

Working Creatively with Care Experienced Children and Young People to Influence Educational Policy and Practice and Transform Lives



CASCADE

Children's Social Care
Research and Development Centre

Canolfan Ymchwil a Datblygu
Gofal Cymdeithasol Plant

Foster Care Transforming Lives - The Fostering Network and Acting for the Promotion of Fostering at European Level (APFEL), 20 November 2019, Edinburgh

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Overview

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Summary

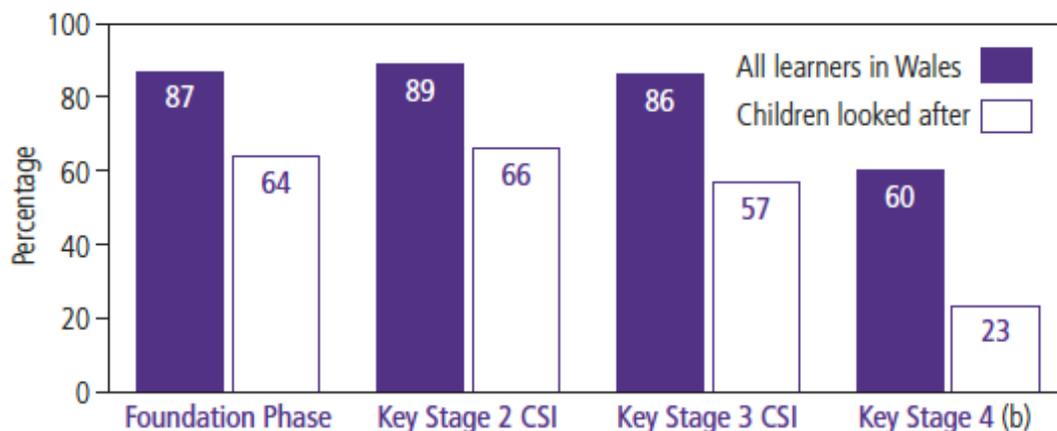
Prevalence of children and young people experiencing care in England and Wales

- Elliott (2019) compared the number of children in care in Wales and England over time
- Number of children in care in Wales and England are 5,955 (Stats Wales 2017) and 72, 670 (Department for Education 2017)
- Increases have a significant impact on services, and the quality of care and education for children and young people

Education

Young people who have experienced care generally achieve poorer educational outcomes compared to those who have not (Jackson and Cameron 2014; Mannay et al. 2015, 2017a; Sebba et al. 2015)

Figure 1: The gap at Foundation Phase and key stages between the educational outcomes of looked after children, and all learners at 31 March 2016 (a)



(a) Chart taken from the children in need census.

(b) Level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A*–C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

Experiences and Outcomes

- Increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system and incarceration
- Early parenthood and child removal
- Increased prevalence of mental health problems
- Homelessness
- But this doesn't have to be the case
- Social workers, teachers, foster carers and other practitioners can play a key role in fostering more positive outcomes

The LACE project

“Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales” [Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., and Andrews, D. 2015 Welsh Government]

The Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) undertook an in depth qualitative study into the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of children and young people who are looked after in Wales commissioned by the Welsh Government.

Objective 1: Conduct an in depth qualitative research study with looked after children and young people, to provide insight into their experience of education and their opinions on what could be done to improve it

Objective 2: Collate and report relevant literature and data

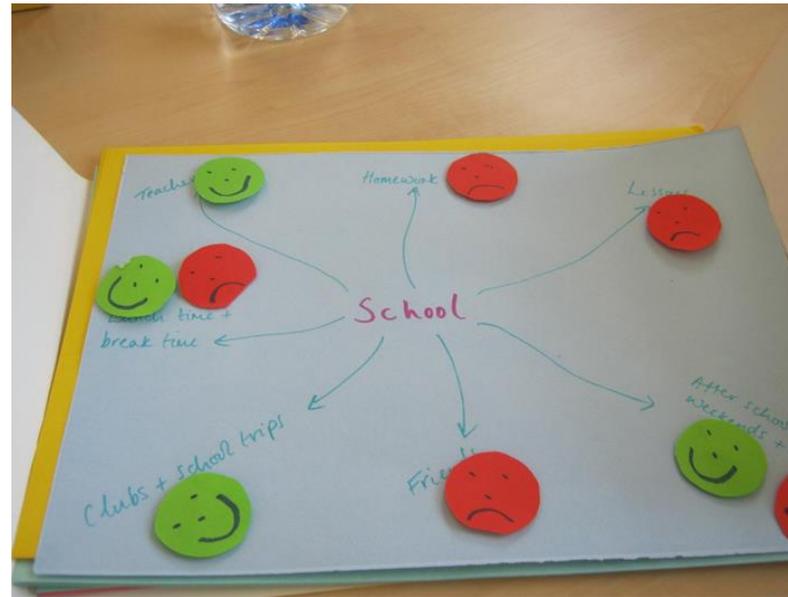
Project Partners – The Fostering Network, Voices from Care Cymru, Spice Innovate

Music and Art Extension Projects – Ministry of Life, Like an Egg, The Roots Foundation, Wales Millennium Centre

Methods

- Statistical and literature review **
- Systematic review **
- Creative methods and interviews
- Peer researcher led focus groups

Creative Qualitative Methods – Peer Led Focus Groups



Techniques of Data Production - Rationale

Moving away from the 'social work interview'

Studies focused on children and young people (particularly those in care) are often weighted towards the words and ideas of researchers, professionals and policy makers; rather than those of the children and young people themselves (Winter 2006)

Not simply 'ticking boxes and missing the point' (Batsleer 2008, p. 141)

Empowering young people to lead and direct the conversations (Lomax et al. 2011)

Peer led (Lushey and Monroe 2014)

Fighting familiarity, making the familiar strange and encouraging defamilairisation (Mannay 2010)

Aspirations

Children and young people did not lack aspiration

"I want to be an architect ... because I like art and most of my family are builders"
(Male, age 12)

They often had altruistic aspirations and wanted to help others

"I want to work with kids in care when I'm older because I know what it's like and I've been through it most of my life. So I can actually be one of those people who turn around and say 'I understand', and actually do understand" (Female, 16+ group)



Barriers and Enablers

“Various people to do with the care system were like ‘oh people in care don’t go to into higher education”. “It’s like they don’t believe that children in care will do anything. And so if they don’t believe it, then how is anyone going to believe it about themselves?” (Female, age 24)

“So she had a look at it with me and she said well I can do this by hand, so she sat down with me and helped me do my homework... So that member of staff sat down with me and said we can do your homework here and there” (Female, 16+ group)

“She [foster carer] put a lot of belief in me and she always told me that I could do it [go to university]” (Female, age 21)

Experiences – being ‘different’

‘Being made to feel like an outcast because I was in care... that made me feel alienated, frustrated, lonely and vulnerable’. (Male participant, 16+ group)

‘We don’t want people to be ‘looked after’, you want to be a normal kid too you know because it’s only one, its only label of you’ (Female participant, 16+ group)

‘I hate people feeling pity for me. I’m just a normal child, like...I’m in foster care, it doesn’t mean you’re just like some pity child’ (Male participant, 16+ group)

Experiences – being visible

'I don't know bad bit was like the LAC Reviews and whatever because the teachers kind of knew that you were in care and whatever and that, they all were, people would be like, 'oh why are you are going with Miss So-and-so?' (Nadine, age 21)

'I just didn't want it, I was like I don't need that, it's singling me out and its making me seem special when I'm not, I'm a normal person'. (Female participant, 16+ group)

'Any meetings, if they are necessary, should be held outside of school time, not just at a time that is convenient for the professionals'. (Female participant, 16+ group)

Review meetings are intended to increase participation and voice for children and young people but here we can see that they can have a negative impact (see also Diaz 2018)

Experiences - conflict

If you're moved out of county then one county will argue with the other county about who pays for transport, who pays for the schooling, who pays for food, who pays for everything that has something to do with your education' (Male Participant, 16+ group)

'Councils are just like: 'no that's your problem, no that's your problem, palming young people off sort of thing and it's just really unpleasant' (Male participant, 16+ group)

'You know it shouldn't have to be, 'oh you're paying for it, you're paying for it', you know? It's a child, it's a human being' (Male participant, 16+ group)

Review meetings are intended to increase participation and voice for children and young people but again here we can see that they can have a negative impact

'Let off' or 'let down'

'As soon as I went into care, then went back to school and my teachers majority of them treated me completely different, because I was in care they moved me down sets, they put me in special help, they gave me – put me in support groups. And I was just like I don't need all this (Female, 16+ group)

It's about motivation. All you need is a good kick up the arse. And I think if somebody had given that to me when I was 16 or 17, I would probably have been like 'right, that's it I want to, I'm going to do something with my life' (Male participant, 16+ group).

Unintended consequences –position of leniency was often well-intentioned, based on what is known about children and young people who are looked after and the difficulties they face.

But - teachers who they talked about as being best were those who encouraged them back into lessons/school, and pushed them academically, rather than allowing them to disengage with school work simply because of their 'looked after' status

Successful', 'failing' and 'supported' subject positions

Hierarchical binaries emerge in response to such discourses, with indices of difference inevitably being inscribed

For the successful subject position to flourish, the failing subject is necessarily brought into being, as both are relative constructs

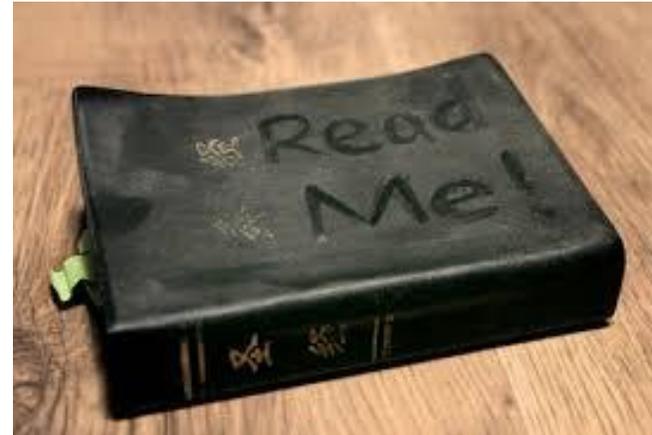
'Supported' subject bring sharply into focus concerns around the unintended harms of targeted intervention or differential treatment with vulnerable or at-risk individuals

Exceptional treatment often considered to be stigmatising in their foregrounding of students' differences from the rest of the school population, whilst occasionally diminishing young people's future expectations for themselves

Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., and Andrews, D., 'The Consequences of Being Labelled 'Looked-After': Exploring the Educational Experiences of Looked-after Children and Young People in Wales', *British Journal of Educational Research* 43(4), pp. 683-699. (10.1002/berj.3283)

Enabling engagement, impact and change?

- Reports, books, journal articles
- Informing policy
- Academic conferences
- How much impact do they have?
- What other options do we have?
- What are the issues of representation, voice and visibility?
- Useful to consider the ways in which creative narrative forms can replace visual images and detailed, identifying, biographical accounts, yet still retain impact; and ethically, yet powerfully, communicate the stories that participants have shared in the research process (Mannay 2016)



Outcomes and impacts

- Attempted to counter the criticism that research findings have little impact on communities outside of academia
- Difficult to recreate the tone, emphasis and depth of meaning from the original accounts, and this was not always achieved, nevertheless, the central messages of the accounts were retained
- Practitioner feedback - *'reinforced the need to provide a voice for the child - give them choices. Listen actively, support, believe in them and push them to meet their potential'*; *'implement this in my everyday work'*; *'ensure all appointments for young people take place outside of their education'*
- Potential for the research recommendations to translate into changes on the ground

Sharing your research, ideas and practice?

Online community of practice

Blogs, research, events, news, case studies

ExChange: Care and Education <http://www.exchangewales.org/careandeducation>

ExChange: Family and Community

<http://www.exchangewales.org/familyandcommunity>

Could you contribute?



Activity

Working in groups use the creative resources provided to explore what you think needs to be done going forward to improve the educational experiences of care experienced children and young people.



SUMMARY - Q&A

SUMMARY



Thank you
for
listening!



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