating the wide range of problems that parents and teachers might face
Identifying need	• …parent's responses indicated that educational psychologists (28%), doctors (27%), support teachers (22%) and therapists (20%) were the professionals most involved…this reflects the severity and complexity of the difficulties experienced by some adopted children • Frustration about delays in their child's difficulties being identified and acknowledged, the unavailability of resources, and waiting too long for appointments

Goldberg, Black, Sweeney and Moyer (2017)

Theme: Sharing information	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
implicit disclosure/ no need to disclose	• Five couples …. Felt that their family structure was "obvious" and thus "we didn't have anything to say about it" • Believing that school personnel would pick up on their family structure implicitly they felt that disclosure was unnecessary. • two couple did not want to "draw attention to" their families • "its [disclosure] never been an issue…we don't really focus on it at home…so we don't talk about it with them • it was "no big deal" and it was obvious (e.g. racial differences) • did not explicitly disclose their child's adoptive status…because they felt it was obvious • "We haven't brought up that were an adoptive family but were two dads so I think they…maybe assume?" • 3 couples described non-disclosure…as their child was bi-racial and/or light skinned and not typically identified as racially different from them
Proactive disclosure	• some couples disclosed (family structure) simply because they wished to be honest about the nature of their family structure • "I got it out there as early as I could so that it's not something I'm stressing over" • people "see him and ask where he gets his dark eyes" thus these parents disclosed to avoid these kinds of inquiries in the future • Many parents described engaging in proactive disclosure of their children's adoptive status with teachers • proactive approach: they were in an open adoption and wanted to reduce confusion and ensure that the teacher knew and used appropriate adoption language • other couples disclosed as a means of trying to proactively avoid homophobia directed at their child • three couples discussed their children's race/ethnicity with teachers because they wanted to ensure that their children -saw themselves reflected in the material at school • clarifying [family set up]…to reduce confusion later on • they wanted teachers to be able to respond sensitively if the child was teased about adoption
Reactive disclosure	• one couple disclosed their two dad family status because "the school form listed me as the step father" • one lesbian couple spoke to the school (and donated books about diverse families) after their son was confronted with questions and comments from peers about his family structure
Home-school communication	• his son's teacher "checked with us before hand to see if there would be a female figure that was appropriate [to make something for]"
Openness	• did not want to hide anything from the school

Theme: Knowledge and understanding of adoption	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
lack of awareness and knowledge from staff	• the teacher "asked for homework involving a baby picture of the child and the child's birth weight and height" which they did not have • Her daughter's teacher had "just assigned a project (involving) a picture of the 'day they were born'. They could make that more inclusive by saying the day the child was born or adopted" • A few couples confronted teacher's assumptions that adoption involved "the rescuing of children" and parents were "saints" for adopting. • "the teachers seen sensitive enough not to say anything insensitive about adoption and alternative family units but there is nothing specific to include diverse families in the curriculum • "I just don't think they're super educated about it. They don't know the language to use"
insensitivity from staff	• the teachers improperly used an adoption book about pet adoption • total avoidance of adoption and poorly informed attempts at addressing it were inadequate in promoting an accurate positive understanding of adoption within the school community

Theme: Inclusion and Diversity	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Proactive disclosure	• three couples discussed their children's race/ethnicity with teachers because they wanted to ensure that their children -saw themselves reflected in the material…at school
Inclusive resources	• inclusive books and curricula were described as important ways that teachers and schools communicated their acceptance and inclusiveness
Inclusive curriculum	• we're being exposed to positive lessons about their racial/ethnic backgrounds • the inclusion of LGBT history was noted by several couples • many parents gave specific examples of how racial ethnic and cultural issues were infused meaningfully into the curriculum • modifications to traditional classroom activities were noted by some parents such that the altered activities were made to be sensitive to adoptive families • Regarding curricula several parents stated that their children's teachers had engaged them in conversation about how to sensitively handle mother's day/father's day.
Inclusion	• the teacher…illustrating how she created space for and also respected boundaries around conversations about adoption • others felt that openness was communicated indirectly such as via teachers use of non-heteronormative language • some parents described ways that their children's teachers had been inclusive, respectful and affirming to their family structure • teachers "going out of their way so [child] doesn't feel odd…making efforts to bring up diverse families including gay couples
Lack of inclusivity	• school forms that did not allow them to accurately describe their family • and others were described as marginalising diverse families
Inclusion and Diversity	• "inclusion and diversity go hand in hand" • some teachers were described as explicitly incorporating diverse families into the classroom

	• "they are trying to teach them that diversity is a good thing and that there is nothing to fear"
Invisibility of diversity	• The school was "very strict on not pointing out differences. They won't even mention race"
Not acknowledging diversity	• a lack of attention to adoption reflected a larger problem of not acknowledging the diversity of family structures present in their children's schools • [parents] tended to describe teachers oversights and exclusions as reflecting ignorance or "lack of education" about LG parent families
Superficial promotion of diversity	• their children's schools and teachers "promote diversity in general" but did not typically "name any specifics" • "I think that the people involved really believe in family diversity but I think as kids get older it tends to kind of read like lip service to the important issues"

Theme: Curriculum	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
School not doing enough/could do more	• but they do nothing specific to include adoption in the curriculum" • parents who responded to school insensitivity by donating resources tended to feel that the teachers did not do enough to include those materials • total avoidance of adoption and poorly informed attempts at addressing it were inadequate in promoting an accurate positive understanding of adoption within the school community • "there are no books specifically on adoption" • "race has come up a couple of times in a positive way like Black History Month but I think that's it
Parents providing resources	• Kristin…had "offered the school resources to teach about adoptive and LGBT families", "the teacher was open minded" but "didn't put it on the curriculum" • they [parents] provided their children's school with some materials (books) to address the lack of racial/ethnic inclusivity; schools in turn were described as responding positively or neutrally • several of these parents donated materials to the schools but with little effect • parents who responded to school insensitivity by donating resources tended to feel that the teachers did not do enough to include those materials • they also "brought in books about brown kids and transracial adoption" • inclusive books and curricula were described as important ways that teachers and schools communicated their acceptance and inclusiveness
Inclusive curriculum	• we're being exposed to positive lessons about their racial/ethnic backgrounds • the inclusion of LGBT history was noted by several couples • many parents gave specific examples of how racial ethnic and cultural issues were infused meaningfully into the curriculum • modifications to traditional classroom activities were noted by some parents such that the altered activities were made to be sensitive to adoptive families

	• Regarding curricula several parents stated that their children's teachers had engaged them in conversation about how to sensitively handle mother's day/father's day. • "Explained to teachers that we celebrate Gotcha Day and asked if we could do something. The teachers said that would be perfect and let us [child] explain his story
Lack of awareness and knowledge of staff	• "the teachers seen sensitive enough not to say anything insensitive about adoption and alternative family units but there is nothing specific to include diverse families in the curriculum • the teacher "asked for homework involving a baby picture of the child and the child's birth weight and height" which they did not have • Her daughter's teacher had "just assigned a project (involving) a picture of the 'day they were born'. They could make that more inclusive by saying the day the child was born or adopted"
Insensitivity from staff	• the teachers improperly used an adoption book about pet adoption • "the accept everything and love everybody approach is not enough
Lack of diversity in the curriculum	• all of the books in the school show White children; there are no children or parents of colour" • curriculum "doesn't address diverse families; most of the books and worksheets show heterosexual White families" • the absence of racial diversity or multiculturalism from their children's school curricula and classroom materials

Goldberg (2014)

Theme: Sharing Information	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Uncertainty of sharing information	• Seven participants….described struggling with uncertainty about how much to share with their children's teachers. • They were trying to find a balance between letting teachers know about their children's background without leading them to form biased judgements about their child based upon their adoptive status and history. • "finding ways to let the school know about his history/issues without prejudicing them before they get to know him" • feeling "stuck" about what to share…having been told by a caseworker "never to tell anyone he was adopted, and to never mention he was adopted from foster care"
Implicit disclosure/ no need to disclose	• "I don't see it's the schools business that he's adopted and I don't intend on telling them unless it's necessary" • Their lack of disclosure by noting that it hadn't come up. Notably, all but one of these participants adopted in racially. • the lack of obvious racial distinction between themselves and their children…led to the invisibility of their child's adoptive status…which they did not correct • direct contrast, four participants explained their non-disclosure …indicating that it was obvious
Proactive disclosure	• [most parents] reported that they told their children's teachers and schools about their children's adoption

Theme: Knowledge and understanding of adoption	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Blaming on adoption	• nine participants…noted that their children's teachers were quick to bring up adoption when their child exhibited behavioural or developmental challenges • teachers seemed to believe that all of their children's problems stemmed from the fact that they were adopted, abused, neglected or exposed to drugs in utero • "I feel that once his old preschool found out he was adopted, all of a sudden they started having problems with him. He got kicked out..." • Learning that some teachers associate behaviour with being adopted [when] they have nothing to do with each other. "Her son has "behaved terribly" on his first day of preschool. When she came to pick him up the teachers all asked whether his biological mom had used drugs wondering if he had a behaviour problem as a result.
Parents educating school	• they were the first LG parents at their children's school which required them to do a 'lot of education' • "we have been the first gay family at each of Lucy's schools and we have had to initiate conversations about sensitivity

	• "helping [teachers] understand open adoption and our open relationship with birth parents is a challenge"
Teachers lack of experience/knowledge about adoption	• some participants highlighted teachers apparent lack of comfort with or understanding of their family structure as a challenge, which was often evident in teachers confused or awkward responses to parents names or naming practices • two gay men notes their children's teachers were "confused" about their own and their partners designations as Daddy and Papa • [gay man] "wondering" whether his daughter's teachers "engage with her more because they may wonder about her not having a mother" • Participants mentioned multiple adoption related challenges. These reflected a lack of education about or shar issues on the part of teachers or personnel • 12 participants noted that their children's teachers had demonstrated insensitivity and/or ignorance about adoption issues • "they were not adoption savvy" • "we will need to do some education about how adoption is not rescuing a child" • "we've already gotten one comment from a teacher that shows that common misconception [rescuing]" • from the perspective of the school, her child was "expected to be 'thankful' about being adopted" • "the biggest hurdle is explaining our fully open adoption and relationship with his birth family" • open adoption is "unfamiliar and uncomfortable"

Theme: Inclusion and Diversity	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Feeling accepted and included	• "no other preschool we looked at felt as supportive and inclusive as this one" • "The school has been very accepting; they pride themselves on their diversity" • "we live in LGBT nirvana when it comes to parenting"
Lack of inclusivity	• heterosexist language on school forms (mother/father) • in the classroom (moms and dads) • "I was disappointed that the school district forms were not inclusive and use mother and father on paperwork" • one lesbian noted that her child was only allowed to make one candle for mother's day • "more inclusion of family diversity, like more 'two moms' or 'two dads' stories and games giving more of a sense of normalcy to that"
Inclusive environment	• Parents noted the absence of challenges. Parents commented on the inclusive nature of their children's schools • "We have felt very accepted and it is very inclusive in general. The teacher incorporated Chinese New Year activities and books • "We have had no problems. We are not the only adoptive family there and the staff and other families are very receptive"
Resources	• inclusion of books on diversity • schools should have more books on diverse families • schools include more books on adoption specifically, especially open adoption

	• more books featuring children of colour
Curriculum	• curricular inclusion of LG and adoption issues • four lesbian women suggested that all class projects be inclusive of all types of families

Theme: Curriculum	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Parents donating resources	• "I feel that adoptive education is on the adoptive families. Same with same-sex family education. We have to suggest and donate adoption and gay family books to the school library. The administration is open to suggestions but we have to make them" • She was happy to donate books and educate teachers, she "[didn't] have the energy to be a 24- hour PSA spokesperson for adoption!" • participants note that they felt that it should not "on them" to provide such books; rather it should be up to the schools to ensure that inclusive materials should be in the classroom
Resources	• inclusion of books on diversity • schools should have more books on diverse families • schools include more books on adoption specifically, especially open adoption • more books featuring children of colour
Curriculum	• curricular inclusion of LG and adoption issues • four lesbian women suggested that all class projects be inclusive of all types of families

Theme: Experience with adoptive parents	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Teachers lack of experience/knowledge about adoption	• "we've already gotten one comment from a teacher that shows that common misconception [rescuing]" • from the perspective of the school, her child was "expected to be 'thankful' about being adopted" • "the biggest hurdle is explaining our fully open adoption and relationship with his birth family" • open adoption is "unfamiliar and uncomfortable"
Advocacy for their child	• participants reported a range of family diversity related challenges in dealing with teachers and advocating for their children [LG status, adoptive parents and racial diversity]
bullying	• [gay man] a teacher had "jokingly referred to us a paedophiles"
inclusive environment	• "We have had no problems. We are not the only adoptive family there and the staff and other families are very receptive"

Language	• heterosexist language on school forms (mother/father) • in the classroom (moms and dads) • "I was disappointed that the school district forms were not inclusive and use mother and father on paperwork" • his child's teacher had referred to him as his son's "adoptive father" • teachers used terms like "real parents" or "real mother" to describe birth parents • "Terminology [is a problem] there is ignorance when talking about birth parents - they use 'mom' or 'real parents'.
other parents presenting a challenge	• four parents, all of whom had adopted children of color, identified other parents as a challenge - *not being accepted - children not playing with* • the school "had very few, if any" LG parent families suggesting she attributed other parents reluctance to socialise with her family to her sexual orientation

Theme: Understanding the impact of pre-adoptive experiences	
Sub-Theme	**Quote**
Blaming on adoption	• Learning that some teachers associate behaviour with being adopted [when] they have nothing to do with each other." • Her son has "behaved terribly" on his first day of preschool. When she came to pick him up the teachers all asked whether his biological mom had used drugs wondering if he had a behaviour problem as a result. • teachers seemed to believe that all of their children's problems stemmed from the fact that they were adopted, abused, neglected or exposed to drugs in utero
Teachers lack of experience/knowledge about pre-adoptive experiences	• participants emphasised their perception that their children's behavioural problems were related to the losses they had experienced - a reality which teachers "did not get" • (two couples) voiced their perception that their children's teachers did not grasp the significance of their children's early disrupted placements or abuse history on their behaviour • [mother] noted that her son suffered post-traumatic stress disorder due to his early negative life experiences, but his teachers "just see him as exhibiting bad behaviour"

Appendix F: Generation of overarching concepts from second and third order interpretations

Sub concepts	Overarching Concept	2nd Order Interpretation	3rd Order Interpretation Description
Blaming issues on the adoption	Knowledge and understanding of adoption and understanding of the impact of pre-adoptive experiences	"I just don't think they're super educated about it. They don't know the language to use"	Many parents felt that school staff lacked understanding of adoption more generally and the lasting impact of pre-adoptive experiences. School staff were described as "not adoption savvy". The lack of understanding around adoption often led to staff being insensitive or ignorant of the issues surrounding adoption. Some staff were also said to be quick to blame a child's difficulties or behaviours on their adoption. This sometimes led to adopted children being labelled as 'bad' rather than their difficulties or behaviour being understood in the context of their early life experiences and how pre-adoptive experiences can affect children's educational progress. This lack of awareness suggested to parents there was a misconception by staff that adoption was 'rescuing' the children and the adoptive parents were 'saints' for doing so. Parents often felt that they had to educate the school staff about adoption issues such as attachment and trauma and fight for appropriate support and resources. Parents
Training for staff		Teachers demonstrating insensitivity or ignorance due to their lack of knowledge around adoption	
Expectations		Misconceptions and assumptions about adoption "from the perspective of the school, her child was "expected to be 'thankful' about being adopted"	
Greater understanding by school staff			
Having to 'fight' for support			
Lack of awareness and knowledge from staff			
Insensitivity from staff			
Parents educating school			
Teachers lack of experience/knowledge about adoption			
Teachers lack of experience/knowledge about pre-adoptive experiences			

Lack of understanding of impact of trauma			also felt that sometimes staff used insensitive language or were unaware of what language to use, such as 'birth parents' or 'real parents'. This was also reflected in school forms, which didn't allow for different family types to be named e.g. same sex parents.
Being Trauma informed is important			

Sub concept	**Overarching Concept**	**2nd Order Interpretation**	**3rd Order Interpretation Description**
Lack of understanding of needs	Identifying and understanding the child's unique needs	"it's taken until this year from them to…appreciate the impact trauma has…I don't think they took it seriously" "school said...he is only slightly worse in reading…we paid to test him…the scores were terrible" One of Lee's son's teachers saw he was "really struggling" and began tutoring him. parents…voiced frustration and helplessness when they felt that schools viewed their children as 'bad' rather than 'trauma' "Her school work improved after she was diagnosed correctly. She could finally learn	This overarching concept refers to adopted children's specific learning or educational needs. Many of the parents identified that their children had a range of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and sometimes there were a range of external professionals involved, reflecting the complexity of the child's difficulties. Parents didn't always have much background knowledge about the child and sometimes this meant that a child's SEN was misdiagnosed or misidentified prior to their adoption and adoptive parents sought additional assessments for them. Parents felt it was important for schools to really know their child and for staff to know
School not meeting needs			
Understanding of need			
Need needs to be acknowledged			
Negative response from staff toward child			
Difficulty getting settled			
Inaccuracy of child's academic ability			
Trauma informed			
Helpful teachers			
Recognising need			
Knowing the individual child			
Misinformed staff			

Educating school		because they were addressing her actual needs" “after my daughter was diagnosed with FASD, her grades improved because she was getting the right help" Parents indicated that over a third (39%) had been identified by the school as having SEN and around 30 different diagnostic labels were specified.	what their child’s specific needs were e.g. requiring a structured environment. Parents reported that they came to know their child and they had to inform the school about what specific support the child required. Some parents stated how some staff tried to offer additional support to their child by offering them additional tutoring or minimising changes in the classroom environment.
Lack of understanding of impact of trauma			
Lack of awareness of diverse families			
Labelled as bad			
School not being aware of needs			
Re-assessment of need led to improved outcomes			
Home-school collaboration			

Sub concept	**Overarching Concept**	**2nd Order Interpretation**	**3rd Order Interpretation Description**
Uncertainty of sharing information		Parents were trying to find a balance between letting teachers know about their children's background without leading them to form biased judgements about their child based upon their adoptive status and history. "finding ways to let the school know about his history/issues without prejudicing them before they get to know him" feeling "stuck" about what to share…having been told by a caseworker	The disclosure practices of parents to schools about their child’s adoptive status, race and their family structure (parental sexual orientation) was described as either being proactive disclosure, reactive disclosure, implicit disclosure and non-disclosure. Many parents were uncertain about how much information to share with schools about their child’s background for concern of staff
Openness			
Reactive disclosure			
Proactive disclosure			
Implicit disclosure/ no need to disclose			

Information sharing	Sharing Information	"never to tell anyone he was adopted, and to never mention he was adopted from foster care" some couples disclosed (family structure) simply because they wished to be honest about the nature of their family structure Maura…felt that this context was important for school to know so that they could understand her son Brianna…important to "explain to teachers where they came from" Parents appreciated teachers who sought information about their child's background.	placing judgemental biases on the child yet they wanted staff to be informed. Parents who informed schools shared this information to reduce confusion, ensure teachers knew the background information and for staff to use appropriate language and respond sensitively to the child and parents not wanting to 'hide anything' from the school. Parents considered it crucial that schools also understood the child's difficulties in the context of pre-adoptive experiences and sharing the child's story could help. Adoptive parents appreciated two-way communication with school staff, who asked about the child's background and wanted to learn more about them, as well as parents being notified of potentially sensitive school work e.g. family trees.
Disclosure practice			
Knowing the child			
Home school communication			
Collaboration between home and school			
School on the same side			
Flexibility			
Interested in children			

Sub concept	**Overarching Concept**	**2nd Order Interpretation**	**3rd Order Interpretation Description**
Curriculum		Parents reported difficulties with schools asking for baby pictures and other early documentation that they didn't have total	Parents reported that teachers varied in their consideration of adoption, race and family structure in the classroom. Some teachers

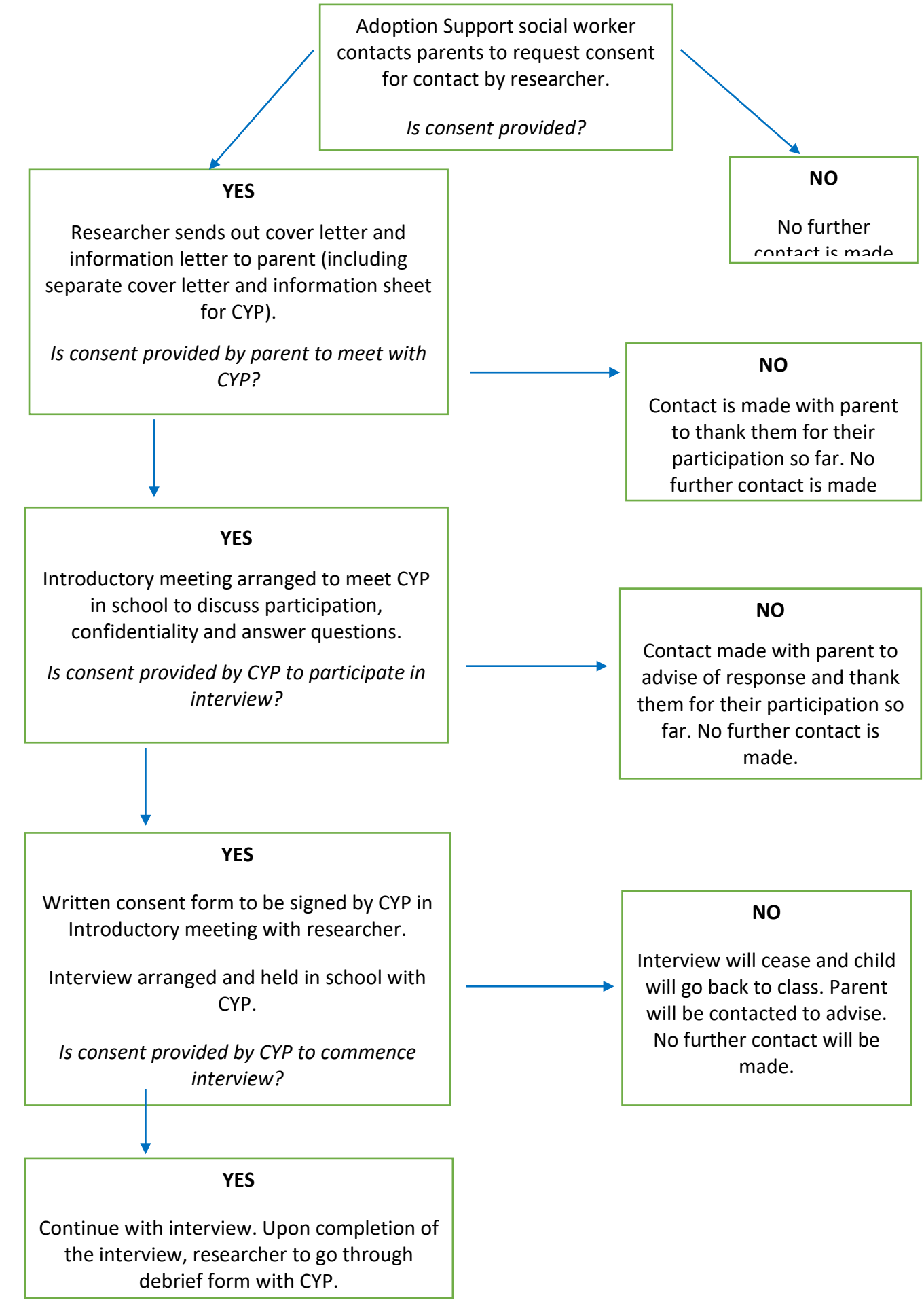
Lack of understanding around adoption	Curriculum	avoidance of adoption and poorly informed attempts at addressing it were inadequate in promoting an accurate positive understanding of adoption within the school community. Several of these parents donated materials to the schools but with little effect. The teacher "asked for homework involving a baby picture of the child and the child's birth weight and height" which they did not have. "I feel that adoptive education is on the adoptive families. Same with same-sex family education. We have to suggest and donate adoption and gay family books to the school library. The administration is open to suggestions but we have to make them"	altered class activities to be sensitive to adoption, but for others, their lack of knowledge and understanding of adoption led to a perception of ignorance around adoption, which was manifested in their approach to the curriculum. This was reflected in assignments and activities such as family tree exercises and requesting baby photos. Some parents found it unsettling the way schools handled these family related assignments. Some parents requested that they be informed of such tasks beforehand. Some schools did this and informed an adoptive parent of a potentially sensitive task. Some parents advocated for their family and made suggestions and adaptions that could be made. Many parents said that they donated books and resources to schools about adoption and diverse families as there was a lack of books in school that reflected different family types. It was felt that teachers don’t do enough to include adopted and diverse families in their classrooms. Adoption appeared to be ‘overlooked’ in classroom discussions.
School not doing enough/could do more			
Parents providing resources			
Inclusive curriculum			
Lack of awareness and knowledge of staff			
Insensitivity from staff			
Lack of diversity in the curriculum			

Resources			Similarly, it was felt that the onus should not be on the parents to provide these resources and education to staff.

Sub concept	**Overarching Concept**	**2nd Order Interpretation**	**3rd Order Interpretation Description**
Inclusion Not demonstrating inclusive practice Lack of awareness of diverse families Educating schools Wanting inclusiveness Flexibility In receipt of additional support Proactive disclosure	Inclusion and Diversity	"I was disappointed that the school district forms were not inclusive and use mother and father on paperwork" "We have had no problems. We are not the only adoptive family there and the staff and other families are very receptive" "inclusion and diversity go hand in hand" Child's desire to be more integrated… rather than isolated in SEN settings Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted.	Many parents described feeling included in their child's school. They felt that adoption became salient in school through the curriculum. Teachers who acknowledged and incorporated diverse families into the curricula helped families to feel more comfortable and accepted. It was noted by some parents that once their child became adopted, their child was in receipt of additional support. This supported their inclusion in lessons, such as through paraprofessional support and access to other provisions within school. For some, not being the only adoptive family in the school helped them to feel accepted and included. It was noted that resources such as books on adoption and diverse families were an important way that 'teachers and schools communicated their acceptance and inclusiveness'. However it was acknowledged that there was often a lack of these resources

Inclusive resources	Inclusion and Diversity		in school and parents often donated books so that their child could see themselves ‘reflected in the material at school’. Some parents wanted schools to be more inclusive and often referred to the need for ‘inclusive language’ use e.g. school forms which ‘often invoked terms like 'moms and dads' which made their kids feel 'like they didn’t belong''. Parents also appreciated teachers making the effort to bring up diverse families in their lessons and acknowledging them so that the child ‘doesn’t feel odd’. Many parents gave specific examples of how racial ethnic and cultural issues were infused meaningfully into the curriculum. Some parents felt that schools didn’t do enough to acknowledge or promote adoption and diverse families, suggesting that sometimes teachers were ‘ignorant’ or ‘lacked education’ about LG parent families . Some families described how they switched schools because of ‘dissatisfaction with schools awareness of and accommodations to children’s unique needs’.
Inclusive curriculum			
Feeling accepted and included			
Lack of inclusivity			
Inclusion and Diversity			
Invisibility of diversity			
Not acknowledging diversity			

Appendix G: Consent Flow Chart



Appendix H: Flyer sent to adoption agencies for initial recruitment

Newcastle University

Are you an adoptive parent? Would your child be interested in talking to me about their experience of school?

My name is Ania Bragg and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Newcastle University. I also work for Newcastle Educational Psychology Service. For my doctoral research, I would like to interview adopted children and young people about their **experience of school**. I am looking to recruit:

- Children who have been adopted from care, who:
- currently attend a mainstream primary or secondary school
- are in Year 3 – Year 11
- and live within the North East region

Your child must be aware that they are adopted and be settled at home and school.

Why is this research important?

- Parents, teachers and researchers report that some adopted children experience emotional, social and academic challenges at school.
- Researchers write about how they think adopted children should be supported in school, but few explore the perspectives of the young people themselves.
- Therefore, I would like to talk to adopted young people to hear about their educational experiences from their perspective.

What will your child be expected to do?

Your child will be asked to take part in an **individual interview with me at their school**. They can have an adult of their choosing with them if they would like. The interview will take approximately one hour. I am hoping they will take place in March.

How can I find out more?

If you are interested and think that your child might like to take part, please email a.j.bragg@newcastle.ac.uk for more information. Please note, as interviews will be taking place in your child's school, it will be necessary for me to liaise with school staff, therefore please include details of the school your child attends in your email.

Thank you!

Please note: I have DBS Clearance and the project has been approved by the Newcastle University Ethics Committee.

Appendix I: Cover Letter for CYP

Cover Letter for Child

Dear _____ (insert child's name),

My name is Ania Bragg I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working with Newcastle Educational Psychology Service.

I am going to be doing a project with adopted children and young people and I really hope that you would like to take part. I have included an information sheet with this letter. The information sheet gives you some details about my project.

If you would like to take part in the project, I will meet you for 10-15 minutes at school to talk about what my project is about and what you would need to do. I can answer any questions you might have.

If you would like to meet me to talk about my project please give this letter to your parent(s). They will let me know you have returned it and I will arrange a time to meet with you.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you and possibly working with you.

Kind regards,

Ania Bragg
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix J: Information Sheet for CYP

Information Sheet for Child

My name is Ania Bragg and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working with Newcastle Educational Psychology Service.

I am doing a project with adopted young people and need your help. I'd like to talk to you about your experiences of school. This can include topics such as teachers, lessons, friends and school in general. I would like to hear your thoughts about these things. I hope that you will be able to help me. By talking to you, I hope to be able to help other adopted children and young people be able to have positive school experiences.

You might have some questions:

How long do you want to talk to me?
We will have a short meeting first (if you want to), for about 10-15 minutes, to talk about my project and I will answer any questions you have.

If you still want to take part, we'll meet again and we will talk for up to an hour but it can be longer or shorter, depending on how much you have to say. You can stop our chat at anytime.

Where will we talk?
We will meet at school in a private space. If you would like to have an adult with you, that's ok too.

Will you tell anyone what I say?
What we talk about will be kept private unless I am worried about anything you say. If I am worried, I might need to talk to your teacher or parent.

How will you remember what I say?
I will record us talking so I can listen to it later on. We might do some writing or drawing together too.

Will anyone reading about your project know that it's me?
No one will know your name except me and I will not use the name of your school either.

Can I change my mind?
Yes. You can change your mind at any time, before, during or after our meeting. We will chat at the end to check that you understand everything about the project and that you are happy with it.

How long will you keep my information for and what will you do with it?
The information I collect will only be used in my thesis (my project write up), which may be published or shared with Local Authority Services. My thesis may also be shared at conferences when it is finished.

Once I have collected all the information I need, it will be stored on a password protected computer to make sure it is safe. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the information. Audio recordings will be destroyed my project has been written up and is finished.

Thank you

Ania Bragg
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix K: Consent Form for CYP

Consent Form for Child
(to be completed with researcher in initial meeting)

Yes, I would like to do Ania's project	☐
No, I don't want to do Ania's project	☐
I understand that Ania will record my voice	☐
I understand that if Ania is worried about something that I have said, she will need to tell someone about it	☐

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix L: Debrief Form for CYP

Debriefing Form for Child

Thank you for taking part in my project. I hope you have found it interesting. If you would like hear about what I found out, I am happy to send you a letter once I've finished.

I would like to hear about the project findings:

Yes ☐

No ☐

Right to Withdraw

You and your parent (s) have the right to withdraw from this project at any time. This may include after the data collection has taken place. However, please note that from July 2019 this data will have been analysed so it will not be able to be removed after this date.

If at any point you would like to talk to me about the project, please get in touch. If you talk to _____ (an identified member of staff within school) or your parent (s), I will arrange a way of talking to you. If you have concerns you don't think I can answer, _____ (an identified member of staff within school) can contact my Supervisor (Dr Fiona Boyd).

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix M: Cover Letter and Information Sheet for Parents

Cover Letter and Information Sheet for Parent(s)

Dear _____ (parent's name),

My name is Ania Bragg and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working with Newcastle Educational Psychology Service.

I am carrying out a research project into the views of adopted young people about their school experiences. I am hoping that through this project I can help other adopted children and young people to have positive school experiences and support school staff in understanding the needs and perspectives of adopted children and young people.

I am contacting you to gain consent to approach _____ (insert child's name) to see if they would be interested in taking part in this project. I have also included an information sheet for _____ (insert child's name) so they have some information on the project if you choose for them to be involved.

The project would involve:

- An initial meeting, approximately 10-15 minutes long, to talk about the project and provide _____ (insert child's name) with a consent form. I will explain to _____ (insert child's name) that they can pull out from the project at any time.
- If _____ (insert child's name) wants to take part, there will then be an interview. The interview might last up to an hour depending on how much they want to talk. In the interview we will talk about current friendships groups, social settings, and questions to explore self-identity.
- The interview will be audio recorded. I will be asking questions and we might also do some writing and drawing together.
- Following the interview there will an opportunity to debrief. This will involve talking to _____ (insert child's name) and explaining again that they can

withdraw at any time from the project. I will also check with them that they have not been upset by our conversation.

There are some important points for you to note:

- The information I collect will be used in my thesis, which may also be published or shared within Local Authority Services. My thesis may also be shared at conferences upon final completion. The information collected will only be used for the purpose of this study.
- Once data has been collected, it will be stored on a password protected computer to ensure confidentiality. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the data. Audio recordings will be securely destroyed once the data has been transcribed and the research has been written up.
- _____(insert child's name) name will be anonymous and there will be no mention of their real name or their school name in my write up.
- If _____ (insert child's name) gives me information which I am worried about, I will have to follow the safeguarding procedure for Newcastle Local Authority.
- All information gathered will be stored in accordance with data protection laws.
- You and _____ (insert child's name) have the right to pull out of this research at any time. This may include after the data collection has taken place. However, please note that from January 2019 this data will have been analysed so will not be able to be removed after this date.

Kind regards,

Ania Bragg
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix N: Consent Form for Parents

Consent Form

- I understand that this research involves _____ (insert child's name) speaking with Ania Bragg, Trainee Educational Psychologist, in an initial meeting for 10-15 minutes and in an interview that will be up to an hour long. The interview is about _____(insert child's name)'s views and perspectives of their experience of school.

- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. Information will be recorded confidentially and will be anonymised.

- I understand that the information _____ (insert child's name) provides will form part of her thesis and this may be shared within Local Authority Services or published. _____ (insert child's name) and school name will be made anonymous.

- If information provided is a safeguarding concern, Ania will have to follow the safeguarding procedure for Newcastle Local Authority.

- I understand that both I and _____ (insert child's name) have the right to withdraw at any time up until July 2019.

If you would like to contact me about the research, please get in touch. My contact information is a.j.bragg@newcastle.ac.uk. If you have concerns you do not feel I can answer I can also provide you the contact information for my Supervisor (Dr Fiona Boyd).

I confirm that I would like _____ (insert child's name) to take part in research exploring the views of adopted children and young people of being adopted and their friendships.

Please keep one copy of this consent form for yourself, and please return the other copy to me.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix O: Interview Schedule

No.	Question	Possible prompts	Type of question
1	Tell me what school is like for you?	Friends/teachers/subjects Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Evaluative
2	What is going well for you at school? *(Could use Talking Mat/Scaling to support this question)*	Friends/teachers/subjects Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Descriptive
3	What is maybe not going quite so well? *(Could use Talking Mat/Scaling to support this question)*	Friends/teachers/school work Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Descriptive
4	If you're having a good day, is there anyone in school you would tell?	School staff? Who? Why? What do they do to help you? Is that important to you? What about a bad day?	Descriptive
5	Who in school knows you're adopted?	Is that important to you? That they do/not know? Why? How did they find out? How did you feel?	Narrative
6	What's it like being an adopted person in your school?	Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Evaluative
7	Can you tell me if you think your experience of school is different to your peers? *(Could use blobs – ask them to choose themselves, then peers, are they different? Why?)*	In what way? If I asked your friends, what would they say about school? Similarities/differences?	Comparative
8	If there was an adopted child about to start your school in September, what would you tell them about your school?	Why would you describe school in that way? Can you tell me a bit more about that?	Circular
9	If there was an adopted child about to start your school, what things do you think school staff or teachers should do to help them?	How? Why? What things do you think school staff or teachers shouldn't do to help them?	Circular

10	What advice would you give the teachers if a new adopted child was joining your school?	Why? Has this been important to you? In what way? Other children?	Circular
11	How do you think your parents would describe your time at school?		Evaluative
12	Are there any questions you would like to ask me? Is there something else you would like to talk about/tell me?		Prompt

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