

Identifying the Needs of Children in Foster Care to Inform Teaching Practices

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Abstract

Children in foster care are students that require their needs to be identified and their concerns to be addressed; consequently educators need to understand these needs in order to help students become successful. This study gathered information about the experiences of children in foster care to identify ways in which schools can become advocates for those children and to inform teaching practices. The study asked questions about the social and academic needs of children in foster care and the ways in which these impacted their learning experiences. It also examined barriers and facilitators for inclusion, and the ways in which educators could provide students living in care with a classroom environment that would aid them to succeed academically and develop socially. This research draws data from six participants who had lived through the foster care system in Vancouver, British Columbia. The findings suggest that for educators to provide students with the classroom environment that is conducive to success, they must be aware of, and prepared to address the challenges their students face, and provide them with needed emotional and educational support.

Dedication

To my husband, without whom I would be lost

and

To my daughter; my love and inspiration

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Chapter 1: Background and Outline

The 2011 Census, which was published in September 2012, “recorded” the number of children in foster care for the first time. According to the Census, a total of 47,885 children were living in foster care in Canada in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012). However, those who work in the field of child services believe that the census data includes only a small number of the children who are actually in foster care. For instance, Fred Phelps, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, in his interview with *The Canadian Press* in September 2012 for the article *Foster children counted in Canadian census for the 1st time*, stated that “We really don’t know, without going from province to province and getting an estimate from each province at any given time, how many children are in the foster care system” (2012). Furthermore, Dr. Nicolas Trocmé, the director of the Centre for Research on Children and Families, and Professor of Social Work at McGill University, supports Phelps’s statement when he affirms that “If you were to phone anyone in the federal government and ask them how many children are in foster care today, the fact that no one can answer that question is pretty shocking, because we are taking responsibility of these children” (Foster children counted in Canadian census for the 1st time, 2012).

The phrase “children in foster care” refers to the children who were removed from their families and homes primarily due to neglect, domestic violence, and physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse. These children have experienced the trauma of separation, after having lived in an environment that has not been healthy and/or safe for them. Children who are placed in foster care are often separated not only from their immediate family, but also from their extended family, their friends, their school, their community and

their neighborhood; all of which constitute their support system and safety net. According to Peter Dudding (2010), editor of *Canada's Children*, "When a child is separated from home, family, and community, there is already enough grief and trauma" (p. 3).

Additionally, foster care has changed and evolved over the years to "encompass many forms of alternative, family-based care for children who cannot live with their parents. This includes, but is not limited to treatment foster care, customary care, private foster care, family-based (parent model) group homes and kinship care" (Ekins, 2010, p. 8).

Foster care policies and procedures in Canada, as well as legislation regarding the protection of neglected and abused children, are established at the provincial and territorial level, as the provinces and territories have legal responsibility for children and their welfare. Aboriginal peoples with status under the Indian Act, are the responsibility of the federal government. This allocation of foster care legislation results in "every province categorizing foster care in a different way" (Wyatt, 2012, p.1). Further, there are often major differences in the types of placements, the application, foster care approval and training processes, the review and evaluation process of current foster families as well as the rates paid to foster families, including additional allowable expenses (see Appendix A for an overview of the main elements of foster homes per province and territory).

In British Columbia, where the data was collected, the process to foster a child starts with an application to the Ministry for Children and Families. For an application to be processed, references, a criminal record check and a medical report are required, in addition to a satisfactory home study (Foster Care, 2000, p. 66). Once the process is completed and the family care home is approved, a Family Care Home Agreement, which is

usually renewed every three years, is signed between the family and the director, who is a Ministry delegate (Foster Care, p. 66). As British Columbia is one of the provinces with the largest number of care available, the number of children allowed in a foster home is dependent on the type of care and/or home they are placed in (Foster Care, p. 66).

Prior to the first placement, foster parents are required to complete an 18-hour pre-service orientation placement, while they are expected to attend 53 hours of the B.C Foster Care Education Program offered through the provincial community college and which are to be completed within two year (Foster Care, p. 67). An annual review of all family care homes includes a file review as well as a home visit during which the members of the foster family are interviewed (Foster Care, p. 67).

Importance of Research

Children in foster care are students that go through the Canadian education system and that require their needs and concerns to be identified and addressed. In order for an educator to be able to provide his or her students with what they need to become successful and reach their full potential, and to provide options and opportunities for them to overcome any social and academic difficulties they might be experiencing or have experienced, he or she has to understand their living conditions and their experiences. As an educator, I have observed that teachers and administrators are not adequately prepared to address foster care related problems that arise in the classroom or at school; further, the educational system fails to provide support to those students whose school challenges derive from the living conditions they experience in their foster homes. Through readings and observations, I have also found that a large number of students placed in foster homes

are also placed in special education programs. The reasons for this placement are multiple; however, behaviour and grade level mismatch are the most used by teachers and administrators.

Furthermore, it is difficult to accept that with such a large number of children in foster care, our country is unable to provide meaningful statistical information of children in care. It is essential to know the exact number of children who live in foster care, as well as the circumstances and the reasons for their placement. If our provinces and territories are legislatively responsible, have taken on the role of the parent and have placed themselves in charge of these children, it then becomes their responsibility to protect these children and to provide them with the necessary resources for their overall wellbeing, including mental health, which will enhance their educational achievements. As such, I agree with the statement that is “...being problematic when the state takes on the role of parent and then is unable to answer taxpayers, the public and the media with respect to how well these children are doing and how good of a job we’re doing as parents when we remove these children” (Foster Children Counted, 2012, p. 2). As a “parent”, the state should be able to answer all questions related to the children who are under its protection. It “owes its children nothing but the best with respect to educational opportunity if they are to achieve successfully the developmental tasks ahead of them in adulthood” (Kufeldt et al., 2000, p. 179). It is necessary to have correct, accurate and up-to-date data in order to make decisions that will positively affect the children in terms of their education, their health and overall well being.

Another important point to take into consideration is that, as time goes by, more and more children are placed in foster care. Farris-Manning and Zandstra (2003) argue that studies conducted in the last decade have shown that in Canada “the vulnerable population of children in need of protection is increasing significantly” (p. 2). This finding makes addressing the educational and social needs of children who are in care more pressing as it is crucial to provide all children with the opportunities they need to succeed and become strong and independent adults, capable of taking care of themselves.

Although there are difficulties in knowing the required information to properly address issues faced by children in foster care, there are countries that have made a head start and are much more organized and prepared than Canada. For many years, some countries, such as the USA, have been able to collect and record information about children in foster care that is detailed and accurate. Officials can provide information about the characteristics of the children who are placed in foster care, the reasons they come in and the reasons they leave, the length of time in care, and their paths and choices once out of the foster care system (Foster Children Counted, p. 2).

Purpose of the Study/ Objective/ Research Questions

There are several purposes to this study. The first purpose is to identify the characteristics of children that have been or are currently placed in foster care. The second purpose of this study is to identify how children in foster care progress in their education, behaviorally and socially. Overall, this study aims at identifying both the challenges and the triumphs of children who are growing up in foster care.

An expected outcome of the study is to inform teaching practices and to identify ways in which teachers can become advocates and schools can become support systems for children in foster care.

Taking into consideration the fact that children in foster care are students in our classrooms, specific questions to be asked include:

What are the social needs of children in foster care and how do they impact their learning experiences? What are the barriers and facilitators for inclusion of children placed in foster care? What are the academic and social needs of those students? How can educators provide students in foster care with a classroom environment that will aid them in succeeding academically and developing socially?

The findings of this study will have implications for how teachers and administrators, both in the public and private school boards, address the problems that may arise when children in foster care join a class/school. Furthermore, educators may change their teaching practices in order to provide students with the necessary support that will help them become more successful in their educational pursuits. The study might also have an implication for students who are placed in foster care, as they might find the support they need, and might not otherwise have, in the schools they attend or through their teachers and school administrators. Through the support that the school and the teachers provide, students might become inspired and feel secure and confident enough to look past their living arrangements and to pursue a better future for themselves. Finally, foster parents might find an ally in schools and teachers that will aid them and support

them in the difficult task that they have undertaken, and the two might find ways to work closer together for the benefit of the children.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In order to gain a better and more in depth understanding of the characteristics of children placed in care, and to identify the ways in which the children progress, behaviorally and socially, in their education, the literature pertaining to those topics was reviewed.

Foster Families and Characteristics of Children in Foster Care

Foster care and foster parents have played a very important role and have been key elements in the life of many children over the years. Children who have been removed from their homes and families, for various reasons, have depended upon foster families to take them in and raise them. These families have been responsible for the well-being of the children, have aided them in the difficulties and problems they have faced, and have been their support system. Furthermore, foster families have provided a nurturing environment and often times have made sacrifices in order to provide the best possible home for the children. They have become the children's immediate "family".

Every child in foster care is unique, has had different experiences and has his/her own specific needs that have to be met. Although taking a child out of his or her family is not always the best option, it is sometimes necessary. According to the Ontario Ministry of Children in Youth Services, children can be placed in foster care by court order, by a children's aid society, or voluntarily by their parents or caregivers (www.children.gov.on.ca). Some of the children stay in foster care for a short time, while others stay for the rest of their childhood and until they age out of care. It is believed that placing a child in foster care is better than placing him or her in an institution since foster

families can provide more and better support, and is viewed as a more nurturing environment for children. Moreover, research supports that there are several benefits in regards to placing children in foster homes compared to placing them in institutions in terms of academic attainment, adjustment after aging out of care, and stronger sense of attachment and belonging. According to the National Youth in Care Network (2001), “Youth who are in less restrictive placements such as foster homes fare best academically, while those in more restrictive placements such as group homes are less likely to succeed” (NYICN, p. 3). Kluger et al. (2001), as quoted in *Children in Care in Canada*, further support the benefits of family-based care by stating that: “youth in treatment foster care have shown better adjustment at follow-up in terms of post-discharge stability of living situation, and restrictiveness of placement setting, than youth served in congregated care settings” (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, p. 3). Mitchell (2011), supports the findings and explains that children who are placed in institutional care “are more likely to demonstrate disorderly attachments”. Disorder attachment refers to the inconsistent interaction of children with adults, with whom they are attached, especially in stressful situations (Mitchell, p. 4).

The literature related to foster care and its effects indicates that although foster care seems to be the best option in certain situations, at times it leads to negative outcomes in terms of social development, education, and professional achievement. Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, as quoted in the article *Census 2011: Canada's Foster Children Counted for First Time* (2012), asserts that “It really is a balancing of risk-you’re taking children out of a difficult situation and putting them in a difficult situation”. She further supports that “no matter how loving the foster home is, the

vast majority of children are going to have a hard time in child welfare care” (Census 2011: Canada’s Foster Children Counted for First Time, p. 2).

Children in Foster Care and a Sense of Security and Belonging

In terms of social development, Peter Jon Mitchell (2011), a senior researcher at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, states that children in foster care do well and have positive outcomes, when they feel that their placement is secure and permanent. It is therefore important for foster parents to put an emphasis on creating a sense of stability, security and belonging in children’s lives. These children have already experienced separation and instability in their lives making it difficult to feel at ease and to adjust in their new living arrangements. This proves to be especially challenging when they feel uncertain and anxious in terms of the length and the future of their current placement.

Triseliotis (2002), supports Mitchell’s findings and agrees that children in foster care have a difficult time feeling a sense of security and belonging. He states that studies completed over the years have identified two main areas leading to those insecurities: the impermanence of the situation and the ambiguity of the position the children find themselves in (Triseliotis, p. 28). The first area concerns “the lack of legal security, which meant that the placement could be terminated at any time” leading to children feeling anxious as to what might happen next. The second area addresses the fact that children feel that they “belong to no one” (Triseliotis, p. 28), making children feel alone and unsupported.

Similarly, (Grey, 2006; Molly, 2012; Lips, 2007) state that foster care, in many cases, hinders a child’s social development. Grey (2006), explains that because both the children

and the caregivers are aware of the possibility of a separation, often times both sides choose to keep a distance between them as a way of not getting attached and of protecting themselves from the pain of another separation. This is caused by the ambiguity the children feel about their position: “the feeling of being ‘in-between’ families, with no one to ‘belong’ to, as well as foster children feeling different and secondary to a foster carer’s own children” (Grey, p. 46). Since children and youth feel that they do not belong and feel caught ‘in between’ families, that is, between their biological and their foster families, they also struggle with issues of identity formation.

The experiences in foster homes are revealed as an increasingly influential dimension in the lives of children and youth in foster care. In a more specific approach, Grey (2006) starts by stating that there has been a focus and a push towards adoptions. At times, long term fostering has been presented as a solution that is not as dependable or as positive as adoption. Adoption is considered by some to be a better and more desirable placement since children in foster care tend to ‘drift’ if a long term plan is not provided. However, as Grey states, the drive towards adoption and the idea that it is the best solution for all situations “raises the danger that plans for children will become policy-driven rather than determined by the best interests of the individual child concerned” (Grey, p. 45). This approach may lead a “one solution fits all” response without necessarily examining each individual case in order to find and provide the best possible option for that particular child. On the other hand, Grey also stresses the difficulties faced by the children in long-term fostering care since it is an unpredictable and an uncertain position to be in. “Taken together, these conditions appear to generate longstanding feelings of insecurity and anxiety in children” (Grey, p.46).

Triseliotis (2002) supports Grey's arguments by stating that children feel in 'limbo' since often times, placements might end early, leading to uncertainty. These terminations are known as "breakdown" or "disruption" (Triseliotis, p. 24) and can take place anytime throughout the placement. The author also supports that long-term placements are uncommon and further states that "the chance of very long-term placements are clearly exceptional" and that "foster care rarely offers permanence" (Triseliotis, p. 27).

Social Acceptance of Children in Foster Care

Another important point is that it often is difficult to explain to children why they were taken away from their families and the reasons they were placed in care. Bruskas (2008), supports that children feel scared and confused as they "endure the trauma of being separated from parents" which makes them "vulnerable and susceptible to posttraumatic stress disorders" (Bruskas, p. 70). Moreover, children may feel embarrassed regarding their situation, especially around their classmates and peers, which sometimes leads them to hide their living arrangements. Bruskas (2008) explains that children do not volunteer their status and their living arrangements because this conversation might lead to feelings of discomfort and hurtful memories. Furthermore, children may feel that they are being scrutinized and questioned, causing them feelings of shame and often guilt. The author further argues that children in foster care experience a sense of marginalization since it is not usual or common for them to meet with other children in care in order to exchange and discuss their experiences, feelings, thoughts and fears. Another reason children do not share their living arrangements, is the fact that there is a negative connotation and a stigmatization associated with the term "foster child". Molloy (2012),

argues that “There is often a perception that children in care have done something wrong and there is a tendency to blame them for their circumstances, particularly if these children act out as a way of coping with their hurt and pain” (Molloy, p. 40).

Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care

The placement of children in foster care does not only affect the social development of the children, but it also affects their educational experiences in various manners and for a variety of reasons. Gustavsoon and MacEachron (2011), state that children and youth who are placed in foster care face a higher risk of doing badly in school. The authors argue that many children in foster care are placed in special education programs, are not engaged academically, and make slow academic progress. They support that youth in foster care “perform below grade level and score significantly lower on standardized tests”, and are “less likely to graduate from high school and much less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree” (Gustavsoon & MacEachron, p. 276).

Lips (2007), further supports this view of limited educational achievement and states that when compared to their peers, “foster children have lower scores on standardized tests and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, and dropout rates” (Lips, p. 1). Kufeldt and McKenzie (2012), assert that the most negative outcome of foster care placement is related to the children’s educational progress. They state that these young people fall behind in grade level and continue to do so over time. As well, many children are assessed with learning difficulties and, when compared to their counterparts, they receive a lower level of remedial help and support.

Lips (2007), Mitchell (2011), and Bruskas (2008), agree that one of the main reasons that most students in foster care do not succeed academically is the frequent movement between placements. This leads to frequent school transfers that cause a disruption in the learning process and affects a child's educational development. Lips (2007) supports that school transfers cause "emotional instability and unrest" since children are forced to adjust to new schools, classmates and teachers often, while they lose their friends and adults that they have began to trust and the relationships they have started establishing. Bruskas (2008) supports Lip's position, but puts the focus on the fact that many school days are missed between transfers, and that children might feel scared and intimidated to attend their new school and make new friends.

Professional Successes of Children in Foster Care

On another level, foster care placement influences people's professional success, and education is a key factor in making the transition into adulthood successful. Primarily due to the lack of a strong educational background and achievement, which can impact their future, children who grow up in foster care do not advance professionally. Lips (2007), suggests that they are more likely to remain unemployed, to become imprisoned, homeless, or dependent on social services. In a survey conducted by Kufeldt and McKenzie (2012), designed to assess how children who grew up in foster care fared in adulthood, it was found that they do not function as well as their peers and on average their incomes are lower. Furthermore, in terms of the percentage of the people who were employed, only "thirty-three percent had full time work, and forty-five percent of them were unemployed" (Kufeldt & McKenzie, p. 32). In support of the above argument, McDonald (1996), states

that since academic performance is closely related to employment and socioeconomic status, some of the children in foster care grow up to be unemployed. McDonald examined twenty-seven studies that provided information about what happened to children after they reached adulthood and left foster care. He found that “about 25% of former foster care children receive public assistance” at some point in their adult life (McDonald, p. 25).

Another argument supporting the negative influence of foster care on young people’s professional development is that the children do not have the family support needed to become successful. Lips (2007), supports that many children in foster care do not have the support system that their peers, who grow up in a traditional family setting, have. When it is time for children in foster care to transition into adulthood especially, there is no one to support them through the process and they have no one to rely on if something goes wrong.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

"The narrative inquiry process is a voyage of discovery to an unknown place."

(Josselson & Lieblich 2003, p. 261)

The method used for this research study was narrative inquiry. This method was chosen because it would allow me to collect the information needed, while at the same time provide interviewees the freedom to choose the information they were willing and comfortable to share, without feeling as much pressure to answer extremely specific questions.

Narrative inquiry is a powerful and sensitive method of data collection. Through storytelling, it allows individuals to share their experiences, while choosing to include, change and/or omit parts and details of those stories. According to Sinclair-Bell (2002), narrative inquiry "involves working with people's consciously told stories, recognizing that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware." (p. 209). For my research project, this meant that I had to be cognizant of the underlying stories that were the basis of the stories told to me. Furthermore, as stated by George and O'Neill (2011), it is important to recognize that for most people, "meaningful and significant life experiences are organized into stories based on values, past experiences, and present knowledge" (p. 369). This means that the stories told are structured and shared based on, and influenced by, values people have, the extent to which their experiences have affected them as well as the current knowledge and understanding they have of the situation they are in.

According to Polkinghorne, there are two types of narrative inquiry: descriptive and explanatory (Clandinin & Connelly). The purpose of descriptive narrative is “to produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful” (Ibid, p. 16). In explanatory narrative, the purpose is to “account for the connection between events in a causal sense and to provide the necessary narrative accounts that supply the connections” (Ibid, p. 16).

There are several parameters to be taken into consideration when using narrative inquiry as a research methodology. The information made available by the interviewees is always limited to what they choose to share with the researcher, and there is no direct access to that information or a way in which to verify it. As George and O’Neill (2011), state “reconstructions of the past are selective and varied because individuals exclude experiences that do not fit with the current identities they wish to present” (p. 369). This idea is further supported by Bell (2002), who argues that participants in narrative inquiry tend to “construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves, excluding experiences and events that undermine the identities they currently claim” (p. 209). That is, people may feel that it is necessary to protect themselves and the image of who they believe they are or what others perceive them to be, and they might do this by choosing to share particular pieces of information or stories, and omitting others. The reconstruction of the events might also not be accurate because time can affect how a person remembers. Moreover, certain experiences and memories might have been suppressed or erased from one’s memory as a coping mechanism. All of these limitations and concerns were taken into consideration when listening to, transcribing and analyzing each story shared with me.

I realized that the way in which people understand, share and interpret their stories might change from time to time, depending on the circumstances, the environment they are in and the people they share the stories with. Therefore, while listening to and analyzing the interviews, I attempted to explore, as much as I could, the present, the past and the future, as well as take into consideration any situation that could influence and affect the story told. Furthermore, I decided that the validity and accuracy of the life stories shared was not as important as the fact that the participant decided to share his or her story, and that “no matter how fictionalized, all stories rest on and illustrate the story structures a person holds” (Bell, 2002, p. 205). As Holstein and Gubrium (1995), suggest “the validity of answers derives not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible. Do they resonate in the context in which they were produced?” (p. 98)

Other concerns and issues identified by Moen (2006), when using narrative inquiry for research are: the relationship between the researcher and her or his research subjects, the way a narrative is developed from an experienced and orally told story into a written text, and the hermeneutic or interpretive nature of narrative research (p. 3). Moen’s observation pinpoints that, the information shared in narrative inquiry, is not only contingent on the interviewees, but that the researcher is also largely responsible for the story told. Often times the researcher might lead participants to share different information, or the participants might be willing to share more in depth information with a researcher depending on how comfortable they feel with him or her and the kind of rapport established. Coles (1989), states that the people who respond to our call for their narratives and who share their stories have certain hopes and expectations from

themselves and from us. They firstly hope that they tell the stories “well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives”, and they hope that we are capable and knowledgeable in terms of “how to interpret their stories correctly” (p. 7). Furthermore, the manner in which the narrative shared by the participant is put into text by the researcher can influence the story and the message. Documenting participant narratives is a tricky and often complicated undertaking because researchers are “telling a story at second hand”, and carry the responsibility for the participant’s life “being turned into a “text” (p. 7), based on the information that is provided. The choice of words, the information included and/or excluded by the researcher, and the context in which it is used can have a big impact on the final meaning of each story. Lastly, the researcher’s analytical and interpretive skills shape the way each narrative is understood, interpreted and represented to and by others. It is therefore crucial to be aware and careful of the “messages omitted, yarns gone untold, details brushed aside altogether, in the rush to come to a conclusion” (Coles, 1989, p. 21).

To prepare for the interviews with the participants, I reviewed the literature available on the topic of living in foster care, the problems children in care are faced with and the educational attainment, or lack of, by students in foster care. The literature review offered me a clear definition of “foster care”, the reasons children are placed in foster care, as well as the outcomes on a personal, educational, and professional level. This background information helped me better understand foster care issues and the concerns; as well, it guided my research and helped me focus the questions that I would ask the participants that I interviewed.

The aim was to interview 4 to 5 adults over the age of 18. The criteria for participation in the research project were essentially broad as it was open to adults who voluntarily agreed to participate and had grown up in foster care or had had at least one placement in care. The time spent in a foster home, as well as the number of movements from placement to placement, were not variables. The focus of the interview was the participants' school and home experiences, their educational accomplishments, and their professional lives. All data in this study emerged from the narratives/stories of the people interviewed and the information they shared.

Recruiting Participants

After ethics approval was granted by York University's Research Ethics Board, the recruitment process commenced with the original aim to find participants within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). As the topic of this research is very sensitive in nature, making it challenging to find people willing to share their stories with a stranger, participants were recruited through snowballing, a system that "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest..." and [it is] "well suited for a number of research purposes and is particularly applicable when the focus of the study is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relatively private matter, and thus required the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study" (Biernacki & Waldorf, p. 141).

A number of associations and organizations were approached through email. Furthermore, organizations were forwarded a letter outlining the details of the study, as well as the requirements that had to be met for an individual to participate. Another letter

addressed to the possible participants, detailing the study and asking individuals to contact me directly if interested in participating, was sent to the organizations (see Appendix D).

Out of the ten organizations and associations approached in the Greater Toronto Area, only one response was received from an organization that requested that a Research Proposal Form be completed and submitted, and that they be provided with the Ethics Approval Certificate from York University as well as the Informed Consent Form that the participants would be signing. However, this contact did not come to fruition.

Finding participants and identifying adults who have been through the foster care system is rather difficult. The stigma attached to, and associated with, the people who have lived through this experience sometimes leads people to lie or withhold information regarding their families, their childhoods and their upbringing. The following quote, taken from an essay contest during the 2009 National Foster Family Week, is representative of what many people assume about a child in foster care. It is believed by many that a child in care is “a child that has a bad attitude and behavior problems and their parents send them away” (Molloy, p. 40). In general, people believe that the blame should be placed on the child for the situation he or she is in and his or her particular circumstances. That is, it is common that people assume that in order for a child to be placed in foster care, he or she must have done something extremely bad.

The other element that made the recruitment of participants challenging was that the topic/subject of this research study is one that is extremely sensitive and delicate in nature. Sharing life events, difficulties, transitions and trauma that may cause anxiety and distress, and that might bring back memories of difficult times in their lives and

experiences that they are not ready to recall or share, are even harder to discuss with a researcher who is essentially a stranger.

The snowballing technique proved to be the answer to finding and recruiting participants. Several people from my immediate circle of family, friends and colleagues were contacted. The project was discussed and explained to each of the contacts, and all the necessary information pertaining to the study was forwarded to them. They were asked to contact others they knew who might be able to help, and to ask people to spread the word about the project. Through talking to people in my immediate circle, a connection was made through an acquaintance in British Columbia. This person was interested in my project and in helping pass on the study information, and the recruitment letter to youth who used to be in and had aged out of foster care.

Once the connection was established in British Columbia, I started looking for more opportunities to recruit participants in that area. While researching the foster care system in BC, various articles titled “Care to Where” came up in the Vancouver Sun. After contacting the journalists who wrote the pieces, a contact was established with the Federation of British Columbia Youth in Care Networks and their Communications Coordinator, Ms. Lisa Mickleborough, who became extremely helpful in establishing a connection with possible participants by forwarding the recruitment letter to possible volunteers via email (see Appendix D). She also asked for an informational poster that would briefly describe the project and the requirements in order to circulate it and to post it in places that potential participants would be able to see (see Appendix E). Shortly after the recruitment letter and the informational poster were sent, people who were interested

in participating and volunteering their stories and time contacted me directly to arrange for the time and the place of the interview.

In the end, all study participants were located in various parts of British Columbia. As contacts were materializing, a trip to Vancouver, British Columbia was planned with having only three participants lined up at the time. While in Vancouver, three more people contacted me to participate in the study, bringing the number of interviewees up to six. This number of interviewees allowed for a good understanding of the issues and of the problems children in foster care are faced with as well as the ways in which education could become a support system for the children.

Participants

Three males and three females, between the ages of 19 to 27 years of age that had previously been in foster care volunteered to take part in the project. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and to the information disclosed during the interviews, only broad and general descriptions of the participants are included in order to protect their identities. Table 1 provides a general description of the interview participants.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Age	24 years old	19 years old	21 years old	21 years old	27 years old	20 years old
Sex	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
Number of Biological Siblings	None	4 biological siblings	Uncertain	4 biological siblings	2 biological siblings	2 biological siblings
Age at First Placement	12 years old	Newborn	12 years old	15 years old	about 5 years old	About 13 years old

Number of Placements	4	1	3	1	At least 11	Numerous
Level of Education Completed	Leaving Certificate	High School Diploma	High School Courses	College Certificate	College Certificate – Bachelor's Degree	Leaving Certificate
Occupation	Unemployed	Caseworker	Business Owner	Unemployed – Starting University	Social Worker	Server at a coffee shop

Participant 1:

Participant 1 is a male in his mid-twenties who was placed in care for the first time at the age of twelve. He experienced four placements in total, including both group homes and foster homes. Prior to being placed in care, Participant 1 was provided with Respite Care, which he initially did not like but eventually got accustomed to. His experiences in care were primarily negative until his last placement at age fourteen. While living in group home, he experienced locked cupboards and closets; even the fridge had a lock, and he was not allowed to have a TV in his room. He described one of the group homes as having “the vibe of an institution”. However, in his last placement he found the support he needed. His foster family provided him with the opportunity to try activities and to travel, and advocated for his education. Educationally, Participant 1 was not placed in the right programs, and was moved to Alternate schooling. As a result of the misplacement and lack of high school credits, Participant 1 could not obtain a high school diploma. Rather, he received a Leaving Certificate which is awarded to students “who meet the goals of their educational program other than graduation. This can include students with Individual Education Plans, or students who meet other criteria established by their Board of

Education” (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/student-credentials>). At the time of the interview, Participant 1 was unemployed and was working towards learning Accounting.

Participant 2:

Participant 2 is a female in her late teens, and the only one who was placed in care as a newborn. She experienced no movement in regards to her placement as she was eventually adopted by her foster parents. Participant 2 had only positive experiences from her time in care as her foster family was always “involved and was pushing me to do my best and she [the foster mother] was always supportive of what I wanted to do in school”. She was influenced by her mother who “was always the most caring person, the most loving person. She always gave to the children and I have learned from that and I think that trait of being able to take care of all of these children kind of set me to want to do that when I grow up”. In school, Participant 2 was able to choose the courses she wanted, and felt that Alternative would be a good option as she believed that she needed one-on-one attention , fewer transitions and more support. However, once in Alternative she did not receive the help required. Participant 2 graduated from high school, and at the time of the interview was working as a case worker.

Participant 3:

Participant 3 is a male in his early-twenties, who was placed in care at the age of twelve. He experienced three different placements in which he felt disconnected from the members of the families and alone until he moved into his last foster home. Participant 3

had a difficult time in school, and was placed in Alternate although his academics were not poor and he did not need extra support. While in school, he was not challenged enough to reach his full potential and attending classes became difficult for him because his “attitude was getting worse and worse about school”, and he “ended up just not going eventually”. Participant 3 only completed some high school courses, did not graduate, and is currently the owner of a small business that repairs computers and phones.

Participant 4:

Participant 4 is a female in her mid-twenties who was placed in care at the age of fifteen. She only experienced one placement to an all-girls’ foster home, which had “that group home feeling to it”. She stated that she “did many things that would have typically gotten me moved. I had a very insistent social worker. It was almost like she thought that I was “too dangerous to be moved””. Educationally, she was moved to five different high schools and eventually ended up graduating in an adult education program. Participant 4 graduated with a college certificate in Community Counseling, and at the time of the interview had been accepted to the University of British Columbia and was awaiting the start of the first semester.

Participant 5:

Participant 5 is a female in her mid-twenties who was placed in care at the age of five. She experienced at least eleven movements, between kinship care and foster care, during which she did not feel that she belonged or that she was understood. Educationally, she took the required courses, dropped out of school twice, and had to repeat Grades 11 and 12. In order to graduate, she took courses that she knew would be easy and that were

geared towards Social Work. She attended college and university, and graduated with a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor's Degree. At the time of the interview she was working as a Social Worker.

Participant 6:

Participant 6 is a male in his early twenties who had been in care since the age of thirteen. He had numerous placement movements and never felt he belonged until his last placement. He was moved from school to school and program to program, leaving him with many gaps in knowledge that were never addressed, and which led him to drop out of school several times. He left high school with a Leaving Certificate and at the time of the interview he was working as a server at a coffee shop, and was planning to enroll in Continuing Education courses in order to apply to become a member of the Canadian Forces.

The Interview Process

The meeting with each participant was casual in nature and happened in a place that the interviewee chose and where he or she felt safe and comfortable. Four out of six interviews took place in public places such as restaurants and coffee shops, while the remaining two took place in the interviewees' homes. At the beginning of each interview, information about how confidentiality would be ensured and the format of the interview were provided. In addition, a copy of the Informed Consent Form was given to each interviewee to review and sign prior to the commencement of the interview process.

Each interviewee was provided with opportunity to ask questions about the research and to express any doubts to be clarified before the interview took place. With the exception of one participant who did not agree, all interviews were tape-recorded which allowed me to have more accurate and detailed information as I had each participant's exact responses at my disposal.

Although memory is a good beginning point for any storytelling, it is not always the most reliable recording mechanism when it comes to remembering details, dates, number of placements, locations. Also, once the interaction with the participant is completed and time passes, it is difficult to completely depend on and trust one's memory. "Memory", as Annie Dillard (1988) remarked, "tends to smooth out the details, leaving a kind of schematic landscape outline" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 83). Thus, detailed, accurate and descriptive field notes were kept, as they "help fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone is likely to construct" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 83). As the participants were sharing their narratives, I jotted specific words and sentences that felt important, in order to aid recall or remember to further look into something. In the notes were also recordings of behaviors such as a participant stopping to think, chuckle, cry etc. Furthermore, full field notes were written as soon as possible after each interview was completed, and questions recorded were further researched. The field notes allowed me to record and/or pick on the ways in which certain questions were answered, as well as the behaviors displayed. They also afforded the opportunity to "revisit" the interviews, to question the narratives and to produce meaning.

Since the topic of the research project was extremely sensitive, I was aware that the interview process might feel a little scary and stressful, and might bring out some very emotional responses from the participants, which they might have not been expecting or might not have been prepared to address. Furthermore, I was prepared for the possibility that the participants could become upset, distressed, or anxious, since the process involved reliving and sharing difficult moments, experiences and personal aspects and events of their lives. This process could lead to the expression of powerful emotions that could include and would not be limited to frustration, sadness, grief and pain.

Moreover, the more I prepared for the interviews the more I realized that some of the participants might not anticipate the effects our encounter could have and the information that they might choose to share. Although I knew that it was impossible to predict the outcomes of the interviews and the reactions the participants might have, I had taken various steps to mitigate any emotional risks to the interviewees by providing them with a list of web addresses of associations that could provide support, as well as web addresses to web discussion groups on the topic.

During the interview, I watched for cues and signals indicating that the interviewees were in distress or were feeling anxiety. They were given the time and space to express their emotions and were provided with the support they needed, and when necessary the data collection was delayed. Two of the six participants became emotional during the interview: one interviewee gained composure almost immediately and refused to stop the discussion; however, the second participant required a short stop in our conversation in order to gain composure. The participant left the room for a few minutes and returned to

continue the interview. Upon return, I suggested we end the discussion, but the participant insisted on responding to the remaining questions.

All of the narratives were written in first person, and an effort was made to provide the context of each person's life. The title used for each narrative was chosen based on a key phrase that the participant had used during the interview process and was meant to act as a piece of advice for educators from each research participant.

At the initial stages of the analysis of the interviews, the focus was on looking at identifying specific themes, in combination with emergent categories that were added to the list as they became available. The main categories were then broken into subcategories/meta-themes. While rereading the interviews, the emphasis was placed on looking for similarities and differences in the categories, themes and elements that each participant had identified. An in-depth content analysis was used in order to present each participant's narrative/story.

As the data was reviewed and was organized in a coherent manner, several themes emerged. The six stories were titled: *"Get to know us and show that you care"*, *"Help create awareness"*, *"Don't dumb things down! We need to be challenged!"*, *"There is no benefit to moving schools all the time"*, *"We have potential! Help us live up to it!"*, and *"We need the right type of support, from the early ages, to succeed in school."* Each title was chosen to represent a different piece of advice offered to educators, including teachers and administrators, as it had emerged through the interview process with each of the participants.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

All the themes that emerged through each story are listed in Table 2 below. The ones that were consistent and repeated were color-coded in order to be further investigated and analyzed.

TABLE 2: THEMES

Story	Themes
<i>"Help create awareness."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Friendships- Sense of belonging- Foster family (support)- Identifying needs- Learning disabilities causing exclusion- Need for the right program/right fit (Alternate not always the answer)- Placement in a program without assessment- Prepare students for employment- Teacher support needed- Teachers should accommodate- Teachers awareness and understanding of the situation- School should provide more opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular activities- Teachers should help students build self-confidence- Teachers should help other kids understand what children in foster care are experiencing
<i>"Get to know us and show that you care."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Friendships- Sense of belonging- Foster family (support)- Stigma- Lack of trust- Need for the right program/right fit- Teacher support, help and involvement needed- Prepare for employment- Teachers show they care- Teacher awareness and understanding of the situation- Get to know the students
<i>"Don't dumb things down! We</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Friendships

<p><i>need to be challenged!"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of trust - Sense of belonging - Foster family (lack of support and support) - Stigma - Lack of trust - Opportunity to try and experience things - Need for the right program/right fit - Teacher support, help and involvement needed - Prepare for employment - Teachers challenge students
<p><i>"Moving schools regularly is not beneficial."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendships - Sense of belonging - Lack of trust - Foster family (lack of support) - Support from the Organizations - Social worker support - Exposure to trauma - Trying to find acceptance - Not receiving what entitled to receive - Need for the right program/right fit - Teacher support and help needed - Teacher awareness and understanding of the situation - Quit school/drop out - Get involved with organizations that can help youth in care
<p>"We have potential! Help us live up to it!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendships - Feeling guilty and responsible for being placed in foster care - Sense of belonging - Lack of trust -Stigma - Exposure to mental health issues - Consistency/Permanency - Foster family (lack of support) - Trauma - Need for the right program/right fit - Teacher support and help needed - Teachers show they care - Overcoming personal barriers - Teachers challenge students - Teachers help build self-esteem - Quit school/drop out

"We need the right type of support, from the early ages, to succeed in school."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gaps in knowledge not addressed-just moved on to the next grade - Need for the right program/right fit - Teacher support and help needed - Teacher show they care - Quit school/drop out - Sense of belonging - Foster family (support) - Stigma - More teachers needed/more funding - Address mental health issues - Provide options and alternative programs - Social worker support - Friendships - Employment -Teacher awareness and understanding of the situation
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In Phase 2 of the analysis, the themes that had been identified in Phase 1 were organized conceptually in order to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the paper. The categories were chosen and identified based on the repetition of topics and patterns that were common across most of the participants' stories. The main categories identified and assigned to the research questions are: (a) *Friendships and Trust*, (b)*Consistency, Permanency and a Sense of Belonging*, (c)*Barriers for Inclusion*, (d)*Facilitators for Inclusion*, (e)*Academic Attainment*, (f)*Preparation for the Future*, (g)*Emotional Support*, (h)*Awareness*, and (i) *Educational Support*.

The specific themes assigned to each category are listed in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3: CATEGORIES AND COMMON THEMES

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	CATEGORIES	THEMES
What are the social needs of children in foster care and	<i>Friendships</i>	-Friendships

how do they impact their learning experiences?	<i>Permanency, Trust and a Sense of Belonging</i>	-Consistency and Permanency -Trust -Sense of Belonging
What are the barriers and facilitators for inclusion of children placed in foster care?	<i>Barriers for Inclusion</i> <i>Facilitators for Inclusion</i>	-Foster Families -Stigma Attached -Exposure to Trauma, Emotional and Mental Health Concerns -Support from Foster Families -Support from People and Organizations
What are the academic needs of students in care?	<i>Academic Attainment</i> <i>Preparation for the Future</i>	-Need for the Right Program/Right Fit -Addressing Gaps in Knowledge -Offering Challenging Courses and Activities -Facing Adulthood -Education and Employment Opportunities
How can educators provide students with a classroom environment that will aid them in succeeding academically and developing socially?	<i>Emotional Support</i> <i>Awareness</i> <i>Educational Support</i>	-Provide Assistance with Everyday Life/Problems -Support and Motivate -Learn About Organizations that Can Provide Support -Know the Students and be Aware of the Situation -Show Empathy: Learn About the Challenges Faced by Children in Care -Assist Other Students in Understanding and Empathizing -Acknowledge the Capacity to Learn -Provide Learning Opportunities and Options

Phase 3 was the analysis of each participant's story, and the identification and connection of all of the themes that had been isolated. In order to support the analysis, quotes from the interviews were used.

Analysis

Social Needs of Children in Foster Care

One of the main elements of the interviews was to uncover the social needs of children in foster care, whether these needs were addressed, how and by whom. To uncover this theme, the participants were asked if they formed any type of relationships while in foster care, or whether or not they made friends with other children or with the adults in the home. As all of the participants' answer to forming friendships was positive, they were then asked to narrate how the friendship started and evolved.

A subsequent question had to do with friendships in school; that is, all participants were asked whether they were able to form friendships in school, with classmates and/or teachers. Participants were encouraged to talk about whether or not their classmates and teachers were aware of the particularities of their living arrangements. If the answer was in the positive, participants were asked how people in the school reacted to this information. If their answer was in the negative, interviewees were asked if they thought it would have been beneficial to them if their teachers and classmates were aware of their living arrangements. Participants were also asked whether they felt a sense of safety and belonging in a particular group of people or in a school, and whether they felt comfortable and secure to share their thoughts and feelings about their lives, problems, and futures with others.

The conversation on the theme of social needs also included a discussion about outstanding positive and/or negative memories participants had about living in foster care. All of them were asked to share at least one memory, and then to discuss and explain the importance of those memories. The last question asked of the participants was to share some of the difficulties and challenges they faced while in care. Once the difficulties and challenges were discussed, interviewees were encouraged to share their feelings in regards to whether they felt safe, included and supported in their foster homes, and whether they felt that they belonged and had a space in the foster family.

Friendships

Data in this study indicate that participants had a difficult time making friends in the foster home and in schools, and that once a friendship was established it was difficult to maintain. Five out of six participants interviewed mentioned that they only had one close friend from their time in foster care. Reasons for the failure to make friends, and to continue the relationships, varied from lack of trust, to fear of abandonment, to insecurity, to instability in homes, and to fluidity of living arrangements.

Struggles to Make Friends

Data in this study shows that some children feel uncomfortable, or even ashamed, to discuss their living arrangements, consequently, they are shy to make friends. Opening up and sharing their life stories with others is not an easy task, especially when other people do not understand the situation that children in foster care are experiencing and the circumstances that led them in those particular living situations. The following excerpts exemplify the difficulties in establishing friendships:

Participant 2:

Growing up, and in elementary, the kids, I think the kids knew because each year like the teachers would ask how many brothers and sisters do you have. At the time I would consider everyone in the house brother and sister. And you know, the foster kids would move in and then we would get more or we would get less, and each year I would have a different number. So, I think the kids started to understand that and I was always uncomfortable with it.

Participant 2 further explained that there was some change in how she felt about being adopted while in high school,

I was, I became a little more comfortable with being adopted, and you know saying that, and, uh...not a lot of people knew. I think they thought I was a foster child but didn't know I was adopted. So, it didn't really affect me friendship-wise, but I always kept very little friends. I didn't think I could trust a lot of people.

On the same theme, Participant 3 stated that while in care she made some friends in school who were aware of her living arrangements, however they did not necessarily understand what it meant to live in a foster home. The following narrative indicated Participant 3's history with friends, its impact and her current struggle with relationships,

So, I was kind of an outcasty kid. I had a group of outcast friends. Most of them knew that I was in care but really only a couple understood what that was about.

I am still dealing with building relationships with people. I was an observer, and still am mostly, so... overcoming my crippling shyness is a really big one. ...and trying to get over the fear of being alone. Like going to school was really hard for me

because I was by myself and I had a real hard time making friends. So, like I was pretty much just existing when I was going to school.

[...] I tend to settle in relationships. Like I pick people that I think I need to fix or something. So I have had a lot of really unhealthy relationships and that creates a lot of stress. And poor choices. Trying to overcome that kind of thing.

Establishing but not Maintaining Friendships

Data in the study shows that frequent movement in placements makes establishing friendships an extremely challenging task and that those who succeed in establishing friendships find it difficult to keep them. As illustrated by Participant 1, unless foster families facilitate the communication between friends, and are willing to juggle their busy schedules to find time to host a play date or drive children places in order for them to stay in contact with their friends from previous placements, especially when they are at a young age, the connection gets lost. He shared that, although “there was one boy I was close to while in one of the group homes, I have not stayed in contact with him” because there was no one to facilitate their communication. However, “I am still in contact with some of the kids from the foster home only because the foster family has been facilitating keeping us in contact”. And he continues, “I had a couple of kids to hang out at school but no one after school because of liability issues”.

Similarly, as indicated above, Participant 3 had difficulty establishing friendships because he feared losing another friend resulting from the fluidity of his living arrangements, which he described as “dealing with being tossed around so many times”. He reflected on how his attitude towards making friends changed from his first placement

to the next: “So like, like the first place, it was hard for me not to [make friends], but the second place was just kinda, it was a disconnect. There was kinda like I don’t know if I should start a relationship, whatever right?”

It is hard for people, especially children, to understand for example why their friend's family changes in terms of numbers often, or to understand the reasons the child in care does not live with his or her parents. Questions such as “Why don’t you live with your parents?”, “Why were you taken away from your family?”, “Were you so bad that your parents did not love you and sent you away?” put children in an uncomfortable situation. Children might be too scared or/and embarrassed to answer these questions or might not know how to answer in this situation. As the paper *Foster Children in Education* (2003), a publication of the Vera Institute of Justice, validates many children will choose to not engage in social relationships and will not seek help because they feel ashamed of being in care. This leads to them becoming isolated in order to protect themselves from embarrassment, teasing and bullying (Foster Children in Education, p. 4). They might also feel that it is their fault that they are placed in care and that they have been rejected by their birth parents. Last but not least, sometimes these questions can bring back painful memories.

Making friends that will be supportive, understanding and with good influence is crucial for all children; however, this is not always possible for children in care. The following excerpt is representative of how children in care sometimes connect with people who do not necessarily have a positive influence on them. Participant 4 stated, "I had one girlfriend in high school. But she was like...pretty much homeless. ...She was like, she was

with her boyfriend who was very street trash and this girl was just as high risk as I was in that sense". This situation is common among youth in care as they find it easier to connect and associate with people who are in the same or similar situations. Unfortunately, some times this type of friendship proves to be an additional stressor in a person's life, as he/she is experiencing his/her friend's difficulties and challenges, and trying to help his/her friend through it.

To conclude, data in the study indicated that for a variety of reasons, children in foster care have difficulty forming and maintaining friendships; when they do, they tend to form friendships within similar circles; and, because of the instability of living conditions, they learn to be fluid in their relations which affects their own development of stable relationships when they are older.

Trust

Negative Memories and Experiences

Data in the study shows that children placed in foster care have terrible memories from the time they were living with their biological families; therefore, it becomes difficult for them to trust the adults who cared for them. Four of the six participants stated that they did not think that they could trust people. The following excerpt is illustrative of how feelings of mistrust begin. Participant 5:

I remember my mom taking us in the Ministry office and then telling us, well telling me, that we're going to be going to somebody's house for a while and she needs to figure herself out. And she asked me to watch my sisters and make sure they were

ok. I remember being really sad and scared. Like, sitting in the back of the car, starring out the window, drive like forty minutes out of town... Don't know what's happening or what's going on.

[I felt] just really sad and scared basically. Not knowing what's happening.

Confused. Thinking that it's probably my fault somehow that we are in care. Very typical for any child or youth who is in care.

Many children might be hesitant to trust others because they are worried and afraid that these people, whom they are not even related to and who they just met, will do the same to them as others have in the past; that is, abandon and/or hurt them. However, foster parents themselves can exhibit lack of trust of the children they take into their homes and push them away as illustrate by the following excerpt from Participant 4:

It was difficult to establish any sort of relationship with the foster parent as my foster mom had been a foster parent for 32 years. Alright? And like sometimes you get some good ones, and sometimes you don't. She had been one invested for a long time and over time she had become really, really guarded in the sense that she didn't let any kid come too close to her to kind of protect her emotional safety, and because of that, she didn't really assist me in any sort of way.

This finding confirms literature indicating that children who have had several placements might feel that they do not want to establish any friendships and bonds with people and do not want to waste time since there is always a possibility of being moved again. Triseliotis (2002), argues that "The main limitation of long-term fostering is its unpredictability and the uncertain position in which the children find themselves. Taken

together these conditions appear to generate longstanding feelings of insecurity and anxiety in children” (Grey, p. 46). Both children and foster care parents might not be willing to establish strong relationships in order “to protect themselves against possible future separation and therefore do not regard the relationship in the same way” (Grey, p. 46). This scenario would constitute another loss for them, one that they might not be ready or able to deal with.

Lack of Permanency

All six of the participants mentioned that children in foster care need a more stable environment in which to grow up because the numerous movements and changes in placement make it extremely difficult for them to form friendships, trust others, and feel that they belong. Prior to being placed in a home, some children are put in Group Homes, which are meant to be a transition between their parents' home and a foster home. However, as Participant 6 indicated,

The reason why they have Group Homes is because kids are in transit. It is not a transition program but they are transitioning you. You are floating until they find you a spot in a home that opens up and then you can move in. I floated for a while before I got to my last house. And it took me a while. It took me two to three years until I found that house.

Evidently, this constant movement creates a sense of disconnect, detachment and mistrust with the families and people in general, because they are uncertain of what might follow next. This finding confirms literature indicating that there are some children “who end up

having difficulty settling into a stable arrangement for a range of reasons and who end up moving frequently” (Canada’s Foster Children, p. 2). This causes them to protect themselves by not opening up to the members of their foster families, not establishing relationships with them, and not investing their hopes and dreams in the family they are placed with, as they do not want to take the chance of experiencing another loss. As stated by Wilkes (2012), “If I think I might be moved any time, I hide away, inside myself” (p. 37). The literature on the importance of permanence presents factors that affect it, which are “the development of attachment, the feeling of belonging, feeling safe and secure, the sense that one’s opinions will be heard, the knowledge that one is considered important, and the sense of participating in the life of the family” (Wilkes, p. 36).

Barriers and Facilitators for Inclusion

Another important element of the interviews was to identify factors that allowed or prevented children in foster care from feeling included, both within their home placement and at school. To help identify these barriers and facilitators, interviewees were asked whether they felt that their foster parents were interested in their success and well being. If the answer was positive, they were also asked to discuss their foster parents’ involvement in their academic and social life. If the answer was negative, the interviewees explained the reasons they felt and thought that their foster parents were not involved in both their academic and social life. Participants were also encouraged to talk about whether or not the foster parents attended teacher interviews, spent time on homework and/or assignment completion, and motivated them academically.

The conversation then included a discussion about the person that was part of their lives and that they considered had the most positive influence on them. Participants were asked to share how this person influenced them and the ways in which that individual motivated them to put forth their best effort.

The last part of the conversation on barriers and facilitators for inclusion asked participants to provide a definition of what success means to them. The participants were also asked whether there were barriers and/or facilitators that they had to overcome in order to achieve this success.

Barriers to Inclusion

Data from the study indicates that children in care experienced several barriers to inclusion in society which were stigma, misconceptions and the stereotypes attached to the term "foster children", exposure to trauma and emotional and health issues.

Misconceptions

Data from this study indicates that many people have a preconceived notion and bias against children and youth in care, making it extremely difficult for them to fit in school and in society in general. The misconceptions are based on the misrepresentation of children in care and on the incorrect information about them. Some people tend to generalize and make assumptions that the children were placed in care because they are troubled, aggressive and/or delinquent. This essentially results in placing the blame and the responsibility on the children and believing that they should not be involved with them, instead of providing them with the love, the support and the positive influence that they

need. As Participant 5 stated, “There is such a huge, there is still quite a bad rep if you are in care. Like you are in care because it is all your fault. Like you are bad. You are dumb. You are whatever it is, and you couldn’t live with your parents”.

Further data from this study indicates that the stereotypes attached to children in foster care, were not only evident in friendships and interactions with people, but also in educational settings. The participants shared how uncomfortable, isolated and discriminated against they felt by their teachers, and how this behavior hindered their integration in their classes and in the school community. Participant 6 shared a discussion with a teacher about sports equipment, during which she stated that she was spending a lot of money on lacrosse equipment for her son. When the participant offered suggestions on how to minimize the expenses, the teacher responded that she would actually like to buy good stuff, and not have her child use the hand-me-downs they give “to you kinds of kids.” The participant shared that to him the statement suggested that this teacher did not like kids in care. He stated, “I don’t know...we are frowned upon in society. I don’t know if we are such black spots. I don’t know”.

Various studies reveal that schools often stigmatize foster children. According to a U.S study titled *Education for Foster Children: Removing Barriers to Academic Success* (2001), foster children are often considered to be, by schools and teachers, a transitory group who may be coming from other areas and districts. In addition to that, as the study supports, “foster children are often missing an identified “parent” to sign for services and act as a contact person and advocate” for that child (p. 50). It is due to these reasons that some

schools “may be reluctant to invest the same time and energy on a student who may move in a few weeks”, and as one educator states “these are not our kids” (p. 50).

Trauma

Data from the study signals that trauma, emotional and health issues are barriers to inclusion for children in foster care. The effects of trauma that children experienced, prior to being removed from their homes, continue to influence their choices and decisions, and make them feel responsible for their life conditions. Two of the participants mentioned their experiences of physical, sexual, emotional and psychological trauma, not only in their birth parents' home but also in their foster home placements. The extent of the trauma and the type varied; however, in both situations, participants mentioned that their parents were unable to take care of them due to mental health issues and/or addictions. Participant 5 shared that her biological mother was battling several addictions, and that up until she was placed in foster care, she too was exposed to those addictions. She speculated that, when she cannot focus at work, or cannot understand something, this is a byproduct of her biological parents' addictions. Participant 4 vividly described her experiences of being exposed to trauma in the foster home.

Being around a lot of other teenage girls in the foster care system, I saw a lot of trauma, unaddressed trauma, ...from other girls. ...I had been thrown in this environment where there was craziness, of a lot of unaddressed trauma. There were girls crying, all the time, or doing something absolutely insane because they were coping with like emotions like that were just off the Richter scale.

Foster Family Placement

Four out of the six participants had at least one placement in a group home. From their narratives, it was evident that these were types of experiences that were mostly common in group homes rather than in foster homes.

Data in the study also shows that children placed in care either had an extremely positive or an extremely negative experience in terms of feeling welcomed, included, and involved in the foster family. Three of the six participants stated that their experiences in care were overall negative and they did not feel that they belonged in the family; they did not feel included and did not feel that their needs were met. These participants mentioned that some of the families did not show any interest in their mental and physical well-being, and some did not invest the time needed to get to know the child. The foster parents acted in ways that indicated that room and food was the only concern and failed to attend to other needs or to even learn about their cultural background and experiences.

An example of lack of knowledge, understanding and respect for the children's cultural backgrounds and spiritual beliefs is the case of a participant who identified herself as Aboriginal, who was placed in a home where one day the children were told that they were taken out for a "fun" day. The children were extremely excited and were looking forward to it only to find out that they were going to church, followed by a stop to purchase Bibles for all of the children in the home. Another example illustrating lack of care is how all of the children's clothes were bought from discount stores or were hand-me downs. Participant 4 stated that she only received her clothing allowance 2 or 3 times in the span of four years and that she was given second-hand clothing most of the times. All of these

factors led the children to feel alone, unsafe, unsupported, and with no one willing and interested in advocating for them in times of need or in protecting them and providing them with things that were necessary.

Several surveys have determined that “the foster system did not encourage high expectations” for the education of children in care (Lips, 2007, p. 3). Furthermore, participants in those surveys argued that they would have benefited from a stronger and more continuous adult encouragement, and that some of their problems in school and related to their educational outcomes “may lie with the adults and the lack of proper adult advocacy and support” (Lips, p. 3).

Stigma

During the interview with Participant 5, the associations and the stigma attached to the language used when talking about foster homes and children in foster care was discussed. The participant explained that language is crucial when trying to eliminate stigma and that it is of great importance to use language appropriately when referring to children in care. As Molloy (2012), argues “Referring to children/youth that cannot live with their families as “children/youth in care” gives a different message than the term “foster child”. It is not a description of the child, but rather a description of his/her situation.” (Molloy, pp. 40-41). Moreover, it is important for people to understand and to educate themselves that children in care “have had some difficult life experiences” and that “being in care does not define the life of a child/youth, but rather it is one part of their life journey” (Molloy, p. 41).

Language is the primary means of initiating and maintaining the stigma attached to a term. It is therefore essential to use caution when choosing words to describe people and situations. In this paper an attempt has been placed on using proper terminology and language; one that does not have a negative connotation to the term foster care, does not stigmatize children and youth in care, and is not hurtful to them. A conscious effort has been made to use *children in foster care*, which simply refers to and describes the living arrangements of the children as opposed to *foster children*, which labels the children and further promotes, encourages and supports the existing stigma.

These misconceptions might lead children to “become socially isolated and withdrawn as a way to avoid embarrassment or to shield themselves from teasing and bullying” (“Foster Children and Education: How You Can Create a Positive Educational Experience for the Foster Child”, 2004).

Facilitators for Inclusion

Foster Family Placement

The data of the study indicates that, although for some of the participants, foster parents presented a barrier to their inclusion, for others however, foster families were their main facilitators for inclusion. Three out of the six participants stated feeling that they eventually found a foster family that made them feel at home and that they had a “real” family, one that they could depend on and could help and guide them through the hurdles they were dealing with. As Participant 3 stated, initially, to him, foster families were more “like a business kind of thing to them. It was just more like, we have these kids and are paying the bills kind of thing”. After several movements he found a home in which

he felt that he belonged and was close to the family. This foster family encouraged him to explore and cultivate his talents; also the family helped spark his interest in technology, and bought him a new personal computer. Furthermore, they showed generosity and took him on a family trip to Europe. Similarly, Participant 1 stated that his foster family was very interested in his education and they pushed him to continue going to school. His foster mother took on the responsibility of driving a total of four hours a day in traffic, to keep him in school and in the appropriate program. While talking about his foster mother, Participant 6 said, "she not necessarily taught me, but she opened my eyes that there is hope, and there is more, and it's not the end. Every day is better, and just patience, and it takes time. ... She has been a sister, a mom, a role model. She has been everything".

Other Facilitators

Data further supports that in addition to foster families acting as facilitators for inclusion, it is important for children and youth in care to have other individuals in their lives who they can turn to for advice, assistance, support and encouragement. Four out of the six participants identified at least one individual who they felt was important to them, had a positive influence on their life, and who they could depend on. Two of the interviewees talked about their youth workers as the individuals that supported and inspired them to put their best effort forward by encouraging them to work towards a healthier lifestyle and to start working out. They helped them achieved their goals, by providing them with simple but necessary things such as a pass to the gym, to being there every step of the way. As Participant 6 explained, "I look up to him as a dad and as a brother. ... He deserves a big, big high five for that. He did a really good job on helping me

lose weight.” Two of the participants stated that the Federation of BC’s Youth in Care Network has been their source of positive influence and support in their lives. Through the Federation they have been able to volunteer, to meet many people who have been helpful and supportive, and have made some dependable and understanding friends. Participant 5 said that “I think them [the people at the Federation of BC’s Youth in Care Network], combined with my foster parents, are a really big inspiration and why I am doing well”.

Success

The last question asked was what success meant to each participant. The answers provided indicated a variety of reactions and responses to the question. Some people responded in a simple manner, without overly analyzing the question, while others displayed surprise and even confusion as to the meaning of the question. For example, Participant 6 answered the question by stating that success can mean a lot of things, and continued to ask several other questions such as “Success as a goal? Achieving a goal or what I am at currently?” to guide his thinking and to find an answer. He proceeded to state that he had never had that question asked before. In regards to the answers offered, some people focused on school, others on work and some on relationships. For Participant 1 success meant having a job and being a contributing member of society, while for Participant 2 it meant completing a goal or doing something one really loves. Participant 3 focused on what success meant in relation to schooling and stated, “Success is not about the grades, but you making an attempt at the work”. Participant 4 addressed two elements in her definition of success; being in contact with the community and working towards a college or university degree. Participant 5 stated that a successful person is someone who

has a good job, who is not in debt, and who is able to have a good, solid, healthy relationship that he or she can keep. Regardless of all the different definitions, essentially success is “making it” as Participant 6 affirmed, regardless of the particular meaning it has for each individual. This discussion on success makes it evident that children in care have meaningful goals, are critical of their lives thus far, and each of them understands success differently because of their life experiences, their personal struggles as well as their dreams and plans for the future.

Academic Needs of Students in Care

Another focus of the interview was to pinpoint the academic needs of students in care, whether those needs were met, and by whom. To uncover this, participants were asked about the experiences they had in school, and were encouraged to talk about their overall learning experiences, specifically about the courses/classes they took, and the reasons for choosing those courses.

Participants were also asked if they felt that the schools they attended and the teachers they encountered could and/or should have played a more active role in both their academic and social life. Participants were encouraged to talk about whether the schools and teachers provided them with the support and the encouragement that they needed in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, they were asked whether their teachers influenced them in any way and whether they guided them towards a career path. None of the participants stated that they found support and encouragement from their teachers in the schools they attended.

Hindrances to Academic Attainment

One of the main educational needs that all of the participants identified, was the attainment of an education that would allow them to graduate from high school, and pursue their dreams of post secondary education. As Table 1 indicates, at the time of the interview the academic standing of the six participants was as follows: one had earned a university degree, another had graduated with a high school diploma, one had a Leaving Certificate, one was going to attend university the following fall, and two had not graduated from high school.

All participants mentioned that they had negative school experiences because of incorrect class or program placement, frequent transfers from school to school, the level of education provided, and their living situation.

Finding the Correct Placement

Data in the study indicates that one of the reasons that participants found school to be burdensome was incorrect placement in schools, programs and/or classes. Often times, a placement was chosen because of the living arrangements of the student and due to his or her behavior when at school. Two of the six participants shared that they were moved to Alternate schools because of behavior at their original placement, and not because of the need for academic support. Moreover, students were not placed into a program or school that was the right fit for them, based on their needs, their individual learning styles, their capabilities and their interests. Even upon realization of the misfit, rarely was an attempt to rectify the situation made or an accommodation provided. For example, Participant 2 was interested in working with children upon graduating from high school. However, there

was no course available at the school so she asked the administration to arrange for her to spend time and volunteer in the special needs room of her school. Although an arrangement for that was promised, it never came to fruition, regardless of the persistence of the interviewee.

Number of School Transfers

In some situations, even when an attempt to find a better fit was made, it usually happened without all facts being taken into account. Instead of trying to identify and understand the reasons that led a student to misbehave, to do poorly in school, to act out or to be disengaged, a change in program or a school transfer was arranged almost immediately. Participant 4 explained, "I went to very many different schools because I was constantly being clipped to this program, that program, to this program. I have been to Alternative schools, I have been to Public schools, I have been to Alternative programs that were outside of Alternative schools", a total of five different high schools. When asked why these transfers took place, she responded that she "was not doing well in Alternate school. So, what's next?"

As literature substantiates, it is necessary to have educators who are trained and able to identify the specific and unique needs of students in care, and to find ways to help and to accommodate the students. As Elaine Olson from the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents states, "A child in foster care is rarely able to work and concentrate on class work when their lives are in turmoil" (Kellam, 2000, p. 4). Another reason inappropriate transfers and disruptions take place is because children in care do not usually have someone who can advocate for them, who "knows the way around the

school system; helps navigate the registration and transfer process; monitors grade and attendance reports” to ensure that the child is in the right program, getting the help and support he or she needs in order to be successful academically (Kellam, p. 4). It is supported, through surveys of children who were formerly in care, that they believe that “they had been shifted around too much while in care, and as a result, they suffered, especially in terms of education” (Lips, p. 3).

Moving students from school to school only makes them feel more stressed out as another change is taking place and less valued as their personal and particular situation is not taken into consideration, and their opinion is not sought. The change in schools does not only force “foster children to cope with the emotional consequences such as instability”, but they also must “adjust to new teachers, classmates, curricula and rules” (Christian, p. 2) that may differ considerably from previous schools (Vera Institute, p. 3). Literature validates these points, as Christian (2003), Lips (2007) and *Ready to Succeed in the Classroom* (2010), assert that the frequent movement and various placements are responsible for children accumulating knowledge and skills in a random and uneven manner, in loss in credits and often in repetition of grades and/or subjects. All of these cost children several months of educational progress, losing an average of four to six months of academic growth per movement.

Level of Education

Data also suggests that the level of education provided was not necessarily appropriate for the students. Three out of the six participants found that the classes they were placed in were very difficult and challenging for them due to the gaps in knowledge

accumulated over the years. These participants stated that the gaps started in the early years and were not properly addressed early enough to help them catch up. As time went by, and without teacher support, necessary resources and opportunities to eliminate or minimize the gaps, school became more and more challenging and scary. Being unable to follow the rest of the class, feeling helpless and without options, students became progressively disengaged, felt unable to reach the required level in order to become successful in school, and eventually dropped out. They felt that this was their only option as they were never supported and no one cared to help them address their weaknesses and guide them in their attempt to do well in school. They perceived schools as a place that did not help progress and to an extent “offered false hope” and was “just a holding tank” as one of the participants stated.

On the other hand, two out of the six participants felt that the courses and classes they were placed in were too easy and not challenging enough. The participants shared experiences of being placed into classrooms that lacked academic rigor, bored them, limited their course options, and did not allow them to reach their full potential. Participant 3 discussed how he was given the easiest possible math instead of an option to choose what he felt would be more beneficial for him,

There were four different kinds of math they will give you in this school and they will give you the most basic one in Alternate. And in mainstream, I was second in math so it was like... I tried to get that but the only option was for me to just do it online and try to teach myself kind of thing. So it was difficult to learn new stuff. The same participant also felt that not only were the easiest classes offered, but also those

classes were limited in terms of expectations. "It is not only Math, but like other stuff was dumbed down too. And there was English. Instead of English there was Communication", he explained.

Alternative Education

Four out of the six participants argued that they were placed in programs due to their living situation, as it was often assumed that Alternate was the solution for most students in care. As Participant 4 stated, "You want to go find some foster kids, go to Alternative schools". All of the youth interviewed supported that Alternate is not always the right answer and is not the right fit for all students. The participants talked about Alternate programs as a placement that did not support their learning goals, did not cater to their needs, did not address their learning styles, and did not prepare them for the future. Consequently, they felt isolated, that no one understood or was interested in understanding where they were coming from. Participant 6 said that Alternate schools had to stop being a "dumping zone" for every student who did not fit in the mainstream program and who had to be in school. "I respected the teachers who were doing their part because the kids have to be somewhere. They can't be sitting at home. But I'm talking about kids with severe mental health. You have kids who have trouble with the law and then you have kids who are trying to make it, who want a start in the education system and you intermingle them all and it's just...", he explained.

The description of Alternate programs provided through various associations was contrasting to the perspective and insight shared by the participants. According to *Making the Grade: A Review of Alternative Education Programs in BC* (2008), published by The

McCreary Centre Society, Alternative Education programs "operate with the intention of assisting youth who experience multiple challenges to achieve successful outcomes academically, socially and vocationally". The same review states that the Alternative programs implemented are "predominantly succeeding, by using teaching methods which incorporate a youth's individual strengths, learning style and life experiences, and by placing a strong emphasis on building community connections and developing positive, supportive and healthy relationships" and provide "an environment in which youth feel valued, supported and engaged." (p. 59).

Preparation for the Future

The data indicated that all participants had future educational and employment plans. Four of them had already established a concrete plan and were on the path of fulfilling it, while the other two were still exploring their options. The latter were those who had not graduated from high school and expressed extreme concern about their future, particularly in regards to their employment. Their concern was primarily their lack of employment options as they did not have a high school Diploma necessary in job searches. They identified the reason for not having a high school diploma as the lack of appropriate education received from the schools they had attended. Participant 3 explained the effects that the lack of proper education has on him and the ways it might affect him in the future by stating, "It impedes me in ways that maybe not affect me right now but maybe later on if I don't choose to go back to school."

Literature suggests that educational attainment is necessary as it can affect the quality of life and the opportunities made available for children in care in the long terms,

especially in adulthood. As Cheung and Heath (1994), reported individuals in care “typically have lower educational qualifications, a higher risk of unemployment, and are more likely to get lower level jobs” (Kufeldt et. al, 2000). Being in this situation makes many young people feel hopeless, unprepared to take care of themselves, and unable to deal with life's responsibilities.

Suggestions for Educators to Aid Students in Succeeding Academically and Developing Socially

The last element of the interviews asked participants to offer suggestions that would make a difference in a student’s life in terms of the ways teachers and educators could facilitate students’ academic and social success. Participants were encouraged to discuss what elements within a classroom and a school they felt would have been of help to them and would have adequately and effectively prepared them for the future.

Emotional Support

Data supports that feeling cared for and supported by teachers and school staff was one of the most important elements that could help students succeed in school and develop socially. The interviewees indicated that teachers should have shown more interest in them as students, should have been more involved in their lives, instead of making assumptions, teachers could have asked questions when they thought that something was taking place and questioned unusual behaviors. Participant 2 stated, "Maybe try and notice when certain behaviours are a little weird and really, genuinely ask questions. ... Just maybe ask them what is going on, or if you can do anything, or I don't, I don't really know".

Participants further indicated that educators should prepare the grounds for a relationship of trust to be built with them as students; as well, they could have encouraged them to ask for help when needed. "I feel like when I was at my lowest point they could have been more supportive I guess. That was really when they kind of turned their backs on me, didn't, I don't know. When I said I needed help they would, they would say they were gonna help me but never really did", said Participant 2. Participants further mentioned that that they did not expect that their teachers would have answers to all of their problems, but that they would be able to guide them towards organizations that could help and offer them support. As one participant stated, "...get involved or get in contact with the Youth in Care Network, find out what the issues are for youth in care and just be aware of those, and kind of get an understanding of how the Ministry works".

Literature suggests that children in care deeply value, and benefit from, individuals in their lives who show care and interest in what they are experiencing. Simple things such as listening to the children and youth, valuing their opinion, taking notice, spending extra time, making a positive comment can help establish a relationship of trust between teachers and students in care. Often times, the attention students get in class or at school is the only attention they get from an adult in their lives. Teachers state that children and youth in care usually crave the attention of an adult who is "going the extra mile to provide some one-on-one time or to identify a particular hobby or interest has tremendous pay-offs" (Ready to Succeed in the Classroom, 2010, p. 2). However, it is important for teachers and educators to understand that trust is something that they have to work hard to earn as children and youth in care often have a difficult time trusting any adult that becomes part

of their lives. Furthermore, patience and consistency is required in order to establish that trust between the two sides.

Literature also suggests that the experiences that children have had with their biological parents and their foster parents can have significant psychological and emotional consequences that might be manifested in school in ways that are considered inappropriate and often times dangerous. Due to their behaviour, students can be perceived as distraught and uncooperative, even though these behaviours and outbursts might not be related to the school or classroom environment. Often times, these behaviours are related to events at home, or are simply pleas for attention and ways to test if a reaction can be triggered. When teachers are unaware of the living arrangements of students in their classes, and “without the social history of the child”, they might not be able to “recognize the reasons behind aberrant behaviour or may place a child in special education unnecessarily” (Foster Children and Education: How You Can Create a Positive Educational Experience for the Foster Child, 2004, p. 5).

Educating Students Regarding Foster Care

All of the participants mentioned that they felt that many children and adults do not understand the experiences that foster children have, do not comprehend the problems they are faced with, while some are only aware of the misconceptions and the stigma attached to the children. All of the participants believe that all students should be taught of the different living arrangements that exist, and that foster care is one of them. One of the observations made was that several other situations or illnesses that people are dealing with are brought to students’ attention in school through class work, assemblies, events

and speakers, while very little has been done to create awareness and to eliminate the misconceptions about children in care. As the following two quotes from Participants 1 and 5 respectively illustrate, participants suggested that guest speakers and school assemblies could be used as mediums to educate other students about the living arrangements of children in care and their life experiences, to answer questions, and to change misconceptions and attitudes towards foster care.

Participant 1:

"Have a speaker come in and talk about the issue or about the different types of families and explain foster families."

"They have speakers come in for other things, why not for this? It should be someone from care, someone who knows what it is like."

Participant 5 stated,

"I know they have assemblies on stuff like that. So you can do like a life story of a youth in care and what it's like. That would be neat."

Although all participants agreed that awareness was key, they indicated that they were uncertain whether other students should know about which students live in foster care as that could lead to bullying and possible stigma. The following excerpt is representative of this uncertainty:

Participant 3:

I think... I don't know. I think that kids nowadays they pick on others for just about anything, so I think it might be more valuable for them [children in care] not to be known. But at the same time, I think it might be worth it for them [other students] to know because then they know your situation and stuff like that and what kinds of things you might be subjected to and stuff like that.

Is it beneficial to identify students in care in a classroom or in a school? This issue is extremely controversial in the research literature. Although some studies supported that identification might assist with providing students with the necessary guidance and help and with the correct placement, other literature suggests that the resulting stigmatization would be more detrimental to the child's overall development. In *Education for Foster Children: Removing Barriers to Academic Success* (2001), the authors state that the educators interviewed supported that children in foster care "may have special needs, but specifically identifying them can stigmatize children", and they saw no benefit to systematically identifying them in schools (pp. 49-50).

Providing Educational Support

The last element of the interviews was about educational support that could have led participants to educational success. The following excerpts are representative of the suggestions offered by the participants in regards to the educational support that students in care need.

Participant 5:

I think it is pretty important to try to do different learning styles, especially for kids with ADHD or whatever. There is a lot of kids in care labeled with ADD and ADHD....Just different anxiety disorders and whatever. And this makes a whole lot of difference if they are able to learn in different styles.

For me it is so hard to learn listening to people talk. Most Aboriginal people are auditory learners, like they learn through narratives, but not everybody is like that. Lots of people need visual, they need to be tactile. Lots of Aboriginal people need to be up and doing things ... to be physically shown how to do something, or how to take something apart yourself. If you want to learn about the woods, go to the woods and identify what the plants are or like the different ecosystems and that kind of stuff.

Like you want to make sure that everybody like ... you teach, I don't know, teaching like everybody learns what you want them to learn. And if you have to adapt your teaching style to do that, you should be doing that to give everybody a fair chance.

Providing an enriched classroom and school environment with ample opportunities to learn, explore, critically investigate, while being guided through the process and provided with the tools necessary, can enhance the educational opportunities for all students. However, as stated by Christian (2003), "The very system that is supposed to ensure the well-being of children in care often is a major obstacle to children's educational success" (p. 2). According to Scherr (2007), in order for schools to fulfill their responsibility of "providing the least restrictive, most appropriate learning environments

for all students”, the school staff must understand the challenges that students in care are confronted with (p. 421).

Furthermore, teachers need to acknowledge each student's capacity to learn, recognize the potential, and establish high expectations for all of their students. Children can achieve what they set their minds to as long as they have the support needed to reach their fullest potential. Five out of the six participants claimed that high, clear and consistent expectations could have helped them focus, learn, behave better and try to do more. Teachers should be "more able to see the potential and to like, to try to get the kids to live up to that", declared Participant 3. The literature on foster children's educational success indicated that even when teachers decide to minimize the demands and the expectations in regards to curriculum in order to help students, some of them might "react with more disengagement or resentment towards teachers for not expecting the most of them" (Meeting the Challenges: Foster Children in Education, p. 44). Children might respond to the low expectations set for them by their foster parents, teachers, guidance counselors and other school staff by fulfilling these expectations.

Another aspect of schooling and education that is not usually addressed is the importance of students participating in after school and extracurricular activities, as they offer a more holistic educational experience. Clubs, associations and sports teams allow students to meet with other children and adults, build friendships and relationships, and find hobbies that can help them focus and work on something of great interest to them. Participant 1 shared his disappointment for not being encouraged to participate in after school programs even after expressing interest to the teachers running the programs. He

stated that he was part of the school's Rugby team for only one season and during that time period he was allowed to play only once, because his coach felt that his learning disability would be a distraction to others.

It is also important for teachers to recognize that students in foster care might be faced with additional barriers in participating in clubs and teams such as lack of transportation and financial constraints to purchase equipment and supplies. To facilitate children's involvement, the organizing adults should be informed of the particularities of the children's situation and efforts should be made to find solutions to emerging challenges. Participant 5 shared her experiences of joining the school rugby team, which she called "a stupid idea" because she had not been part of any extracurricular activities before and did not know what it entailed. She was excited to join the team and to participate in a tournament, but was not aware that there was a cost associated with it. When the coach realized the situation, he paid for her expenses in order for her to attend. Participant 5 felt very surprised as this was an unexpected gesture that she was not accustomed to, and very grateful as her teacher provided her with the opportunity to be part of the team.

The last suggestion about educational attainment and success was the importance of preparation for independent living, since school can greatly affect future quality of life. Moreover, being able to take care of themselves as adults is of great importance as children in care do not always have a family to rely on for support. Four out of the six participants felt that they were not adequately prepared to live on their own, to find a job and to support themselves in the long term. They stressed the importance of schools as avenues

for future preparation, leading to success and to independent living. Literature supports this role of education and the importance of schools to offer “more life-skills instructions to help prepare them for the transition to independence in adulthood” (Lips, 2007, p. 6).

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The goal of this study was to examine the academic and social needs of children that have lived in foster care. The study aims to inform teaching practices and to identify ways in which schools and educators can become support systems and advocates for children in care, to ensure that they have an inclusive and equitable education.

The specific questions that were asked were:

- What are the social needs of children in foster care and how do they impact their learning experiences?
- What are the barriers and facilitators for inclusion of children placed in care?
- What are the academic needs of children in care?
- How can educators provide students with a classroom environment that will aid them in succeeding academically and developing socially?

To answer these research questions, six individuals who had lived in foster care in British Columbia were interviewed. The interviews focused on the participants' friendships, on trust, belonging, the identification of the barriers and facilitators for inclusion, as well as their academic attainment and preparation for the future. The interviews further sought to identify what foster children believed were important elements that educators and schools could provide for children in care to be successful.

Summary of Findings

There are four key findings discussed in this thesis. The first is that socially children in foster care had difficulties establishing and maintaining friendships, developing a sense

of trust and belonging, both in their home placements and in their classrooms. Meeting friends, and keeping them, was particularly challenging for children. This was a result of having experienced separation and abandonment in the past, leading them to inability to trust others and to question other people's motives for care and whether the individuals they meet would remain in their lives, or would abandon them like others did in the past. Data also indicate that, establishing friendships was trying because some children felt embarrassed and uncomfortable to share and discuss their living arrangements with other individuals.

The second finding is that language, misconceptions and stereotypes, lack of teacher care and residual trauma from lack of appropriate care were the main barriers for inclusion. The stereotypes and the stigma attached to the term "foster children", as well as the misconceptions people have about the reasons children are placed in care, are hindrances to children. Another identified barrier to inclusion was exposure to varied types of trauma and emotional, mental and health issues that were unaddressed. The last barrier was the foster families because they were said to have failed to provide the support and guidance needed in order for the youth to feel cared for, included and guided.

The importance of meeting the academic needs of students in care, particularly attaining an education that would enable them to graduate from high school and pursue a college or university degree was a main issue discussed. The data overwhelmingly confirmed that students in care had difficulties being successful in school. Two out of six of the participants felt that the level of the courses they were placed in was too low; consequently, they were bored, disengaged and unchallenged. Furthermore, participants

expressed their anxiousness about the inability to find jobs to support themselves after aging out of care. They were stressed about their future because they felt they had no options, they were unprepared to take care of themselves, and they could not deal with future adult responsibilities.

The last question encouraged participants to share ways in which they believed educators could help students in care achieve their dreams and become successful in all aspects of life. Most participants stated that their teachers could have been more involved in their lives, both in school and outside of school. They mentioned that they would have benefited from their teachers' awareness of their predicaments, including their living arrangements and associated problems. Additionally, educating others to understand what being in foster care meant, addressing the misconceptions related to foster care and assisting in minimizing or eliminating the stigma attached to children in care, was identified as a responsibility of teachers and schools.

Last, the data suggest that the role of educators should be that of an actual educator; to help, guide and support students in order for them to achieve educational success, regardless of what that means for each student, and of the kind of resources and assistance that each of them requires. Teachers should accept each child's potential to learn, recognize his or her abilities, and have high expectations for each of them. In order to accomplish this, teachers must adjust their teaching styles and methods in order to accommodate each child in their classroom. This will allow teachers to offer their students individualized attention, to assist them in addressing their gaps in knowledge, and to challenge them to reach their full potential.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are primarily about the generalizability of the findings. One of the methodological limitations of the study was the sample size, as the number of the people interviewed was relatively small with only six participants, which suggests that the results are not necessarily representative of the general population.

Another limitation of the study is about the geographical area in which the participants come from. All six participants were recruited from Vancouver, British Columbia and the surrounding areas, and had experiences in the foster care system in that particular province only. This poses a limitation as “provinces and territories in Canada have a legislative responsibility for child and family services” with the exception of “the federal responsibility for Aboriginal peoples with status under the Indian Act of Canada” (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). Therefore, this means that the experiences of the youth in care in British Columbia do not necessarily represent those who grew up in foster care in other Canadian provinces and territories.

Furthermore, the age of the participants is another limitation. Most of the participants were between the ages of 19 to mid/late 20s. This allowed only for the ideas, views and experiences of this particular age group to be shared and heard, and do not reflect the experiences of all youth in foster care. People who had lived in care, but who belonged to a different generation from the people interviewed, might have had different challenges to discuss and different experiences to share.

Recommendations for Further Research

During the process of this study, numerous areas in which further research is required and would be beneficial were identified. This process made it evident that the data available through papers written on the topic of children in foster care is limited in nature. Most of the papers found and reviewed on the educational attainment of youth in care primarily came from the United States. One of the main reasons for the lack of this type of information is the fact that only recently (2011) has Canada started recording children in care. Furthermore, once the children age out of care there is no tracking of where they are and what they are doing; whether or not they are in school, or whether or not they are working and are able to support themselves.

Given the fact that the number of children being placed in foster care in Canada is increasing and that there is limited information and support available for teachers, administrators and educators to be knowledgeable to guide and support these students, more research in the area of educational barriers facing children in care is necessary. Many teachers are unprepared to recognize and identify that children in foster care have unique needs, and that their life stories and living arrangements affect their academic performance and their school behaviour.

Often times, teachers might recognize the issues but do not have the training needed to be able to provide the help and support that the students need in order to move past the situation they are in and become interested in being academically successful. Therefore, more research on how to train teachers and prepare them to become advocates and mentors for children in care is of great importance. This would allow teachers to plan an

inclusive classroom and an effective teaching practice, and other school staff to ensure that there is a school-wide support system in place for children in foster care.

An additional area for further research that has been highlighted by the studies undertaken for this thesis includes a wider selection of participants. The individuals interviewed in this study were primarily in their 20s, limiting the experiences and problems that they shared during their narratives. Further research, which would include people of various age groups, would be beneficial as it would offer a better understanding of the history of foster care and of the experiences of children in care. Looking at the narratives of people who aged out of care in different decades would allow for a comparative analysis of whether the issues, obstacles and concerns have changed, and if so how. It would further allow for more feedback and insight on how educators and schools could become the support systems that children in care need and seek, while informing teaching practices for educators and administrators.

Lastly, more studies involving the narratives of individuals who have aged out of care, and their life trajectories after leaving their last foster placement, would provide important insight into the educational, professional and social development and success of each person. This information would allow for a more holistic understanding of the progress made, the successes achieved and the challenges faced by children in care face after they age out, and would assist teachers and school staff in finding ways to prepare the children for the future challenges that they will have to overcome.

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Appendices

- A. Overview of the Foster Care System in Canada (by Province and Territory)
- B. Informed Consent Form
- C. List of Interview Questions
- D. Letter to Organizations to Recruit Participants and to Potential Participants
- E. Flyer with Information for the Federation of BC's Youth in Care Network to Promote the Study
- F. Letter to Participants
- G. Support Services in the Vancouver Area
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Appendix A

Overview of the Foster Care System in Canada (by Province and Territory)

	Number of Placement Types	Application Process	Approval and Training	Review and Evaluation	Rates and Additional Allowable Expenses
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	-varies depending on the placement type - an application for caregiver services, the supporting documentation, plus the worker's recommendation must be submitted for consideration	- a home agreement is signed each time a home is approved -maximum number of children that can be placed in a home is stated on the approval - Pre-service Training of Prospective Caregivers and Adoptive Parents is mandatory for all new approved caregivers	-annual report submitted by the supervisor	-basic maintenance rate is based on the age of the child to cover food, housing, laundry/dry cleaning, personal items and additional care costs. For children 0 to 11 years of age the monthly rate is \$452.10 and for children 12 and over \$522.30. -additional funds are available for certain expenses
Prince Edward Island	-5 general -6 specialized	-“Foster Parent Information” session -“Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Application Form” to be completed during the information session Child protection registry checked -Foster Parent Intake Assessment completed -Family	-“Preparation for Fostering” group training	-three months after placement, or the end of that first placement, if that is earlier - a “Home” Worker, who is responsible to support the foster home and be the ongoing connection with each home is assigned -a “Post Placement	-payments are monthly according to the “Foster Care Classification Levels” and the age of the children -additional funds are available for certain expenses

		Assessment completed -Criminal record checks, references, medicals and other professional reports might be requested		Evaluation”is completed at the end of each placement	
Nova Scotia	3	- criminal record checks, child abuse register checks, references -medical reports and other professional reports such as financial management, problem-solving abilities, attitudes and practices towards discipline, parental abilities and relationships - general attitudes of children and youth within the current family structure	- Basic mandatory training consists of: a. Foster Family Orientation Program b. Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training c. Sensitivity Training for Foster Families	-six months after approval -annually thereafter	-paid daily depending on age (\$13.77 for children 0 to 9 years old, and \$20.02 for children 10 years and over) -several additional allowances given at different intervals over the year(clothing, spending, school supplies, Christmas allowance)
New Brunswick	4	-application form -interview with the potential foster family -home assessment -check references -criminal record check -completion of P.R.I.D.E program -health statement	-“Foster Family Resource Agreement” signed -training at the regional level	- by phone, within three days of the placement -visit within seven days -foster family contacted within 30 days of the first visit and monthly thereafter, or in accordance with the plan for the child -most families evaluated annually	-depending on age (3 age categories instead of 2) -additional allowances available

Quebec (information had not been finalized at the time of the report)					
Ontario	3	legislation requires that: - services are provided with respect to children's need for continuity of care and stable family relationships - physical and mental developmental individual differences and taken into account - it respects cultural, religious, and regional differences	- "Orientation' Training - "Core or In-Service" Training	No information available	- paid daily - dependant on age of child and type of placement - additional allowances available
Manitoba	5	- family assessment - building review - medical reference - personal references - abuse registry check - prior contact check and a criminal record check	- a license is issued to the home indicating the maximum number and sex of children to be accommodated - agencies are encouraged to provide initial and ongoing training to foster parents - certificate course in foster care is offered through one of the community colleges	-annually	- daily - dependent on age of child - dependent on location (South of 53 degrees, North of 53 degrees with road access, North of 53° East of Lake Winnipeg with no road access - additional allowances available
Saskatchewan	5	- attend 3-hour orientation session - application form - pre-service training - home study report (includes	- formal mandatory foster care training program - it combines approval of foster parent applicants with	-annually	- daily rate - based on age (5 age categories) - dependent on region (south or north) - additional allowances

		self-assessment, several interviews, reference checks, and completion of a medical report.) -criminal records investigation	pre-service and practitioner level training		available
Alberta	6	-complete pre-service training - confirmation that the applicant is 18 years of age or older -child Welfare Information System check (for past abuse or neglect) - three reference checks -medical report -home assessment - school report if the applicant(s) has (have) children to confirm there are no significant school concerns - list of agencies the applicant fostered with before, if any -criminal record check	-complete the approved training program -approved applicants are advised of their foster home classification, the number of beds approved and the age and sex of children	- reassessed where changes have occurred that may impact on foster care services provided (e.g., move, new child, etc.) -each adult living in the home must provide criminal record check every three years -foster homes evaluated annually	-daily rates -dependent on age (6 age groups) -additional allowances available
British Columbia	11	-references -criminal record check -medical report -home study	-Family Care Home Agreement signed -18-hour pre-service orientation program prior to first placement -newly-approved foster parents are required to complete 53 hours of the BC Foster Care Education	- annually	-monthly rates -dependent on type of care -dependent on age of child -limited additional allowances as the rate paid is considered all-inclusive

			Program offered through the provincial community college		
Yukon	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -application for Fostering form - three personal and/or community reference checks -medical reference -public health nurse reference - RCMP criminal record check -inquiry of the Child Protective Services files for all family members over 18 years of age - a home study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -sign the Foster Home Agreement renewed annually -at least one foster parent is to complete a minimum of two hours of orientation and training prior to accepting their first foster child -all foster parents are encouraged to attend a 21-hour orientation training in Whitehorse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -monthly contact when a child is placed in a home -foster homes monitored every six months -annual review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -daily rate -dependent on age -dependent on location -additional allowable expenses available
Northwest Territories	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -home study -application criminal record check -release/receipt of information form -medical exam forms -interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -oath of confidentiality form -foster home agreement form -mandatory and voluntary training available 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -daily rates -dependent on location -additional allowances available

* All the information in Table 1 is from Foster Care. (2000). Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information. Retrieved from the Government of Canada website: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/rhdcc-hrsdc/HS25-6-2000-eng.pdf

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Date: September 2013

Study Name: Identifying the Needs of Children in Foster Care to Inform
Teaching Practices

Researcher:

Name:

Candidate in the Masters Graduate Program in Education at York University

Email address:

Program Contact Information:

Graduate Program in Education

282 Winters College

Tel: 416-736-5018

Fax: 416-650-8006

Email: gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first purpose is to gather knowledge about the experiences of children in foster care and to use it to identify ways in which classrooms and schools can become advocates for children in foster care. The second

is to inform teaching practices for educators who work with students who have been through or are currently in foster care.

Children in foster care are students that go through the Canadian education system and that require their needs to be identified and their concerns to be addressed. In order for an educator to be able to provide his or her students with what they need to become successful, to provide options and opportunities for them in overcoming any difficulties they might be experiencing, both academically and socially, he or she has to understand the living situations and the experiences of the students, which necessitate support. As an educator, I feel that teachers and administrators are not adequately prepared to address any problems that may arise in the classroom, and that our educational system might not be ready to provide support to those students.

The study aims to address the following questions: What are the social needs of children in foster care and how do they impact their learning experiences? What are the barriers and facilitators for inclusion of children placed in foster care? What are the academic needs of those students? What are their social needs? How can educators

provide students with a classroom environment that will aid them in succeeding academically and developing socially?

What you will be asked to do in the research:

You will first be asked to provide some biographical information about yourself including your current age, the age you were when you entered and left care, the number of placements, as well as the frequency of movement. Another important element will be the level of education attained. You will then be encouraged to share your personal story/narrative. Through the narrative (storytelling), you will share your personal experiences and will tell your story of growing up in foster care and how you see it as having affected your current life. This process will probably take between forty to sixty minutes.

Risks and Discomforts:

Since the topic of this research project is extremely sensitive in nature, the interview process might feel a little scary and stressful, and might bring out some very emotional responses. There is a possibility that you will become upset, distressed, or

anxious, since this process involves sharing and reliving difficult moments and experiences, and sharing personal aspects and events of your life. This process can lead to the expression of powerful emotions that might include, and will not be limited to, frustration, sadness, grief and pain.

Due to various reasons, you might not anticipate the effects this encounter might have. Although it is impossible to predict the outcomes of the interviews and the reactions that you might have, as the Principal Investigator on this research project, I will take various steps prior to, during and after the process in order to mitigate any emotional risks to you.

In order to protect your emotional and psychological well-being, I will firstly provide you with a safe and comfortable space in which to hold the interview, and I will try to create an environment of intimacy, by establishing trust and rapport, where sharing will not be/feel intimidating. Furthermore, I will explain all the possible risks before the interview begins, and will remind you that you may refuse to answer any questions you do not feel ready or willing to address as well as that you may request to

stop the process at any time. I assure you that you are in control as you can choose what to share and what to exclude from your story, where to begin and where to end your narrative, and the amount of detail you wish to include. The questions will be open-ended and carefully worded to avoid, as much as possible, triggering any painful feelings and memories, and to provide you with the opportunity to answer the questions in a manner that you feel comfortable doing.

During the interview, I will be aware of and watch for cues and signals indicating that you are in distress or feeling anxiety. You will be given the time and space to express your emotions and be provided with the support you need, and if necessary the data collection will be postponed or suspended.

After the end of the interview, I will provide you with an information sheet that will include referrals, if help is needed, in terms of addressing the emotions that came up during the interview. The list will include web addresses of associations that can provide support, as well as web addresses to constructive web discussion groups on

the topic. Some of the associations that will be included on the information sheet are the following:

1. Family Service Toronto – www.familyserVICetoronto.org
2. Jewish Family and Child – www.jfandcs.com
3. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto – www.nativechild.org
4. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – www.camh.ca
5. Bellwood Health Services – www.bellwood.ca
6. MentalHealth.ca – www.ementalhealth.ca

Benefits of the research and benefits to you:

By participating in this study, you will be able to share your experiences with others and provide important information that will help identify what the elements were that assisted or hindered you in terms of your social and educational development. This study will benefit you by providing you with the space and time to reflect on your life through the practice of 'tell-story'. This practice of storytelling, has been quoted as both educative and therapeutic for those who engage in it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Also, this information will be valuable for educators, administrators and foster parents to become knowledgeable so that they can provide children in foster care with the support needed.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the study:

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality:

I will protect the identity of the people participating in the project by choosing safe and private spaces for conducting interviews and by using pseudonyms in my writing.

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence, and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Storage and Disposal Method:

The data will be kept in a secure place until the project is completed. I will safe keep the information on a computer file with a password and another copy in a secured and locked filling cabinet. The data will be kept until the Thesis is completed and defended. It will then be destroyed by shredding the hard copy that has been stored in the filling cabinet, and by deleting the copy saved on my computer.

Questions about the research

If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact _____ at _____ or my Supervisor _____ at _____.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca.

Legal rights and signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the research conducted by Konstantina Peristeris. I have understood the nature of this project and

wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature

Date

Participant

Signature

Date

Principal Investigator

Appendix C

Interview Questions

A. General Biography:

- a. What is your full name?
- b. What is your date and place of birth?
- c. What is your academic background?
- d. Are you currently employed? If so, where do you work?
- e. How many siblings do you have?

B. Foster Home Placement:

- a. Can you tell me about the first time you were placed in foster care? What type of care was it (kinship care, foster home etc.)? You can talk about the people in the home, your feelings towards them, surprises, confusion, happy events and so on.
- b. Can you tell me about the relationships you were able to form while living in a foster home? For example, did you form friendships with other children in the home and/or the adults in the home? Who initiated the friendships and how did you respond to them?
- c. Can you tell me about the number of different placements? What was the length of each placement? How did you feel after each movement?

- d. Did you feel that your foster parents were interested in your success and well being? Can you tell me about their involvement in your academic and social life? You can talk about whether they attended teacher interviews, spent time on homework/assignment completion, encouraged you in terms of your academics, met your friends and their parents etc.
- e. Can you tell me more about the outstanding memories you have of your foster home and why these memories are important?
- f. Can you share some of the difficulties/challenges you were faced with while in care? You can share your feelings in terms of safety, belonging, inclusion, support etc.

C. School Life and Education:

- a. Tell me about the person that you considered has had the most positive influence on you and your life. How did he/she influence you and how did he/she motivate you to put forth your best effort?
- b. Can you tell me about your experiences in school in terms of work/academics? You can talk about the courses/classes you took, how you did in those courses, whether you were placed in those or whether you chose them based on your interests and future plans, your learning experiences overall etc.
- c. Can you tell me about your experiences in school in terms of social life and friendships? You can talk about whether your classmates and teachers were aware of your living arrangements and their reactions, whether you became

- close to any classmates and/or teachers, whether you felt a sense of safety and belonging, and whether you felt comfortable and secure talking to someone, whether you made strong and lasting friendships etc.
- d. Can you tell me what success means to you? Were there barriers that you had to overcome in order to achieve your dreams and plans for the future, and what were those barriers? Were there any facilitators? Discuss how these affected your career choices and your future.
- e. Do you feel that your school and teachers could/should have played a more important and active role in both in your academic and social life? You can talk about whether you felt that the school/teachers provided you with the support and encouragement needed to achieve your goals, whether they influenced you, and whether they guided you towards a career path.

Appendix D

Date: _____

Dear _____:

Hello.

My name is Konstantina Peristeris and I am conducting a research study about identifying the needs of children who have lived in foster home in order to inform teaching practices as a requirement for the completion of a Masters Degree in the Faculty of Education at York University. I am emailing you to ask if it would be possible to get some advice or assistance in contacting adults who have lived in foster care, for any length of time, in Canada.

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first purpose is to gather knowledge about the experiences of children in foster care, and to use it to identify ways in which

classrooms and schools can become advocates for children in foster care. The second purpose is to inform teaching practices for educators who work with students who have been through or are currently in foster care.

I am looking for people who are interested in participating in this research study and who are adults who have had at least one experience living in any type of foster home, for any length of time. The participants will first be asked to provide some biographical information about themselves and they will then be encouraged to share their personal story/narrative. Through the narrative (storytelling), they will share their personal experiences and they will tell their story of growing up in foster care and how they see it as having affected their current life. They will decide the aspects and events of their experiences that they would be willing to share. This process will probably take between forty to sixty minutes.

Your advice and help are greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me at _____ if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Konstantina Peristeris

Masters Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University

Appendix E

Looking for Participants for a Research Study!

Are you a young adult who has lived in foster care?

Do you think that teachers and schools should be advocates for children in care? Would you like to provide suggestions on how this is possible?

This is an opportunity to participate in a research study about identifying the needs of children who have lived in foster home in order to inform teaching practices. I am conducting this study as a requirement for the completion of a Masters Degree in the Faculty of Education at York University.

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first purpose is to gather knowledge about the experiences of children in foster care and to use it to identify ways in which classrooms and schools can become advocates for children in foster care. The second is to inform teaching practices for educators who work with students who have been through or are currently in foster care.

Taking part in research is always optional and completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time. I am looking for people who are interested in participating in this research study and who are adults who have had at least one experience living in any type of foster home, for any length of time.

If you decide to take part in the study, I will review the study with you and explain the process at a time that is convenient for you. You will first be asked to provide some biographical information about yourself and you will then be encouraged to share your personal story/narrative. Through the narrative (storytelling), you will share your personal experiences and you will decide the aspects and events of your experiences that you would be willing to share. This process will probably take between forty to sixty minutes.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at kperisteris@sympatico.ca if you have any questions regarding the study or if you are interested in participating.

Thank you for your time and for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Konstantina Peristeris

Masters Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University

Appendix F

Re: “Identifying the Needs of Children in Foster Care to Inform Teaching Practices”

Dear Participant:

I am honoured and grateful that you are volunteering your time to share your experiences and to participate in a research study about identifying the needs of children who have lived in foster home in order to inform teaching practices. I am conducting this study as a requirement for the completion of a Masters Degree in the Faculty of Education at York University.

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first purpose is to gather knowledge about the experiences of children in foster care and to use it to identify ways in which classrooms and schools can become advocates for children in foster care. The second purpose is to inform teaching practices for educators who work with students who have been through or are currently in foster care.

Taking part in research is always optional and completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time. During the interview, you will first be asked to

provide some biographical information about yourself and you will then be encouraged to share your personal story/narrative. Through the narrative (storytelling), you will share your personal experiences and will tell your story of growing up in foster care, and how you see it as having affected your current life. You will decide the aspects and events of your experience that you would be willing to share. This process will probably take between forty to sixty minutes.

Thank you for your time and for participating in this research project. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Konstantina Peristeris

Masters Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University

Appendix G

Support Services in the Vancouver Area

In case support is needed, these are some organizations available in the Vancouver area:

1. Ministry of Children and Family Development – www.mcf.gov.bc.ca
2. Foster Parent Support Services Society – www.fpsss.com

735 Goldstream Avenue, Vancouver

3. Mental Health and Addictions – www.vch.ca
4. Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society – www.vacfss.com

3284 Broadway East, Vancouver, B.C

5. MentalHealth.ca – www.ementalhealth.ca
6. Canadian Mental Health Association – www.vancouver-burnaby.cmhc.bc.ca

2425 Quebec Street, Vancouver

Appendix H

Support Services in the Greater Toronto Area

In case support is needed, these are some organizations available in the Greater

Toronto area:

1. Family Service Toronto – www.familyserVICetoronto.org
2. Jewish Family and Child – www.jfandcs.com
3. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto – www.nativechild.org
4. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – www.camh.ca
5. Bellwood Health Services – www.bellwood.ca
6. MentalHealth.ca – www.ementalhealth.ca