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EDUCATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FOSTER PARENTS

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EDUCATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FOSTER PARENTS

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

_____

by

LaResha Roxanne Richardson

June 2017

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LaResha Richardson

June 2017

Approved by:

Dr. John Winslade, Committee Chair, Education

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ABSTRACT

Not all children live with their biological parents. In 2013, approximately 60,000 children in California were in foster care. These children comprise a significant subgroup of students in public schools today and are one of the most educationally vulnerable student populations. Often they are, as a group but with individual exceptions, low-performing.

Parents' involvement has often been credited with improving school achievement. Foster parents, therefore, play an important role in ensuring the academic success of foster care children. Foster parents encourage, provide emotional support and guidance to these children and advocate on their behalf.

The purpose of this study was to explore how foster parents perceived the educational experience of children in foster care. A qualitative research approach utilized an interview process to explore the participants' perceptions and generate recommendations for developing a more effective educational system. The study sample consisted of eight foster parents, recruited by snowball sampling, with experience working with school-age children in foster care. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The purpose of this study was to explore foster parents' perceptions and identify important issues that they believed contribute to the academic successes and failures of children in foster care. Findings were analyzed to generate recommendations for developing a more inclusive educational system.

The data was examined in relation to two theoretical frameworks; Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Foster parents reported that they believed they participated in the foster child's academic achievement. They did not believe that they were always supported to fully assist the foster children to achieve their full potential. Foster parents perceived two-way collaboration as imperative when addressing the educational needs of children in foster care. While they believed that they were efficient in yielding results to help children in foster care become academically successful, foster parents also believed that changes need to occur within the foster care system that would enable them to be more efficient and effective. This research study brought light to the complex dynamics of foster parent responsibilities and educational decision-making. Those dynamics included lack of adequate and sufficient training offered to teachers and foster parents regarding the education of children in foster care; the lack of foster parent knowledge regarding district-mandated foster parent liaisons and factors that inhibit foster parent collaboration. All findings have implications for the foster care system. However, the conclusions are limited to only foster parents' reports. Information was not gathered from other stakeholders, such as foster children, social workers, teachers and those within the foster care legal system.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Foster care and the education system are two very complex institutions (Aldgate, Heath, Colton & Simms, 1993; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Davis & Ellis-MacLeod, 1994). Both institutions strive to address and serve children who experience abuse and neglect. Addressing the educational needs of children in foster care is challenging to schools, social service agencies, and foster parents (Baker & Place, 2005; Frerer, Sosenko, & Henke, 2013; Geenen & Powers, 2006; Weinber, Zetline & Shea, 2009). It is estimated that in 2013 there were approximately 589,000 children and youth in foster care across the United States (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). In 2013, 58,699 children in California were living in foster care (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Of these children, more than 65% were between five and twelve years of age. The median age of children in foster care is 10.6 (California Department of Social Services, 2014). As a result, a majority of children in foster care are of school age.

Foster care is,

What the foster care system is: a temporary arrangement in which adults provide for the care of a child or children whose birthparent is unable to care for them. Foster care is not where juvenile delinquents go. It is

where children go when their parents cannot, for a variety of reasons, care

for them. (http://www.adopt.org/what-foster-care).

Children are often removed from their homes, because social workers determine

the biological family cannot guarantee the child's safety, or where some form of

parental abuse and/or neglect is present (Rycus, Hughes, & Ginther, 1988).

It is known that child maltreatment or abuse can have an adverse effect on

a child's development, including on academic achievement (Chambers & Palmer,

2010). Children who suffer maltreatment or abuse score significantly lower on

standardized tests, receive lower grades, and exhibit more behavior problems

compared to children who have not experienced maltreatment and abuse

(Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). The effects of

maltreatment and abuse and the loss of a significant parental attachment

correlates with the fact that upon entering foster care children have an increased

risk of needing specialized support in school.

Children in foster care experience a vast range of developmental delays

and social problems which in turn affects their overall school success. As a

result, children in foster care often come to school with weakened learning

readiness and with lower than age and grade appropriate academic and social

skills, due to what may be described as family turbulence (Altshuler, 2003;

Dubowitz, Feigelman, Harrington, Starr, Zuravin, & Sawyer, 1994; Sawyer, &

Dubowitz, 1994). Thirty to forty percent of children with one or more disabilities

are in foster care and receive special education services. These services are

often interrupted or not received in a timely manner due to frequent placement changes (Powers, Geenen, Powers, Pommier-Satya, Turner, Dalton, Drummond & Swank, 2012; Geenen & Powers, 2006). Through investigating foster parents' perceptions, this research will address how foster parents view children in foster care, ultimately reaching self-actualization through school success. According to Bruska (2008), "Children in foster care will experience feelings of confusion, fear, apprehension of the unknown, loss, sadness, anxiety and stress" (p. 70). Schubert (2001) states that a disruption and interruption in school enrollment or attendance takes place due to the foster care system's primary concern for a child's safety above all else. Educational needs are often not a concern until safety needs are adequately met. However, obtaining educational achievement provides an opportunity for greater possibilities in life, including an improved quality of life (Nowak-Fabrykowski, Helinski, & Buchstein, 2009). Children in foster care often experience a vast number of educational challenges, such as numerous school placements, high absenteeism, tardiness and truancy and mental health problems (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).

Children in foster care also often experience disciplinary action at significantly higher rates compared to those that have never in foster care. The disciplinary actions are often a result of the foster child not meeting developmental milestones and behavior problems (Fletcher-Campbell & Hall, 1990). Special education services is one the primary services considered for children in foster care when there is evidence of lack of educational progress,

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developmental delays and behavior problems (Benedict & White, 1991; McMillen & Tucker, 1999). Dubowitz, Feigelman, Harrington, Starr, Zuravin, and Sawyer, (1994) reported that thirty percent of children that reside in foster care received special education services, forty-one percent were retained or had to repeat one or more grades in primary school, Moreover, graduation rates from high school often decrease when children were placed in foster care.

Geenen & Powers, (2006) stated that it is often a challenge to ensure that children in foster care have the services they need to be academically successful. Foster parents and school personnel have encountered constraints when requesting and permitting academic services for students in special education due to the lack of understanding of who has the legal authority to participate and make decisions similar to those of biological parents or guardians (Altshuler & Kopels, 2003). Once a child in foster care obtains special education services it is often difficult to maintain those services due to the transient nature of children in foster care and the difficulty of maintaining those records once a child leaves each placement (Fletcher-Campbell, & Hall, 1990; Weinberg, 1997). One way of supporting the educational success of children in foster care can be accomplished by addressing school enrollment obstacles. These obstacles may interfere with children's academic needs, including the provision of specialized services and problems with effective communication and sharing of data among schools, the welfare system, and foster parents (Nowak-Fabrykowski, Helinski & Buchstein, 2009).

Children who are removed from their homes and placed in foster care often experience multiple placements. This in turn produces significant feelings of loss, isolation and depression (Newton, Litrownik & Landsverk, 2000). These feelings and experiences often inhibit children in foster care from achieving secure, healthy and stable relationships (Altshuler, 2003; Baker & Place, 2005). Children in foster care may thus face educational barriers that are uncommon to children not in foster care, including emotional, social and physical issues that often affect their academic development (Nowak-Fabrykowski, Helinski, & Buchstein, 2009).

By contrast, research shows that when parents are involved in their children's educational development, children become more productive and are more academically successful, and develop better social adjustment. Parents' involvement in their children's education can be a multi-faceted and positive influence (Avery, 2000). Epstein and Connor (1992) emphasized the importance of parents providing for children's health and safety, as these contribute to healthy child development and help to prepare children for school. Effective parenting is often correlated with better academic performance and achievement (Flynn, Marquis, Paquet & Peeke, 2011; Alexnder, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Tadesse, 2014; Anderson & Minke, 2007). Children are often a product of their social environment. Within these social environments they grow and develop. To better understand a foster child's development more research must be done on the interaction that takes place between the foster home and the education

system. Because developing children grow and learn in social environments, understanding these contexts and what happens within, between, and around them helps promote understanding of how children develop (Epstein & Connor 1992).

However, several researchers (Courtney, Grogan-Kaylor, Piliavin, & Nesmith, 2001; Geenen & Powers, 2006;) noted that involvement and/or perceptions of foster parents in the education of children in foster care are notably absent. Foster parents may assist teachers and school personnel in responding to the needs of youth, including discipline problems, social problems, high truancy rates, academic, behavior problems, high absenteeism, and tardiness, which ultimately result in low college attendance rates (Geroski, 2000; Altshuler, 2003; Chambers, & Palmer, 2010). Foster parents are, nevertheless, often deemed responsible for ensuring the educational needs of children placed in their care are adequately met (Nowak-Fabrykowski, Helinski & Buchstein, 2009). Foster parents are encouraged to establish relationships with teachers and school administrators, monitor school attendance and homework, be active participants in children's educational planning, and address behavioral issues that may occur while the child is at school (Tideman, Vinnerljung, Hintze, & Isaksson, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore foster parents' perceptions of their role within the education system and foster parents' perceptions of what impacts a foster children's academic success. Foster parents' perception regarding foster children's educational experiences and outcomes is scarce (Tideman, Vinnerljung, Hintze, & Isaksson, 2011; Chambers, & Palmer, 2010). The literature on foster care tends to focus on their failure to support children within the education system and the problems that their charges experience while in foster care. A review of the literature found a gap regarding the focus on the foster parents' perspective of the education system (Courtney et al., 2001). This study addressed the gap by speaking with foster parents to uncover their perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks help provide a better understanding of foster parents' perceptions and foster parents ability to positively influence foster children's academic success. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs acted as the theoretical framework to guide this research study. Bronfenbrenner and Maslow both provide a lens into the developmental process. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development provides a framework for understanding the context of human development in five socially

organized subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The five subsystems help in

supporting and guiding human development. The five environmental influences
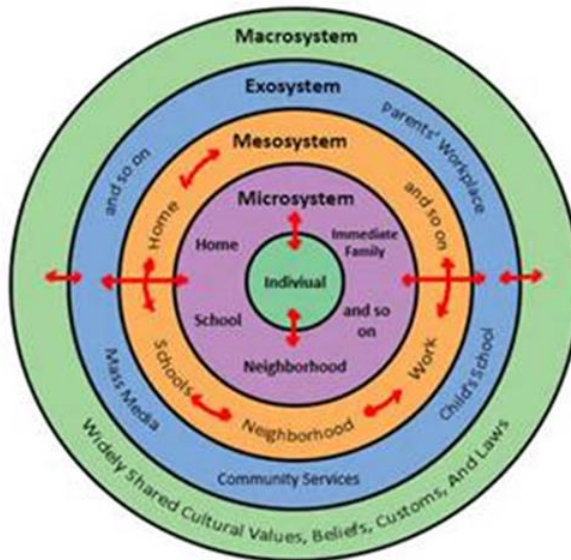
Figure 1.1 Bronfenbrenner Ecological System Theory

Retrieved from: **http://psychchick15.weebly.com/psych-journal/journal-8-
urie-bronfenbrenners-ecological-systems-theory**

ranges from the interconnect that is present between a developing child and their

direct environment such as school and home to the macrosystem, which

encompasses the institutional structures of culture such as economy, and

customs. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the family setting, or foster

home, in which the foster child resides, is the primary arena in which

development occurs. Through the family setting or microsystem, the foster

parent plays a critical role in the development of the foster child. This study will

examine how foster parents view the institutional patterns within the education system.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1967) states that humans have a variety of needs, which he assembled into five basic categories or constructs. The needs are arranged in hierarchical order (lower to higher). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is often depicted as a five-layered pyramid (see Figure 1.2) with the most important needs for development and motivation at the bottom. Maslow states
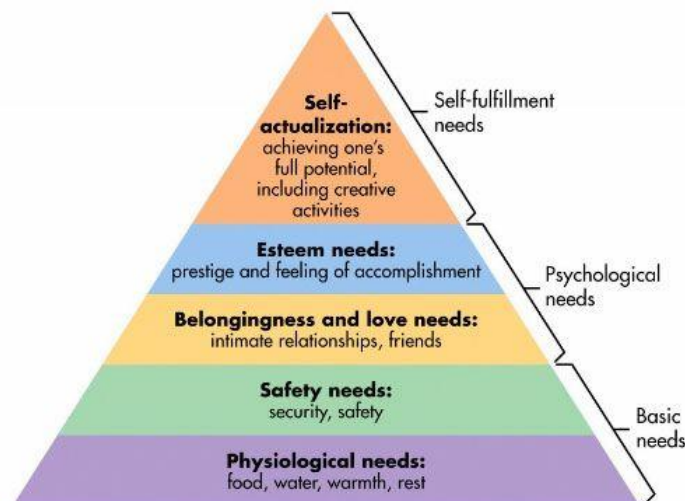
Figure 1.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
Retrieved from: https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

that, if an individual's physiological (food, shelter, clothes) safety and security needs are not met, the child will have a hard time ultimately reaching the self-actualization and self-esteem layers (Norwood, 2009). Maslow's theory can be useful to examine in order to understand the constraints on foster parents when it comes to engaging with the educational needs of children in foster care. Foster

parents believe that their primary responsibility is to take children to medical

appointments and provide updates to case workers (Finkelstein, Wamsley, &

Miranda,2002). Foster parents' roles are beginning to change to encompass the

whole child. However, there is still a long way to go.

Research Questions

The focus of this study will be to examine this issue from the perspective

of foster parents. The questions that this study aims to address are as follows:

1) How and in what ways do foster parents perceive what contributes to the

   academic success foster children achieve? What do foster parents

   believe contributes to their foster children's academic progress and

   academic success?

2) What do foster parents believe inhibits their foster children's academic

   progress?

It is anticipated that this study will provide insight into the unique educational

experience of foster children through the lens of their foster parents.

The purpose of this study was to investigate foster parents' perceptions of

education and the role the foster parents play in the academic achievement of

children in their home. A qualitative study was conducted using individual

interviews. A qualitative research goal is to grasp and understand individuals'

perspectives, as well as recalling their experiences (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative

studies provide a more broad and in-depth analysis into foster parents'

perceptions then a quantitative study. Open-ended questions were used to allow the individuals to respond in their own words and to provide as much detail as possible. According to Creswell (2012), interviews are central to the collection of data in a grounded theory study. The researcher used the interviews of the foster parents to uncover their experiences and perceptions. Data collection for this study included foster parents' responses in individual interviews, which were transcribed. These transcripts formed the data sets used in this study. The data was then analyzed using the principles of grounded theory.

Definitions of Terms

The operational definitions of key terms used in this study will be as follows:

Foster Parent. Foster parents are adults who are licensed by the state or county to provide temporary housing to children whose biological parents are deemed unable to provide care for them. Foster parents often provide care for children for time periods ranging from a few weeks to sometimes several years, depending on the circumstances of the child's birth parents and outcomes of the reunification process with their children. Foster parents are monetarily compensated for providing care. In California, foster parents must consent to a criminal record check, child abuse registry check, and attend state and federal mandated training (Ana Beltran, 2012; Ogilvie, Kirton, & Beecham, 2006).

Foster Child. A child who has been separated from his or her biological family by the juvenile courts, because his or her biological parents are deemed by the court as unable to provide care, often as a result of parental abuse and/or neglect (Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000; Goldman, Salus, Wolcott, & Kennedy, 2003)). As defined by AB 490, a foster child is "one who has been removed from his or her home pursuant to Section 309 of the Welfare and Institutions Code or has been removed from his or her home and is the subject of a petition filed under Section 300 or 602 of the Welfare and Institutions Code (E.C. 48853.5 (a)) and has been placed in foster care".

Individual Education Plan (IEP). An Individual Education Plan is a document that describes educational services, placement, and goals for students with disabilities. The Individual Education Plan includes information regarding present levels of educational performance, measurable annual goals that are implemented in the classroom settings and any additional special programs or services (Ausbrooks, Gwin, & Brown 2011; IDEA 2004).

Deficit. A deficit is a problem a child is experiencing in which his or her performance on educational tasks does not match the norm for his or her age group. Deficits areas include: language, reading, spelling, math, memory, organization, processing, behavior, motor skills (IDEA, 2004; Siegel, 1986).

Response to Intervention (RtI). The process of identifying students who are at risk for not meeting grade level standards in order to intervene early (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). RTI is a systematic approach to providing

interventions and monitoring the progress of all children. It is a "general

education approach to high quality instruction, early intervention, and prevention

and behavioral strategies" (California Department of Education [CDE], 2008, p.1).

Intervention. Interventions are designed for students that have not been

identified as those who need special education and/or related services based on

the Response to Intervention (RTI) model and may need additional support(s) to

succeed in the general education environment (VanDerHeyden, Witt, &

Gilbertson, 2007). Interventions build upon a specific skill that is monitored to

achieve adequate progress in a specific area. The intervention through the RtI

program must be scientifically research-based. Examples of interventions

include but are not limited to: 10 Steps to Brilliance, Read 180, Touch Math,

System 44 Compass Learning, Recipe for Reading Corrective Math, Step Up to

Writing and Math PALS.

Partnership: A partnership is a collaboration of services between the foster

parent and educational systems designed for decision-making and to deliver

services to agencies servicing children in foster care (Zellman & Waterman,

1998; Tadesse, 2014; Shea, Weinberg & Zetlin, 2010).

Student Support Team (SST). A multidisciplinary team of teachers (one

general education, one special education), an administrator (or administrative

designee), a school psychologist, a school counselor, a school social worker (if

available), the student (in middle and high school), the student's guardian, other

school staff as appropriate) that provides support to students who are

experiencing academic hardships. Those hardships include developmental

delays, behavioral problems and emotional adversity that has the potential to

hamper academic success (Schools, 2010). An SST works with school

personnel and parents/guardians to obtain and maintain resources while

cultivating procedures that enable a child to be successful in the mainstream or

regular education classroom.

Research Method

A qualitative methodology approach was chosen for the study by using a

phenomenological approach that consisted of using informal interviews. Eight

foster parents were interviewed. The foster parents recounted their perceptions

and experiences. The interviews captured the fullness of their perceptions.

Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and relaxed place. Locations

included coffee shops and participants' homes. The interviews were recorded

and transcribed by the researcher. Seven of the participants were recruited

through a snowball method. Throughout this study, the researcher explored the

gap in literature addressing foster parents' perception of the education system

when relation to children in foster care.

Researcher's Positionality

As a former social worker, case manager and current special education

teacher, I have witnessed these issues from both welfare and educational

angles. I believe that all children need and deserve someone to ensure their

academic, physical, emotional, mental, behavioral and social success. However,

through my experience I have noticed that many times a child in foster care does

not have academic needs met or even addressed. As a social worker and case

manager, my focus was to ensure housing by ensuring that the foster parent was

able to maintain placement. As a social worker and case manager, I also

witnessed the numerous life-changing events that occur in a foster child's life.

Many of these events have a lasting impact on their social, emotional and

physical development. As social workers, we rarely discussed education.

 As a teacher, I have witnessed children in foster care come to school

unable to focus on anything. Some are emotionally vulnerable and others are

very aggressive. As a teacher, I have often experienced very limited contact with

foster parents compared to non-foster parents. I find that it is rather disturbing

due to their lack of involvement or information pertaining to the foster child.

 Children need someone in their life that loves them and does not hurt or

abuse them – someone who can help them become successful academically,

physically, emotionally, mentally, behaviorally and socially. Having this kind of

overview of different aspects of a child's life is unique to parents. I assume that

foster parents are best positioned to play this role for foster children. Through

this study I will, therefore, explore the perceptions of foster parents regarding the

education system and the role the foster parents' play while gaining insight.

Summary

Children in foster care have multiple social, health and educational needs that can impact on their success in school. The need to explore the perception of foster parents who serve the educational needs of children in foster care is of primary importance. This study researches a foster parent's role within the education system and attempts to understand and describe the extent to which it provides educational services to foster children. Through foster parents' perceptions, this research will gain knowledge into how the education system is functioning to serve children in foster care and potentially how it might better do so.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to develop a better understanding of the data that is written regarding the information and practices within foster care that influences the educational achievement of foster children. This review aims to present an examination of published research related to the education of children in foster care. The literature review includes empirical and non-empirical research regarding the issues concerning educational needs of children in foster care. In addition, it discusses the relative merits of historical policies and the relationships between foster parents, foster children, and their educational achievement.

Children in foster care may live with relatives, in a therapeutic foster home, in a group home or in a residential treatment center (Davis & Ellis-MacLeod, 1994). Foster care is a temporary service, however, that provides children with a longer-term alternative to living in an unsafe environment. Children enter foster care in response to a crisis or turbulence in their lives and/or in their families' lives. Children entering foster care usually expect to return to their parents as soon as possible. However, many children remain in foster care for an extended time and many children eventually leave foster care only when they "age out" (Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000; Pecora, Williams, Kessler & Itirpi, 2006).

In an overburdened social service and educational agency, children in foster care often do not achieve as much academic progress as children who have never been in foster care. Education is nevertheless an imperative component for success for all children. However, children in foster care consistently face multiple constraints during their academic journey. A major constraint in the educational success and continuation of services for those in foster care is the absence of a consistent adult to ensure that educational decisions are developed and maintained in the best interest of the foster child (Vesecky, Woodward, Levine, 2005; Gallegos, A. H., & White, C. R., 2013 Vacca, 2008). Foster parents may play this role.

Foster youth typically display lower academic achievement than those that have not been in foster care. Specifically, they are more likely to display higher rates of absenteeism and truancy, disciplinary problems, earn lower grades, consistently, score lower on standardized test, perform below grade level, be retained a grade, qualify for special education services, not complete high school, and/or college. Statistics on educational outcomes for foster children reveal the following:

- Thirty percent of foster youth perform below their current grade level in reading, writing and/or math (Altshuler & Kopel, 2003a; Ausbrooks, Gwin, & Brown, 2011).

- Thirty-five percent of foster youth have experienced school changes four or more times and each school move results in a four to six-month loss of educational progress (Chambers & Palmer, 2011; Child Trend, 2011).

- Thirty to forty percent of children with disabilities are in foster care and receive special education services. These services are often interrupted, or not received in a timely manner due to frequent placement changes (Powers et al., 2012; Geenen & Powers, 2006).

- Fifty-nine percent of foster youth do not complete high school (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Chambers & Palmer, 2011).

- Eighty-nine percent of non-foster youth complete high school and only fifty-nine percent of foster youth enrolled in 11th grade complete high school by the end of their twelfth-grade year (Burley, & Halpern 2001).

- Seventy percent of foster youth aspire to completing post-secondary education, however only 11% actually complete college (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Chambers & Palmer, 2011; Jackson & Ajayi, 2007).

Throughout recent history, there has been a steady increase in the number of children in foster care as well as in the number of children aging out of foster care. Many youth aging out of foster care are left without any resources when they reach the age of eighteen. Many of these youths often end up in prison, the mental health system, drug rehabilitation centers, or homeless shelters (Okpych, 2012). With the vast increase in the population of children entering foster care,

the policies and laws related to their safety, health, and education have also changed tremendously (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).

The increase of children in foster care is related to displacement from other systems, specifically mental health programs or correctional facilities. The increase in the number of children entering foster care has also affected the changes in biological family structure; resulting in a decline in informal and extended family support (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). Increased risk factors for child abuse and neglect include poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, and adolescent parenthood (Harden, 2004). These forces have undermined the resilience and coping capacity of families, leading to further government intervention (Freundlich, 1997).

<div align="center">Government Intervention</div>

Foster care has seen steady changes since the 1960s (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). Both legislative history and guidance from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services requires that "reasonable efforts" must be made to ensure that children placed in foster care never return to an unsafe environment (Allen & Bissell, 2004). In the 1960s, child abuse reporting and intervention laws were enacted that brought about increased public awareness of child abuse (Kernan & Lansford, 2004). In 1961, Congress began allowing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments when placing children into foster care. Before 1961, Aid to Families with Dependent

Children (AFDC) payments were only available to children in their parents'

homes. With the change in financial backing, a drastic increase in foster care

occurred (Rosenthal & Louis, 1981). By 1966, all 50 states had enacted various

child abuse and neglect reporting laws, which was a direct result of the Child

Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2002).

In 1974, Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

(CAPTA). This legislation enabled states to provide funding for the development

of the Child Protective System (PL-104-235). In 1996, the Child Abuse

Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (PL-104-235) was amended, requiring

states to have in place policies and procedures for reporting suspected child

abuse and maltreatment. CAPTA also, established policies and procedures for

investigating reports of abuse. Once a child was deemed or found to be at risk

for continued hard immediate steps to protect children must be taken (U.S.

House of Representatives, 2000). By the late 1970s, the number of children in

foster care was more than 503,000, which resulted in Congress becoming

increasingly concerned about the growing number of children entering foster care

(Shyne & Schroeder, 1978). Many children were removed from their original

homes due to poverty, which was determined by social services to be a form of

neglect (Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

With the increased number of children entering foster care, Congress

passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Day & Preston,

2013). This act attempted to modify foster care by encouraging permanence.

Permanence includes keeping families together. As a result of the Act, the foster

care population in the United States was cut by more than half to approximately

243,000 by 1984 (Pecora et al., 1992). However, during the Reagan

Administration, many did not like The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act,

citing that it was unnecessary for the federal government to intervene in state

and local decisions, resulting in pressure on proposed regulation to enforce

permanence (Raymond, 1998). However, financial incentives were not changed

and more and more children were placed in foster care (Chamberlain et al.,

1992; Campbell & Downs, 1987). During this time, children were once again

taken from homes that could have been deemed safe or could be made safe with

the provision of services. Children were once again placed in foster care until

after "reasonable efforts" had been exhausted. The "reasonable efforts"

requirement was largely ignored (Day & Preston 2013). However, in

the absence of reasonable efforts, the foster care population rose again. The

continued rise in foster care placement did not conclude until the late 1990's

(Day & Preston, 2013).

Beginning in 1992, Congress began deliberating over redirecting funds for

children in foster care into family preservation (Day & Preston, 2013). Family

preservation, as defined by Los Angeles County Department of Children and

Family Services (2015), is a,

strength-based, collaborative program aimed at helping families to identify

and build upon existing strengths; resolve problems causing child safety

concerns; advocate for their children at school and in other public settings; and expand, or establish for the first time, the family's connection to resources and supports in the local community. One of the primary goals of family preservation is increased self-sufficiency within the family and a reduced reliance upon public agency intervention (p. 1).

Congress passed the Family Preservation and Support Act, but President Bush vetoed it. However, in 1993, it was passed and signed into law by President Clinton. In the five years that followed, the federal government spent over one billion dollars that covered a scope of child social service needs that included: foster care, adoption, and after-school recreation programs. Very little of the money was spent on family preservation. The Family Preservation and Support Act has been reauthorized and renamed several times since its original passage. It is now entitled the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act. The legislation and policies enacted have always reflected a social system that is in favor of the biological family, often resulting in the legislation and policies being resistant to the foster family parent or foster care (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010).

Educational Efforts to Assist Foster Children

Children in foster care are recognized as an educationally vulnerable student population (Zetling, Weinber & Shea, 2006). Several pieces of legislation have tried to address the problem of the education of children in foster care. One piece of legislation meant to address the education of children in foster care is

Title IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act, it required foster care agencies to implement a plan regarding the academic success of children in foster care (Geen, 2009). One component of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and No Child Left Behind Act (2002) required schools to narrow the achievement gap between children in foster care and those who have never been placed in foster care. This mandate led education agencies to transform goals and promote college and career success among students who were previously seen as at risk such as foster children, and to work to address their specific educational needs. The Uninterrupted Scholars Act passed in January 2014, granted social service agencies access to education records that were not accessible under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Uninterrupted Schools Act enabled social service agencies to obtain a copy of current school records, which expedited foster children's transfers into other schools and academic placement. These laws established a stepping stone for children in foster care to graduate high school. Enrollment delays, frustration over the inability to transfer credits, and the unnecessary repetition of partially completed courses are all factors that lead to children in foster care dropping out of school before they complete their education (Frerer et al., 2013; Geenen & Powers, 2006; Chambers & Palmer, 2011; Child Trend, 2011; Jackson & Ajayi, 2007; Kozol, 1991).

<u>California Legislation</u>

      <u>Assembly Bill 1806.</u> In California, Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill 1806 on September 29, 2014 affecting foster children and youth. This bill enabled "high school students in foster care to receive partial credits for courses if they switch schools in the middle of the academic year. If they transfer to a high school in their junior year or later, they only have to meet state graduation requirements, which are typically lower than district requirements" (p.2) (Assembly Bill 1806, Ch. 767, 2014).

      <u>Assembly Bill 167</u>. Assembly Bill 167 provided children in foster care with the opportunity to reduce their high school graduation requirements per California Education Code 51225.3 (c). Effective in January 2010,

> California legislation exempted a foster child who transferred from a new school during their eleventh and twelfth grade from completing locally imposed course requirements that exceeded minimum state standards, if those local requirements would prevent the student from high school graduating in a timely way. (California Education Code, 51225.1, 2013)

Foster children who transitioned to a new school district or school in their junior or senior year of high school were only required to meet the minimum high school state-mandated requirements (California Foster Youth Education Task Force, 2010). However, if the school district determined that the foster child is

able to complete the high school requirements in a timely manner, that expectation would be enforced; requiring the foster child to complete the additional courses to graduate. AB 167 indicates that if a school district is in agreement with waiving the additional courses and requires a foster child to only meet state requirements, the school district must provide written notice to the foster children and their educational representative that the lack of course requirements have the ability to effect their post-secondary enrollment (California Foster Youth Education Task Force, 2010). Through Assembly Bill 167 school districts are ultimately provided the flexibility to make the decision regarding course requirements, which in high school often determines a foster child's grade level (Bruskas, 2008). Thus, the number of credits a foster child obtains determines whether Assembly Bill 167 is applicable to him or her, in determining whether he or she is in 11th or 12th grade (California Education Code, 51225.1, 2013). However, the opposite is true with a foster child who is in elementary school, where the student's age determines his or her grade level.

Assembly Bill 490. Effective January 1, 2004, Assembly Bill 490, Chapter 862, enforced new policies and procedures related to the education of children in foster care. Assembly Bill 490 addressed the impact of the effect of changes in placements for children in foster care (Shea, Zetlin, & Weinberg, 2009). When children in foster care change placement about once every six months, they lose an average of four to six months of opportunity for educational achievement (Wolanin, 2005).

All educational and school placement decisions for foster youth shall be
made to ensure that each foster pupil has the opportunity to meet the
same academic achievement standards to which all pupils are held, is
placed in the least restrictive educational programs and has access to the
academic resources, services, extracurricular and enrichment activities as
all other pupils (Education Code 48850 (a)).

Assembly Bill 490 required educational agencies to have a foster care
liaison to confirm the appropriate educational placement, facilitate enrollment for
foster children and ensure transfer of school records for foster youth and for
children in foster care (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). Assembly Bill 490 also
mandated that schools enroll children in foster care regardless of the lack of
necessary documentation needed for school enrollment, such as health and
education records. Assembly Bill 490 also enabled children in foster care to
remain in their neighborhood school or prior school zone, even if the foster child
had moved out of the school's boundary area (Shea, Zetlin, & Weinberg, 2009).
Assembly Bill 490 ultimately aimed to eliminate the frequent changes in school
placement because of frequent changes in foster care.

Assembly Bill 403. Assembly Bill 403 has helped in placing children in
therapeutic foster homes instead of group home settings. The goal of Assembly
Bill 403 was to help ensure that children in foster care have their daily needs met,
be they physical, mental, or emotional. Assembly Bill 403's intention was to
provide children in foster care opportunities to grow up in permanent and

supportive homes, so they could grow into successful adults (Zetlin, Weinberg &

Shea, 2006). AB 403, views the therapeutic foster home as the most stable,

productive and healthy out of home placement in comparison to group home and

residential treatment programs. According to AB 403, a foster child is to be

placed in their least restrictive environment. AB 403 promotes therapeutic foster

home by providing foster parents with the necessary training and support for

foster children and foster parent to be successful (Pecora, Kessler, O'Brien,

White, Williams, Hiripi, English, White & Herrick, 2006).

     Assembly Bill 403 also advanced California's long-standing goal to not use

group homes as a long-term placements but to promote and encourage

therapeutic foster homes. Group homes would be utilized as short term

placement and intensive treatment.

     AB 403 called for the implementation of new standards and performance

measures. "Whenever possible, children should live in their communities in

home-based family care settings. This legislation will allow for development of

critical elements, including increasing the supply of home-based family care and

training for all providers who care for our children (p. 7)" said Will Lightbourne,

Director of California Department of Social Services

(http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/pdf/AB403.pdf). AB 403 followed

recommendations from California Department of Social Service's. Assembly Bill

403 began its implementation in January 2016.

Assembly Bill 12. Assembly Bill 12, also known as the California

Fostering Connections to Success Act, was signed into law on September 30,

2010 (A.B. 12, 2010). Through AB 12, Adoption Assistance Program (AAP),

Kinship Guardianship Payment Assistance Program (Kinn-Gap) and foster care

the acknowledgement of the importance of family permanency began to arise.

Through these programs monetary compensation was provided to relative

caregivers with foster children living with them. (Steinberg, 2001). Beginning

January 1, 2012, the bill also allowed foster children who were 18 years old the

option to stay in foster care until they were 19 years old and in January 2014 it

was extended to the age of 21 years of age. Foster children over age eighteen

years in foster care were designated as "non-minor dependents".

All of the above legislation is summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Government Intervention by Year

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and No Child Left Behind Act (2002)	Required schools to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students. This mandate led education agencies to identify low-performing students, including foster children, and to address their specific educational needs.
1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act	Provided funding to states for the development of the Child Protective System (PL-104-235). In 1996, the Act was amended, requiring states to have in place procedures for reporting suspected child maltreatment and/or abuse, investigate reports of abuse and take immediate actions to protect children found to be at risk of harm
1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act	Attempted to modify foster care by encouraging permanence.
1993 Family Preservation and Support Act	The federal government spent over one billion dollars on a range of child social services, including foster care, adoption, and after-school recreation programs to support family preservation.
2004 Assembly Bill 490	Required educational agencies to have a foster care liaison to confirm the appropriate educational placement, facilitate enrollment for foster children and ensure transfer of school records

	for foster youth and for children in foster care. Required each educational agency to have a foster care educational liaison to receive funds to assist children in foster care.
2008 Fostering Connection to Success	Required child welfare agencies to plan for the educational stability of children in foster care
2010 Assembly Bill 12	Foster children could remain in foster care to the age of twenty-one years.
2013 Local Control Accountability Plan/Local Control Funding Formula	California was the first state to commit to improving the educational achievement of children in foster care. California became the first state to include foster youth as a subgroup in their accountability framework and the Academic Performance Index (API).
2013 Assembly Bill 97	Assembly Bill 97 required the Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) developed by County Offices of Education to answer the four questions.
2014 Assembly Bill 167	Provided children in foster care with the opportunity to reduce their high school graduation requirements per California Education Code 51225.3 (c).
2014 Uninterrupted Scholar Act	Allowed agencies to retain up-to-date copies of school records, which could expedite the transfer of foster children and their academic placement
2014 Assembly Bill 1806	Allows high school students in foster care who switch schools in the middle of the academic year to receive partial credits for courses.
2015 Assembly Bill 403	Provided children in foster care opportunities to grow up in permanent and supportive homes, including therapeutic foster homes, so that they have the opportunity to grow into successful adults.

Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)/Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

With the implementation and passage of the Local Control Funding Formula

(LCFF), in 2013, California was the first state to commit to improving the

educational achievement of children in foster care by including foster children in

funding allotments (Hahnel, 2014). California was the first state to acknowledge

foster children as a subgroup. LCAP enables the state to monitor foster

children's academic progress. Through acknowledgement of foster children as a

subgroup school districts are now accountable for identifying goals to close

achievement gaps in order to obtain funding through LCFF. School districts were

required to develop and implement plans specifying how the district would improve the educational outcomes of foster children (Humphrey, Koppich, Esch, Marsh, Hall, Campbell, Stokes, Ramage, Petit, Sands, Wolf & Imazeki, 2014). Schools and school districts with fifteen or more foster children were now being held accountable for the academic performance of children in foster care. School districts have had to develop, present and adopt a local control and accountability plan (LCAP).

The local control and accountability plan (LCAP) has to address and attend to the following:

"identify goals for foster youth as a district subgroup; describe the specific actions the districts would take each year to achieve these goals; and contain the budget associated with these actions. The California Department of Education was maintain records and report education outcomes to the California Department of Education (CDE): information that was necessary for CDE to identify which students were in foster care; and information that was helpful to meet the educational needs of these students. The state of California began to address issues of: educational outcome data, suspensions, expulsion data, truancy, attendance rates, and dropout rates. Data had to be reported at the school site level, district level, and county level, so long as there were fifteen students in foster care" (California Education Code, Sections 52060 – 52077).

Assembly Bill 97 required the Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) developed by County Offices of Education to answer the following four inquiries:

How will the county superintendent of schools coordinate services for foster youth, including but, not limited to:

- "working with the county child welfare agency to minimize changes in school placement;

- providing education-related information to the county child welfare agency to assist the county child welfare agency in the delivery of services to foster children, including, but not limited to, educational status and progress information that is required to be included in court reports;

- responding to requests from the juvenile court for information and working with the juvenile court to ensure the delivery and coordination of necessary educational services;

- establishing a mechanism for the efficient expeditious transfer of health and education records and the health and education passport?" (California Assembly Bill 97; 52066; 10 A-E).

These initiatives were implemented through three major forms of foster care agencies throughout California.

Three Major Forms of Foster Care Agencies

Currently in the United States, there are three major forms of foster care agencies. There are therapeutic foster homes, group homes and residential treatment programs. In the next section, the differences between each of these forms will be provided. These are summarized in Figure 2.2.

Therapeutic Foster Care

Children in therapeutic foster care typically live with non-relatives in family based setting licensed by a social service agency, Therapeutic foster care can be described as a family-based alternative for children who have been removed and separated from their biological parents. (Ogilvie, Kirton, & Beecham, 2006). Therapeutic foster care serves children with special medical needs, which often coexist with behavioral emotional problems and mental health problems.

Characteristics that exist within therapeutic foster care are as follows:

1. The foster parents are considered professionals, (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001)

2. The number of children placed in the home is restricted and typically does not go over six children including the foster parent's biological children (Kruzich, Jivanjee, Robinson, & Friesen, 2014),

3. Case managers are assigned to each therapeutic foster home (Lockwood, Friedman & Christian, 2015),

4. Foster parents are provided with training (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2006),

5. Foster parents implement the foster child's treatment plan that is formulated by several stakeholders to enhance the development of the foster child (George, 2014),

6. Foster parents are provided with professional and emotional support that enables them to meet the needs of children in their care (Curtis, Alexander & Lunghofer, 2001).

7. Crisis intervention services are available for the foster parent 24 hours each day (Curtis, Alexander & Lunghofer, 2001),

Therapeutic foster homes are unique in their care of children in foster care. They are also unique in: their treatment approach; in the support and assistance offered to foster and biological families and in the training and support provided to foster parents (Hill, 2009). Therapeutic foster care programs are more like a family setting than any other foster care placement. According to Assembly Bill 403, therapeutic foster care also provides the best setting for ensuring all needs of a child are being met including academic.

Group Homes

Group homes are another form of out-of-home placement for foster children (California Department of Social Service, 2014). Group homes are seen as short term placement for children with emotional or behavioral problems that require more restrictive environments or a temporary placement until a therapeutic foster home is located (Ogilvie, Kirton, & Beecham, 2006).

Group home care is described as residential treatment or congregate

care. The group homes can range in size from six beds to facilities where

hundreds of children are housed (groups of 12 or more must be divided

into distinctive living arrangements, although these cottages may be

located on a single campus (Garbarino & Kostenly, 1992, p. 454)

Group homes typically employ staff members that act as caretakers to foster

youth.

In 2014, approximately 3,000 of the 60,000 foster children in California were

placed in group home settings (California's Child Welfare Continuum of Care

Reform, 2015). Group homes provide a multitude of different levels of structure,

supervision and treatment services. Group homes have the ability to be

specialized, while targeting a specific group of individuals. The treatment

services vary based on the population of individuals being housed in the group

home. Treatment services available at a group home may include substance

abuse treatment programs, minor-parent (mothers and babies) programs, infant

programs, mental health treatment, vocational training, mental health day

treatment, emancipation and reunification (Weinberg, Zetlin, & Shea,

2009). However, residential treatment programs provide care that is more

specialized and intensive.

Residential Treatment Programs

Residential treatment programs provide the most restrictive out-of-home

placement for foster children. Residential treatment programs provide specialized

services, along with short and long term care. Residential treatment facilities typically resemble large, dormitory-type facilities. Residential treatment centers are parallel to psychiatric hospitals (Barth, 2002). However, residential treatment centers usually provide less intensive and less restrictive care and employ fewer medical professionals than do inpatient psychiatric units (McDowell, Ortiz, Stevenson, Lichtenstein, Walter, McDonald Associates & Pecora, 2014). Foster children who are typically placed in residential treatment centers exhibit symptoms of psychosis, suicidality or highly aggressive personalities and are thought to be inappropriate candidates for group homes and for therapeutic foster homes and are therefore usually placed in residential treatment (Joughin & Richardson, 2000). Approximately one-sixth of residential treatment centers provide long-term treatment for children in foster care that have encountered sever emotional disturbance such as those suffering from severe mental retardation or neurological disorders, for whom rehabilitation is unlikely in other settings (Hill, 2009).

Residential treatment is considered to provide short-term acute care for children with various emotional and behavioral problems. Residential treatment centers vary in the number of individuals that reside in the treatment centers. Some treatment centers accommodate only a few children while other treatment centers accommodate hundreds of children. Residential treatment serves a multitude of individuals with different disabilities, resulting in multiple treatment approaches, and in the length of service provided (Barth, 2002).

Table 2.2   Three Major Forms of Foster Care

Therapeutic Foster Homes	Group Homes	Residential Treatment Programs
• Non-relative placement • Private Residence • Family Based Placement • Foster Parents are Professionals, Licensed by Child Welfare Agency • Limited number of children in home. • Case Managers are assigned to each Therapeutic Foster Home • Foster Parents are given strategies to help foster children cope with emotional crisis • Foster Parents Implement the Child's Treatment Plan • Foster Parents are given professional and emotional support • Crisis Intervention Services are available 24 hours a day	• Placement option for children with significant emotion or behavior problems • Child requires more restrictive environment • 24-hour non-medical care and supervision • Structured Environment • Mid-range placement option for children in foster care • Typically, in a residential setting. • Staff member are employed to act as care takers • Offers specific services targeted to specific population of children or range of services • Ex. Minor-parents, vocational training, emancipation and reunification	• Most restrictive out-of-home placement • Provides more specialized care • Provide mental Health services • Large dormitory facilities • Emphasizes treatment of emotionally and behavior disturbed children. • Medical Professional staff • Children who are psychotic, suicidal or highly aggressive are placed in residential treatment programs. • Provides short term acute care • Varies in size • Varies widely in the population it services, treatment approaches and length of services provided.

Demographics Information for School in the Inland Empire

The study examined foster parents foster parent perceptions in the Inland Empire. The Inland Empire is located in Southern California. The United States Census Bureau identifies Riverside and Bernardino Counties as the Inland Empire. The Inland Empire covers approximately 27,000 square miles and has a population of approximately 4 million people (US Census Bureau, 2010). According to Education Data Partnership (2017, January, 23) there are 24 school districts and 26 charter schools that serve approximately 450,000 students daily within Riverside County. San Bernardino County has 38 charter schools and 34 school districts that serve approximately 435,000 students daily. Within Riverside County Office of Education 21% of students are English learners. The county services more than 57 different languages (CDE Dataquest). San Bernardino county serves 77,324 English learners. In both counties over half of the students receive free and reduced price meals. Riverside County services approximately 3,500 students and San Bernardino county services 3,900 daily. The Education Data Partnership (2017, January, 23) stated on their website that "Foster youth counts include both primary and short-term enrollment. However, short-term enrollments are not included in the overall enrollment data for this county". The data cited above includes information for the 2015-2016 school year. Although it does not provide short-term enrollment data for the foster youth, the data does provide a glimpse into the number of foster children enrolled in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. As evident through the data San

Bernardino and Riverside County encounter children that are faced daily with educational barriers.

Educational Constraints for Foster Children

Numerous studies have confirmed that foster children perform worse in school than children who have never been placed in foster care (Berger, Cancian, Han, Noyes, & Rios-Salas, 2015; Aldgate, Heath, Colton, & Simms, 1993; Altshuler, 2003, Crozier & Barth, 2005). As a result of performing poorly academically foster children have their future beyond high school ultimately affected, resulting in higher than average rates of homelessness, crime, drug abuse and unemployment among adults who have been in foster care (Courtney & Barth, 1996). Casey Family Programs (2003) states that many children in foster care have poor developmental, mental and educational outcomes. School is often sidelined or treated as a secondary concern as the adults' (caseworkers, foster parents, and judges) primary concern is providing a safe and secure environment that is free from neglect and/or abuse, or transferring them from a placement that is no longer deemed as suitable (Shea, Weinberg, & Zetlin, 2010). Removing children from their biological parents and caregivers has been shown to negatively affect children's educational achievement (Altshuler, 2003). The educational problems of foster children are highlighted by higher rates of grade retention, more mental health problems, lower scores on standardized

tests, higher absenteeism, more frequent tardiness, and higher truancy and dropout rates (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

<u>Numerous Placements</u>

Children in foster care often experience repeated changes in placement that require changing schools. Twenty percent of children in foster care experience three or more placements in one year. Shin and Poertner (2002) reported that forty-one percent of children in foster care change schools at least three times during their placement in foster care. Frequent changes in placement, separation from biological siblings and family, together with placements that, at times, are less than adequate (Joughin & Richardson, 2000) contribute to these foster children's inconsistency in their educational progress.

Research has shown that transfers have a harmful effect on educational outcomes for children in foster care (Tideman, Vinnerljung, Hintze, & Isaksson, 2011). Not only must children in foster care ensure the emotional ramifications of instability, they also must adjust to new teachers, classmates, curricula, and classroom and school rules and procedures. In addition, school disruption often results in loss of credits, unsatisfactory academic progress and achievement, repetition of grade levels, and delays in school enrollment and transfer of student records (Vacca, 2008). Moreover, children in foster care often experience the absence of a consistent, dependable, persistent and well-informed adult who can advocate on their behalf for special education and necessary resources (Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2010; Vacca 2008). Students in foster care transition

between schools at least once or twice a year, and by the time they age out (aging-out typically occurs when an individual reaches the age of eighteen or graduates from high school) of the foster care system, over thirty-three percent of foster children will have experienced five or more school transitions (The Center for State Child Welfare, 2011). Vacca (2008) states that, "frequent placement changes disrupt the authority of foster parents to represent children's educational interest" (p. 1082).

The California School Board Association (2008) estimated that children in foster care lose approximately four to six months of academic progress for each school transition. This leads to many children in foster care being years behind children who have never been in foster care. Falling behind is not the only problem with frequent school moves. School transfers also result in the decline in the chances a foster care student has of graduating from high school. Research shows that children in foster care who have experienced fewer changes in placement were more likely to graduate. Students who had even one fewer change in living arrangement per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care (California School Board Association, 2008; & Casey Family Programs, 2003).

High Absenteeism, Tardiness, and Truancy

High absenteeism, tardiness and truancy are major constraints that affect the success of children in foster care. The absence of required school records or other documents can lead to delay in enrolling foster children at the new school

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and a gap in the number of days or weeks that learning occurs (Shea, Zetlin, & Weinberg, 2009; Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012; Conger &Finkelstein, 2003). After children are enrolled in school, they are often tardy or absent, due to sessions with counselors and therapists, and mandated medical and court appointments that keep them out of class (Chambers & Palmer, 2010). Millions of foster children in the United States experience poor attendance rates, which leads to inability to perform at grade level, ultimately leading to behavior and discipline problems and, in the end, a decrease in college attendance (Tideman, Vinnerljung, Hintze, & Isaksson, 2011). California Education Code 48200 indicates that parents of minors who has been considered habitual truant are subject to prosecution under Education Code 48200. Before a matter reaches court intervention, certain specified procedures must be followed. A student is considered truant when, "Absent from school without valid excuse more than three days or tardy in excess of thirty minutes on each of more than three days in one school year" (E.C. 48260). Schubert (2001) states that a disruption and interruption in school enrollment or attendance takes place due to the foster care system primary concern being for a child's safety primarily and educational needs are not a concern until safety needs are adequately met.

Mental Health

Although an under-researched topic, there appears to be a high incidence of mental health problems and psychiatric disorders in adults that have been in foster care. Conduct, depressive and anxiety disorders seem to be particularly

common among children in foster care (Joughin & Richardson, 2000). According to Bruska (2008), "Children in foster care will experience feelings of confusion, fear, apprehension of the unknown, loss, sadness, anxiety and stress" (p. 70). Bruskas (2008) goes on to express that these feelings ultimately hinder an individual's experience and development. A study conducted by McLaughlin, Zeanah, Fox, and Nelson, (2012) showed elevated levels of depressive disorder, conduct disorder, anxiety disorder, among children who had once been in foster care, compared to the general population. Children in foster care often experience the following diagnosis:

- o one or more disorders: 54.4% (Barth, 1990; Casey Family Programs, 2003; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001),

- o "post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) 25.2 % (a rate nearly double that of U.S. war veterans)" (p.6) (Faer & Cohen, 2015)

- o "forty-eight percent of children in foster care struggle with emotional or behavior issues" (p.6) (Faer & Cohen, 2015)

- o major depression: 20.1% (Barth, 1990; Casey Family Programs, 2003),

- o social phobia: 17.1% (Barth, 1990; Casey Family Programs, 2003).

Behavior and Discipline Problems

Children in foster care often experience high incidence of behavior and discipline problems that affect their educational success (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). Behavior and discipline problems are often caused by emotional

disturbances due to separation from other family members and numerous

placements (Courtney, Grogan-Kaylor, Piliavin, & Nesmith, 2001). The distress

of and anxiety couple with the past abuse emotional anguish regarding their

biological families typically diverts foster children's attention from school work

(Chamber & Palmer, 2010). Behavioral problems often exhibited by children in

foster care include aggressive, demanding, immature, or attention-seeking

behavior and anxiety. On the one hand these behaviors can often be seen as a

normal response to entering foster care. On the other hand, entering foster care

and being removed from home and separation from family members can lead to

serious psychological and emotional consequences, often manifesting in

problematic behavior at school (Ausbrooks, Brown & Gwin, 2011). Some foster

children act out; others withdraw. All of the above problems can decrease the

potential for eventual college entry for children in foster care.

Due to the high incidence of behavior and discipline problems, suspension

and expulsion rates for foster children are also high (Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris,

1993; Leitner & Johnson, 1994; Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). Suspension from

school as defined by Education Code EC §48900 occurs when a student is

temporarily removed from school. The temporary removal can vary in length of

time from one day to twenty days. Expulsion, on the other hand is when a

student is prohibited from attending any school in the district. A pupil may be

suspended or expelled for actions related to school activity or school attendance

occurring (EC 48900 (r):

- "While on school grounds

- "While going to or coming from school

- "During lunch period, whether on or off campus and

- "During or while going to or coming from a school-sponsored activity"

    (California Education Code 48900 (r).

Before expelling a student in foster care, the districts must notify the foster child's

district-appointed liaison and/or attorney and the liaison must be invited to the

expulsion hearing (California Foster Youth Education Task Force, 2010).

Decreased College Attendance

A 2001 study conducted by Burley and Halpern, (2001) found that foster

children were often retained at rates far higher than for children who were never

in foster care. Furthermore foster children were twice as likely to drop out of high

school or not earn their GED (Jackson & Ajayi, 2007). The lack of high school or

GED completion leaves children in foster care unprepared for college entry.

Foster Parents

Foster parents play an important role in ensuring educational success for

foster children. Foster parents' primary goal is to provide a stable, safe, caring

and supportive environment for children place within their home until family

problems or crises are no longer issues (Dougherty, 2001). Foster parents are

often seen as part of the treatment team that includes social services staff and

the biological parents working towards multiple goals, including the goal of family reunification (Ana Beltran, 2012; Ogilvie, Kirton, & Beecham, 2006).

Roles and Responsibilities

Foster mothers typically indicated that they were the primary caregiver. Foster mothers stated that they are the primary resource involved in meeting the educational, social, physiological needs of children in foster care who are placed in their home (Chapman, Wall & Barth, 2004). A little over half expressed the belief that it their primary responsibility was to ensure that foster children attended all medical appointments, as well to provide awareness of issues regarding the children to the agency or county social worker.

Foster parents are responsible for ensuring that foster children's developmental needs are met (Rycus & Hughes, 1988); however, foster parents often reported concern about their ability to care for the educational needs of children placed in their homes (Jackson & Ajayi, 2007). Foster parents reported not receiving any information regarding children in foster care about academic success or deficiencies during placement (Mech & Fung,1999). Vacca (2008) states that, "Frequent placement changes disrupts the authority of foster parents to represent children's educational interest" (p. 1082). Many foster parents report that teachers have a lack of understanding regarding foster children's behavior and academic needs. In the literature when foster parents are ill-prepared and not provided with adequate preparation, training, and support children in foster

care will experience a disruptions in their placements (Walsh & Walsh, 1990;

Redding, Fried & Britner, 2000). Foster parents who possessed an abundance

of social support, such as extended family, teachers, counselors and social

workers (Walsh & Walsh, 1990), were more likely to be able to provide a stable

nurturing and caring environment for the foster child (Redding et al., 2000).

Additionally, when foster parents who held appropriate behavioral and academic

expectations and understood the origin and rationalization for a child's behavior,

were able to provide a stable placement (Butler & Charles, 1999).

Unfortunately, the literature does not contain the voice and perceptions of

those responsible for caring for children in foster care, nor the voices of the

children themselves (Courtney, et al., 2000). Their voices and perceptions may

best address the achievement and educational barrier and/or challenges of

children in foster care.

The Changing Role of Foster Parents

Historically, foster parents have been seen merely as temporary

caregivers for foster children (George, 2014). Foster parents open their homes

to children in need of temporary care, a task and responsibility that can be both

rewarding and extremely difficult. Children in foster care are often transitioned

from multiple foster homes without accounting for foster parents' connection to

the child or the foster parent's psychological state. These types of transitions are

often a result of a judge's request for siblings to remain together. (Dougherty,

2001). Historically, foster parents were not considered as potential adoptive

parents for children whom they were caring, even when the children had deeply bonded with the foster parent(s) (Dougherty, 2001). In the 1980s, however, foster parents began to be viewed as an integral part of the foster children's life. With the emphasis on permanency, social service agencies began to ask foster parents to play an active role in the reunification process and were often considered the first option for permanent placement of the goals of reunification could no longer be considered (Dougherty, 2001; Zetlin, Weinberg & Shea, 2006). Sixty-four per cent of children adopted in foster care in 1999 were adopted by the children's former foster parents - a trend that is likely to continue (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000),

However, social services agencies typically have not clearly defined the role of the foster parents. This has lead foster parents into taking on new roles and responsibilities. These new roles and responsibilities are often coupled with little to no training or support (Dougherty, 2001). Currently, foster parents take on numerous roles. Those roles include but are not limited to nurturing the children they foster; supporting a well-rounded and healthy development; providing guidance and discipline; advocating on behalf of the children for school services; providing support to the biological parents and supporting the relationship between children and birthparents (Rosenfeld, Pilowsky, Fine, Thorpe, Fein, Simms, Halfon, Irwin, Alfaro, Saletsky, & Nickman, 1997.; Dougherty, 2001).

Barbell and Freundlich (2001) state that,

"The roles of nurturing, promoting child development, and providing

guidance and discipline are traditional foster parent responsibilities. As

agencies move toward new models of permanency and recognize the

strengths that foster parents bring beyond these traditional roles, many

foster parents are assuming roles of advocacy, mentoring, facilitation, and

recruitment and training of new foster parents". (p. 20)

As these roles increase, so does the desire of foster parents to adopt more

children in foster care (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).

Today foster parents are becoming a more integral part of the

permanency team. Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, Public Law

105-89), foster parents are now provided with the opportunity to be heard in both

court review and court hearings regarding any child in their home. The Adoption

and Safe Families Act provides a clear picture of the importance of foster parents

in evaluating, planning and providing information about foster children's well-

being (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).   Dougherty (2001) noted children in foster

care have special, unique and complex needs, which can best be tackled by a

synchronized team that includes, but is not limited to, the birth parents, foster

parents, mental health professionals (including child and adolescent

psychiatrists) and social services staff.

Parental Involvement in the Education of Children

Historical Perspective on Parental Involvement in Education

Parent involvement, as defined by Anderson and Minke (2007), is awareness of and involvement in students' school work. Parent involvement in a child's education is based on an understanding of the relationship between parenting skills and student success in school, while providing a commitment and dedication to persistent and consistent communication with educators about a foster child's academic student progress. Since the beginning of foster care placement, foster parents have collaborated with a variety of people to best serve students (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). The list includes administrators, general educators, parents and other family members, medical personnel, social workers, psychologists, lawyers and, most importantly, with the foster child (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). The best interests of the foster child require a collaborative and supportive approach to education and transition issues related to foster children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the importance of education in early childhood and supported the belief that parents and/or the microsystem play an important role. (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001).). Since 1960, parent involvement has continued to be considered an important part of any child's educational success. Epstein (1992) emphasized that families "are responsible for providing for children's health and safety, preparing children for school, and maintaining healthy child development across grades, and supporting learning and behavior across school years" (p. 1145).

Research has continued to suggest that high quality parenting skills can lead to better school performance (Epstein, 1992; Wolfendale & Bastiani, 2000; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Parental involvement not only leads to improved educational performance (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002). Sheldon & Epstein, 2002) but it fosters better student behavior, improves school attendance, increases support of schools, improves students' emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005). As they develop children clearly grow and learn better in supportive social environments. Therefore, understanding these contexts, and what happens within them, indicates a stronger understanding of how children develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

<center>Educational Representative</center>

Educational representatives are individuals who help youth meet their educational goals (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 319(g); Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 361; Cal.Ed. Code § 56028; Gov't.Code § 7579.5). An educational representative's duties include but are not limited to: maintaining school stability, determining the gaps present in the delivery of educational support services and ensuring that the services are provided:

> "either directly or indirectly through referral to collaborative partners and
> agencies, identifying inadequacies and difficulties in the completion and
> timely transfer of education records to the school that the foster child(ren)
> are attending, facilitating appropriate educational placement such as

<center>51</center>

special education, helping in the overall improvement of the foster child's academic achievement, and helping to reduce student truancy, dropout rates and delinquent behavior" (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 319(g); Cal. Welf.& Inst. Code § 361; Cal.Ed.Code § 56028; Gov't.Code § 7579.5).

Parents or guardians typically hold educational rights for their children. When biological parents are not willing or not able to exert these educational rights, the court may assign educational rights to another adult (Welfare and Institutions Code: 358.1 (e) 2006). Once a judge limits or restricts the biological parent's educational rights, the judge must appoint a "responsible adult" to possess the educational rights.

The responsible adult or educational representative may be a foster parent, CASA worker, relative caregiver or other adult in the child's life (Welfare and Institutions Code 361 (a) 2006). Individuals whom the court may not appoint to be the surrogate parent include the social worker, probation officer, group home foster parent or staff member, or a school district employee. For these parties there is deemed to be a conflict of interest.

The educational representative's duties are to: meet with the foster child regularly, investigate the child's educational needs and determine which needs that are or are not being met, ensure that the child is currently receiving proper and beneficial education services, before each review hearing provide information and recommendations to the child's social worker regarding educational goals and progress. Educational representatives also review the

educational file allowing them to gain an adequate depiction of the child's current educational needs. They also observe and meet with the foster child at school on a regular basis, attend school-related meetings pertaining to the academic success of the foster child, communicate with all stakeholders in the foster child's life to collaborate on what is best for the child, monitor educational progress, and report to the court about the educational progress and case welfare of the foster child at least once a year. In short, they provide educational advocacy aimed at ensuring the best interests of the foster child. An educational representative, also known as the holder of a student's educational rights, is often seen as the missing piece in the educational advocacy continuum. Educational representatives are able to make decisions regarding: school enrollment, preference for placement in school of origin or foster parents' residence school placement, consent to or authorize "assessment for special education, consent for implementation of the individual education plan (IEP), request for special education due process (such as a due process hearing or mediation), submit an application to a magnet school, charter school, or alternative education setting" (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 319(g); Cal. Welf.& Inst. Code § 361; Cal.Ed.Code § 56028; Gov't.Code § 7579.5).

Educational Representatives must work independently from, but be willing to work cooperatively and collaboratively with, the school districts, department of social services, probation, juvenile courts, therapists and foster parents.

Educational representatives are supposed to help a child meet their full academic potential.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout this study, I examined the data using two theoretical frameworks. The first framework is Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation (1943) and the second theoretical framework that will also be used in this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Maslow's theory of motivation will be used as a guide to better understand the dynamics of foster care and children's academic needs. However, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory will be used to analyze and explain phenomena and to extend existing knowledge. I will therefore explain these two frameworks in turn.

Theory of Motivation

Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation provides a lens into how foster parents help play a vital role in the educational development and self-actualization of children in foster care (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011). The Maslow hierarchy of needs (1967) states that humans have a variety of needs, which he assembles into five basic categories or constructs, which are illustrated in the form of a pyramid. The needs are arranged in hierarchical order, with the "basic" needs at the bottom of the pyramid and the ability to fulfil one's achieve and maximum potential are at the top of the pyramid. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a simple, clear and resonant explanation for why children in

foster care often do not reach self-actualization, which is the highest tier of the

pyramid (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011). Maslow's hierarchy of needs is

relevant to this study because the theory focuses on the influences of behavior

and motivation (1943). Maslow's needs pyramid, illustrates the five levels of

needs. The basic needs are located on lower level of the pyramids and more

multifaceted needs are on the upper level of the pyramid. Maslow's hierarchy of

needs provides a view of the individual needs of a child. The hierarchy of needs

examines five levels of need. Maslow states that an individual cannot achieve

the next level of need until they are able to fulfill the ones that come before it.

On Maslow's needs pyramid, basic needs are physiological needs,

(Maslow, 1967). The physiological needs are the physical needs one needs to

survive such as food, shelter, water and clothes. According to Braxton and

Krajewski (2011), for a child in foster care they are often deprived of these needs

until they enter foster care. Many children go without food, clothes and even

shelter prior to foster care. The next level is the need for safety and security,

which includes the need for security and protection from harm. Safety

encompasses freedom from personal harm, intimidation, having consistent

models of appropriate ethical, moral and caring behavior (Maslow, 1967).

Children in foster care often struggle to develop a safe and secure environment.

They have often experienced a history of abuse or neglect and struggle to

maintain feelings of safety and security. Many struggles to maintain a trusting

and secure environment that is relaxed and without fear of negative comments

for a vast number of reasons (Lawrence, Carlson & Egeland, 2006). Many

children in foster care have been physically, mentally and sexually abused.

Many do not feel safe and often live with fear, anxiety and sadness. The ability

to trust is often altered by past experience. Many children do not feel safe even

after entering foster care, due to PTSD or fear of past abuse occurring again.

The next level of need is love and belonging. Many children in foster care have a

hard time believing that they are loved or that they belong to a family especially

with the numerous placements (Vacca, 2008). The third level refers to love and

belongingness needs that include love, friendship and comradeship (Maslow,

1967). Children in foster care struggle to value education when they are unable

to establish a rapport with the teacher or parent. When children are unable to

establish rapport the ability to share understanding, caring and concern are often

omitted (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011). The fourth level is about esteem

needs that entail self-respect, personal worth and autonomy. Without self-

esteem and confidence, children lack the motivation and ability to acquire new

skills, expand abilities and explore personal potential. Self-esteem is self-

motivation to achieve what one has set out to do. The ability for a child to

achieve is not easy and often not achieved. The last need is self-actualization.

Self-actualization is the ability to use sound moral judgment to achieve self-

purpose. Many children in foster care come in struggling to maintain safety and

physiological needs.

Foster parents play an imperative role in a foster child's life. Foster parents have the ability to provide a child in foster care not only with basic needs but also with a safe, loving, caring and secure environment (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011). Foster parents also have the capability of encouraging and inspiring personal achievement (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011). The last level, self-actualization, is when an individual reaches their full potential through characteristics such as trust, justice, wisdom and meaning (Maslow, 1967). Foster parents and biological parents have the greatest impacts on children. Foster parents and biological parents have the opportunity to motivate, mentor and model appropriate behavior on a daily basis. These are key influences to cultivate productive and effective learning as well as encouraging the development of self-efficacy. The very last need is self-actualization or full achievement. Maslow believes that an individual is unable to reach self-actualization or full achievement without having all four previous needs met. The needs in order are physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization.

In a study by Havalchak, White, O'Brien, Pecora and Sepulveda (2009), the children who had been in the foster care system were assumed to have experienced parental abuse, neglect, or other traumatic life events. Such negative experiences in their home environments could be expected to create an entirely different set of meanings for this population than for the general population (Havalchak, et al., 2009). Without having adequate physiological

needs met for food, clothing, and shelter, it is challenging to advance to a higher

need; if a child is hungry, does not have warm clothes or does not have any

place to sleep; social services aims to fulfill these needs first. Shea, Weinberg,

and Zetlin, (2010) contended that personal safety is another factor contributing to

the achievement academic success. Children must feel safe, both physically and

mentally, before they engage in learning. It would be hard for a student to

concentrate on mathematical properties, without first feeling safe. Trauma from

past experiences of abuse and emotional difficulties from their biological families

can be expected to typically distract children's attention from schoolwork (Barbell

& Freundlich, 2001). Through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the study will

examine the way in which the five levels of needs are perceived by the foster

parents to have an impact on a foster child's academic success. Through this

study a holistic examination of children in foster care through was conducted

through Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. The needs were examined through a foster

parent's perceptions in relation to the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual

qualities of a child in foster care and how they impact their academic success.

This theoretical framework was applied to the data by providing a lens into how

foster parents viewed these needs were being meet and how the foster parents

themselves were meeting these needs of motivation (Finkelstein, Wamsley, &

Miranda,2002).

     When looking at Maslow's theory to examine the constraints of foster

parents when it comes to engaging with the educational needs of children in

foster care. Foster parents believe that their primary responsibility is to take children to medical appointments and provide updates to case workers (Gerber, & Dicker 2005). Foster parents' role are beginning to change to encompass the whole child, however, there is still a long way to go (Rhodes, Orme & Buehler, 2001; Pecora, Le Prohn & Nasuti, 1999). A). Many foster parents do not feel a part of the collaborative team that encompasses meeting the needs of children in foster care. Many foster parents' authority is undermined when the child is only placed in their home for a short period of time (Gerber, & Dicker 2005), disrupting their ability to establish and ensure that the child's physiological, safety, love and belonging needs are met. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1967) when a child does not believe that their physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs have been met they have a difficult time engaging in academics. Through training, patience, stability and love the constraints of foster parents when engaging in the educational needs of children in foster care will be more obtainable. I believe we must look at the child as a whole, however social factors also play a part in the ability of foster parents to engage in the educational needs of children in foster care.

Ecological Systems Theory

The other theoretical framework that will also be used in this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977) provides a rich understanding of how different aspects of the child's environmental interactions influence and shape their development.

Individuals are seen as developing within a complex system of multiple

relationships. The multiple relationships include, but are not limited to, school,

community, teachers, parents and government. An individual is ultimately

affected by each environment within the ecological system to which they are

exposed directly and indirectly. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory

(1977) provides a look at the social system that work together to influence the

development of the individual child. Bronfenbrenner states that each of the five

systems work together to influence a child's development. The systems may all

affect the child directly or indirectly. Children in foster care are exposed to

multiple relationships within the ecological system, both directly and indirectly.

Bronfenbrenner suggests that an individual's development is a reflection of the

multiple systems working together. According to Bronfenbrenner (1990), the

ecological system is broken down into five systems:

　　　　1. Microsystem - The microsystem amounts to the set of interactions and

relationships that children have with their immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000).

It includes the school, community, the family environment neighborhood, and

peers. The environment can be seen within social roles and interpersonal

relationships. The microsystem is a very important part of the child's

development. The microsystem are the child's immediate social interactions

such as school, family, church, child welfare agency and community. A child will

encounter these social interactions on a consistent basis. The foster parent is

considered a part of the microsystem (Bruska, 2008). The microsystem has the most direct influence over a child's development.

2. Mesosystem - This is the system of connections between the structures of the child's microsystem (Berk, 2000). The mesosystem encompasses a variety of microsystems. The mesosystem examines the interactions between two or more microsystems, such as the foster parent and the school. An example would be the connection children that are linked and interconnect to their teachers and foster and/or biological parents.

3. Ecosystem - This system refers to the larger social system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although children might not be aware of being directly involved in it, they could easily be affected by it. Children in foster care are impacted by the ecosystem on a daily basis. External environments for a child in foster care include, but are not limited to, the foster care agencies, and court system. Individuals are often affected by the system, either directly or indirectly. The ecosystem is the linkage between two or more systems (Berry, 1995). The ecosystem is the system that has the potential to affect a child directly or indirectly. For a foster child, it typically encompasses the court, judge and child welfare system. The ecosystem has an ability to affect a child directly if a judge orders a child to be placed with their sibling(s). This will cause a child to be removed from their current placement and requires them to change placement. Ecosystem is the system in which the foster care reimbursements are rooted.

4. Macrosystem – The macrosystem encompasses the values, customs and laws within a community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem is the laws, customs and traditions of a society in which the foster child is developing. This system includes the legislation and the changes in legislation over the years regarding education. When looking at the macrosystem, we often look at the socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity in which the child is growing up (Berry,1995). An example for a child in foster care would be the change in monetary compensation that a foster parent receives to care for a child placed in their home.

5. Chronosystem - The chronosystem involves the dimension of time. This system focuses on transitions over time and how they affect the overall development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It examines the foster child's changes over time and the effects of those changes.

As children continue to develop and grow, there is a strong correlation that they will react differently to environmental influences and/or changes. Examples would be puberty, a death, moving and starting school. The chronosystem provides a better understanding of how these changes will affect and influence development. An example of a transition for a child in foster care would be a change in residential placement. When a child changes residence a change in school placement often results.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that the family setting, or microsystem, in which a child lives, is the prime environment for development to take place;

however, it is not the only environment. Bruskas (2010) states, "that in the

microsystem for children in foster care it includes actual or perceived loss of

family" (p. 233). This ultimately affects a child's ability to develop a parent-child

attachment, which ultimately has the potential to negatively affect a child's

development (Bruskas, 2010). Other microsystems in which a child's

development is influenced include school. The collective term for the relationship

among these microsystems is the mesosystem. Development is enhanced if the

relationships in one microsystem support the relationships in another.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) states that, parental involvement in a child's education

can be conceived of as one mesosystem promoting the idea of development.

The primary system, or the microsystem, shows the connections and interactions

between children and their immediate social environment. Bronfenbrenner

suggested that the microsystem level should also be considered as the child's

primary behavioral setting, based on how the child perceives and interprets their

interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem contains social

influences that are the basis for the laws, customs, and central norms of society

as a whole. An example of a macrosystem's influence on the microsystem would

be governmental funding for foster parents.

  According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), children are affected by their

environment. The first two systems were of particular importance in this study.

The micro system, the first layer, centers on the child's immediate environment.

This includes the child's parents; whether biological or foster, teachers, friends,

and extended family. Individuals and systems in every layer have a direct impact on the child's development. Parents and foster parents play an important role in children's immediate environment and, therefore, parents have a large role to play in how the child performs in all areas of life. This theory reflects the fact that, foster parents play a major role in the development of a foster child's overall development. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory also provided a lens that focuses on how poverty and other stressors families may face would impact the child's overall development. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecosystem focuses on three particular processes, parent work environments, social interactions, and the community where the child and family currently reside. All of these systems are examined by looking at the challenges for a child and family that may affect them in an indirect and direct way.

The foster parents are the primary care takers of children in foster care however many believe that their primary responsibility is to take children to doctor's appointments and provide case workers with an update regarding the progress of their foster child. Many foster parents believe that they are inadequately trained to deal with the educational needs of children in foster care. However, the interaction between the foster parent and school personnel often provides a disconnect between the academic achievement of children in foster care. Epstein (2005) indicates that parents and primary caregivers play a big role in the educational success of children in foster care. When communication

and a visible relationship between schools and parents are present, it provides a clear set of expectations for the child and the foster parent.

Foster parents play a role in a foster child's immediate environment. Foster parents are a major part of a child's development. However very little research has been done on foster parent's views and perceptions regarding the foster care system in regards to meeting the educational needs of children in foster care.

Currently, there are numerous studies examining the influence of the family or microsystem on the non-foster child's performance and behavior in school but little has been done with children in foster care (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Need for Study

Children in foster care constitute a particularly vulnerable group, who are known to have high rates of mental health, educational, and emotional problems as well as limited access to services on their own. Foster parents play an important role to the academic success of children in foster care. The lack of research regarding their foster parent's role within education is every evident. Although an overabundance of research has been conducted in the area of foster children's experience while in foster care, the aging out process of foster care, and foster youth poor outcomes, very few studies have been conducted regarding the perspective of the primary caregiver, which is the foster parent

(Courtney et al., 2001, Courtney et al., 2005, Courtney et al., 2011; Courtney, Courtney, M. E. & Dworsky, 2006).

Just like biological parents, foster parents have the potential to make a positive difference in the academic needs of a child.

The focus of this study will be to address the following questions from the perspective of foster parents:

1) How and in what ways do foster parents perceive what contributes to the academic success foster children achieve?

    a. What do foster parents believe contributes to their foster children's academic progress and academic success?

    b. What do foster parents believe inhibits their foster children's academic progress?

The purpose of this study is to investigate foster parents' perceptions of the factors affecting foster children's academic successes and failures, as well as their perceptions of their role within the educational system and foster parents' perceptions of their impact on foster's children's academic success and failure. The study will inquire into the types of educational services that promise to improve the educational achievement of children in foster care.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter describes in detail how the study was designed and conducted. It provides a description of the purpose, the process of selecting participants, research questions, research design, participant recruitment and participant confidentiality procedures for conducting interviews of the participants and for analyzing the collected data. It will also provide a rationale for the use of qualitative design.

This study examines the educational perceptions of foster parents when caring for children in foster care. As a qualitative study, it is designed to explore the research questions by focusing on what makes a difference in foster parents' educational perceptions by looking through the lens of Maslow's theory of motivation, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore foster parents' perceptions of their role within the educational system and of their impact on foster children's academic achievement. As mentioned in chapter two, such information about their foster children's educational experiences and outcomes is scarce (Tideman, Vinnerljung, Hintze, & Isaksson, 2011; Chambers, & Palmer, 2010). This study seeks to contribute to filling this apparent gap in the academic record.

The literature regarding children in foster care's academic achievements tends to find problems by focusing primarily on children's failures within the educational system, and within foster parents' perspectives on the education system in regards to foster children placed within their homes. It also focuses on the problems that children experience while in foster care (Courtney et al., 2001). A review of the literature, as outlined in chapter two, found a gap regarding the focus on the foster parents' perspective of the education system in regards to foster children placed in their home (Courtney et al., 2001). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to obtain the foster parents' perceptions regarding the education system.

Research Questions

This qualitative study is designed to explore the research question by interviewing foster parents on their perceptions of the educational experience of children foster care. A qualitative approach was used to gather data for this study. Qualitative research has the advantage of enabling the researcher to grasp the individual's perspective and perceptions on the topic with more depth than a quantitative study (Seidman, 2013). In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with identified foster parents within Southern California's Inland Empire. Open-ended questions were used to allow individuals to respond in their own words and to provide as much detail as possible. Eight research questions guided the data collection and inquiry process: two overarching questions and

three sub questions. The focus of this study will be to address the following questions from the perspective of foster parents:

1. How and in what ways do foster parents perceive what contributes to the academic success foster children achieve? What do foster parents believe contributes to their foster children's academic progress and academic success?

2. What do foster parents believe inhibits their foster children's academic progress?

These questions are designed to gain access to and develop knowledge regarding foster parents' views and perceptions about the education system and to develop or build an educational theory based on raw data (Patton, 2002)

Design of the Study

In line with a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into foster parents' thoughts and perceptions of how the education system was addressing the academic needs of foster children within their homes. The interview method provided the ability for participants to generously and openly answer questions without the limitation of writing (Seidman, 1991). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research provides the opportunity to develop a better understanding about any phenomenon about which very limited information is known. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as, "an inquiry process of understanding based on

distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human

problem" (p.15). Through a qualitative research method, the researcher was

able to generate an analysis of the words used, changes in intonation in voice,

stuttering, and hesitations of each participant. This research design also

employed a pre-interview survey in addition to the semi-structured face-to-face

interviews, designed to gather demographic data. The interviews focused on the

foster parents' perceptions of children in foster care and their experiences in

regards to academic achievement for children within their homes. Interview

questions were very open and broad, so follow-up probing questions were used

to encourage participants to personalize, reflect and expand upon their

responses, if and when appropriate. Interviews were conducted with multiple

foster parents to minimize the concern for bias and increase internal validity.

Data Collection

Participants

The sample included eight therapeutic foster parents in the Inland

Empire. The criteria for foster parent participation in the study included: (a) that

the foster parent(s) were currently fostering a child, (b) that the foster parent(s)

had completed all required training to become a foster parent (c) that the foster

parent(s) had fostered at least one current or previous school age foster child for

at least a year. If they did not meet the requirements, they would not be able to

participate in the study. A purposive sample of individuals residing in the Inland

Empire area was therefore sought. All participants were asked to participate voluntarily through phone contact acquired through the method of snowballing. I personally know a foster parent that provides services through Trinity Youth Services - an organization that trains and certifies qualified foster parents. The foster parent was asked to provide me with information needed to locate other foster parents. The recruitment tools used were flyers, given out by the researcher throughout the Inland Empire located in Southern California

Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is a method of recruiting research participants who might be interested in the study through extended associations. Using this snowball method, participants who were foster parents were identified and invited to be interviewed. Alternatively, the researcher also asked ask other participants to pass along flyers, emails, and information sheets, that contained contact information for the researcher to prevent a breach in confidentiality or an invasion of privacy.

Once selected, the participants were contacted via phone to schedule an appointment. All interviews were conducted at a convenient and comfortable location for the interview participant. Once the researcher had made contact with a potential participant and a meeting time had been determined, the researcher placed a courtesy reminder call and/or text to the participant reminding him or her of the meeting a few days before the data collection meeting took place. Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form with

the prospective participants and answered any questions the participants may have had. Consent to interview participants was obtained through telephone, email or face-to-face contact at the time of the interview. Once the informed consent forms were signed, the researcher began the interview, starting with a short reminder of what the research study was about.

<u>Interview Protocol</u>

To collect the data, the researcher developed interview questions that would allow participants to express their perceptions (see Appendix 2). The interview questions were created after a thorough review of the literature, which determined gaps. Participants were verbally instructed not to put their names on the survey and reminded that their answers would remain confidential. The participants' responses were only identified by numbers to ensure that the data was kept organized. The numbers were assigned based on the order in which they were interviewed. If additional space was needed for answers, participants were invited to use the back of the survey form. They were thanked in advance for their participation. Upon completion of this interview participants received a $5 gift card.

The interview protocol used was a semi-structured open-ended interview. The interview protocol consisted of fifteen questions asking about foster parents' experiences, while they had children in foster care in their home. The interview protocol included a brief description of the study. Questions were geared towards gaining an insight into the perceptions of foster parents about the

educational achievement of children in foster care. Following the description, the questions included in the protocol stemmed from the research questions and came from grounded theory. Data was gathered by conducting interviews using the interview instrument attached in Appendix D. Data was collected through a questionnaire containing demographic information as well as through a thirty to forty-five minute interview with each participant.

Demographic data was filled out by participants on paper before the interview began. This section included questions, such as: "How long have you been a foster parent? What is your gender? What is your ethnicity?" These questions provided an opportunity to gather information regarding the diversity of the sample. The researcher took notes on a printed copy of the interview protocol. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with identified foster parents within Southern California's Inland Empire. Semi-structured interviews were used, because they allowed the researcher to uncover rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives to inform emergent themes. The interview questions were designed to elicit not only foster parents' perceptions but also to illustrate the theoretical framework of ecological systems theory. Open-ended questions were used to allow the individuals to respond in their own words and to provide as much detail as possible. Throughout the interview the researcher also asked probing questions, where needed, to ensure the research questions were addressed. The questions were written to gain insight into foster parents' perceptions.

Interviews were audio-recorded so that the researcher could reference them later for analysis. An audio copy of the interviews was recorded to ensure accuracy and consistency of the data. The researcher transcribed each interview as close to the date of the completed interview as possible. These transcriptions were used to identify and analyze the overarching themes and experiences of foster parents. The interviewer conducted eight interviews and scheduled one interview a day.

Ethical Considerations

<u>Protection of Human Subjects</u>

The researcher verbally and in writing explained confidentiality to interview participants during the recruitment phase. This information was also reviewed as part of the interview procedure. Participants' identifying data was encrypted, and all data was kept in password-protected data storage devices, on a password-protected computer. All data will be destroyed upon completion of all aspects of the research.

The target population of this study was foster parents (adults). Consequently, the population was not considered "vulnerable". Individuals were not identified but were grouped with others to provide group results.

Ensuring and protecting the identity and confidentiality of each participant in the study was of the utmost important to the researcher. The confidentiality and emotional safety of all participants were maintained throughout the

study. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary in nature and were given the option to withdraw from the study until such time as the researcher had completed writing a draft of chapter 4. Data will be shredded within three years of the completion date. Participants were assigned a number to maintain confidentiality. Only numbers appeared on transcribed data, rather than participants' names. Interview data was safeguarded by being stored in a lockbox. All data stored on my personal computer at my residence followed the IRB Data Protocol provided by CSUSB.

Research Setting

The study was conducted through face-to-face interviews. The researcher conducted the interviews in person, in the foster parents' homes or a location convenient for the foster parent. At that time, data regarding their knowledge of educational needs and the role that each individual played in identifying, monitoring and advocating on behalf of the child was collected from the foster parent.   The interviews were conducted with foster parents throughout the Inland Empire in Southern California.

Gaining Entry

The researcher's prior knowledge of foster care and the foster care system helped her relate and engage in further conversation regarding children in foster care. One thing that was kept in mind when gaining access to research participants was to do no harm. In addition, five participants who had email addresses, were sent interview questions in advance, which gave them the ability

to look over, as well as to prepare their answers to questions. The researcher

explained the intent and purpose of the study to the foster parents verbally and in

writing, which was to understand the perceptions of foster parents regarding the

educational system.

The data collection instruments used in this study included an informed

consent form (Appendix C) and semi-structured interview protocols (Appendix D)

which were developed under grounded theory (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2013).

First, demographic information such as age, licensure, gender and years of

experience was collected to reflect the diversity of the sample. Secondly, data

was collected on foster parents' perceptions of their current involvement in the

education system in regards to foster children. Thirdly, interview data was

obtained by probing foster parents' perceptions of the relationship between

academic achievement and foster children.

Analysis of Data

The research was exploratory in nature and a constant comparative

method was used to analyze the data. Constant comparative method is the core

of qualitative analysis in the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and

Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1992). Glaser and

Strauss believe that it is important that a constant comparative method is

grounded in the data. The constant comparative method was used throughout

the research to compare experiences of each of the foster parents with one

another and to compare the foster parents' experience with the literature. The

data sources that were used to compare information were memo writing, coding,

diagrams, close reading and re-reading. As soon as more than one interview

was conducted, the interviews were compared to emerging data and also

compared with past literature. The qualitative procedures included a list of open-

ended questions in addition to some demographic questions for categorization

purposes. All interviews were transcribed for easier analysis. The researcher

compared information found from all interviews and narrowed the data down to

categories. The researcher determined themes based on the common

categories of information derived from participants' answers to the interview

questions. This method was used to provide the researcher with a more

comprehensive overview of the experiences of foster parents. According to

Patton (2002), themes are categorical in nature and patterns refer to descriptive

findings. The answers to questions were coded and gathered in graph form to

determine themes, patterns and trends. Common themes and responses were

grouped together to cover several areas: foster parenting behaviors,

experiences, opinions, and values. After examining the themes, patterns, and

trends the main themes were summarized. A demographic table and/or graph

with frequencies and percentages was generated.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness the researcher discussed with participants at

length the reason the research was being conducted and the confidentiality of the

process. The researcher hoped to create an environment in which openness and emotional safety were seen as a priority.

Validity was sought by using thick description (use of quotes from the participants), multiple interviews, and internal validity of the information in the interviews. Validity was established through the saturation of information, resulting in the participants being interviewed until an exhaustive analysis was complete and original information was no longer found amongst the participants. The emergent themes were interpreted through guided codes from the literature review and the theoretical framework. Once the interviews were transcribed, the information was uploaded to Dedoose Coding was done by Dedoose, which helped identify reoccurring words and phrases from the transcribed data. The software was used to detect patterns, common themes and trends from the foster parents.

Phenomenological Grounded Theory

Phenomenological grounded theory was chosen as a method to provide a guiding framework to further research the perceptions of foster parents. Grounded theory is the analytic process in which the researcher begins with broad field of study and allows for theory to emerge from the data (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory comes from the field of sociology. Charmaz (2008) states that grounded theory is derived from data using a constant comparative method of analysis with four stages.

The first stage is open coding. Open coding involves breaking the data down into significant concepts. The second stage is theoretical coding, which involves reassembling the significant concepts with propositions about their relationships to each other. The third stage is selective coding, which involves limiting the inquiry to only those concepts and relationships that are related to the core explanatory model. The fourth stage is sorting the theoretical memos into an outline and writing up the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Grounded theory provides the opportunity for participants to create and maintain their own reality by pursuing an in-depth understanding of the world in which they live and by developing subjective meanings of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). Grounded theory provides researchers with the opportunity to interpret a reality, dependent on the participants' portrayals of their experiences (Charmaz, 2008). Grounded theory does not seek a single, universal truth but allows the participant to tell her or his story. Grounded theory does not seek to provide a generalizable truth, but offers a set of models and hypotheses that other researchers can use as a foundation to develop similar research problems and research studies (Creswell, 2011). Through the use of grounded theory, the researcher was ultimately led to confirm emergent concepts generated from the data and account for the data through the uncovering of rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives (Seidman, 2013). This was done through finding very unique information during participant interviews and, therefore, generating a

paradigmatic view of how foster children are best served (or not best served) educationally.

Open Coding

The first phase of grounded theory analysis, known as open coding, involves identifying significant concepts in the data. Coding allows researchers to make sense of transcribed data, such as interviews. The process involves looking through the data and marking segments with codes that identify what the data can be interpreted to say (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For example, this might involve analyzing participant interviews, participant stories (written and oral), researchers' written stories and then analyzing these items into discrete incidents such as objects, events, actions, ideas, and so on. One way these items are analyzed is by comparing similarities and differences. Significant incidents are assigned labels known as codes (Charmaz 2006a; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the data are explored in order to understand and code the thoughts, ideas, actions, objects and events and meanings emerging from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Charmaz 2006a; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The objectivity of open coding lies in the identification of patterns and themes in the data and beginning to group them into categories of similar happenings, events, or objects. The themes are then explored in groups, such as: foster parenting behaviors, experiences, perceptions, opinions, and values.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

A major threat to validity in this study is its reliance on an individual to self-report. Self-report data may be vulnerable to bias, due to the fact that people report events as they recall them. Another issue may be that participants are not truly honest about what has happened. Validity may also be threatened by the participant's desire to provide the researcher with the most socially desirable responses. Another limitation of the study is that interviews will only be done in the Inland Empire a region within Southern California, rather than more widely. Participating in the study may result in foster parents becoming more involved in creating strategies to improve foster children's academic achievement. Foster parents were able to recount the events that have led to greater academic achievement. It has the potential of empowering foster parents through collaboration and motivation to follow through with ideas that help foster children be successful.

Transcription Conventions

Transcription conventions depict the way in which audio data gathered from qualitative research is transcribed into written form for thorough evaluation. Qualitative studies often collect audio data. The way in which audio data is represented is the first step toward analyzing data. In the following paragraph, I will explain the way in which the data was transcribed to depict the accuracy of the interview. Comments or questions by the researcher were labeled by typing

R: at the left margin and then indenting the question or comment. Any comments or responses from the participants were labeled with a P: at the left margin with the response indented. Nonverbal sounds not coming from the researcher or participant were excluded. When the researcher or participant mispronounced words, these words were transcribed as the individual said them. The transcript was not altered in any way by removing foul language, slang, grammatical errors or misuse of words or concepts. Voiced pauses (such as "um" and "er") were not included in the transcript in order to enhance readability. When the participants used their own name during the interview, the name was replaced by the participant's identification label. When the participant provided other individual's names, locations, and organizations, the information was replaced with a generalized grouping. Three dots indicated moments of silence lasting longer than three seconds. Lastly, the participants' words were inclusive of all spelling and grammar errors. The overall intention was to ensure that authenticity of the participants' statements remained paramount throughout the research. The word (sic) was added to reflect the fact that there was an error within the statement.

<center>Dissemination</center>

The results of this study were made available to all participants after the completion of the study upon request. In addition, this study will be part of the researcher's doctoral dissertation and also could be part of further publications. I anticipate that the information will be a valuable resource to the foster care

community. This research will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals and conferences for presentation.

Summary

This chapter provided an insight into the researcher's methods of research and the process through which the data was gathered and analyzed. The study was guided by three research questions. Through the use of qualitative methodology this study provided a glimpse into the education system as it was experienced by children in foster care from the perceptions of their primary caregiver, the foster parent. Many children in the United States are entering foster care each and every day (Baker & Place, 2005). While there is extensive literature on children in foster care, very few studies examine the foster parents' perspective. This chapter discussed the methods of the study and the researcher's role. This qualitative research study used grounded theory for data analysis, which provided a better understanding of foster parents' perceptions of the education system. In the following chapters, the research will address the findings of the study, discuss recommendations for future research and conclude this study. The next chapter addresses the findings and analysis of the data collected in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The results in this chapter were derived from a total of eight voluntary interviews

that explored foster parents' perspectives regarding the education of those

placed within their homes. The results of the study will begin with presentation of

the demographics and the following sections will illustrate trends, patterns and

themes that emerged during the interviews. The data gathered during the

interviews varied in their extent and depth of relevant information. However, each

interview contributed significantly to the research study as a whole. It is also

important to recognize, that the data is foster parents' reports of their

perceptions, and does not include case workers', foster care children's or

teachers' reports. This resulted in a specific, rather than comprehensive, view of

the data.

The analysis of data in this research study is rooted in grounded theory.

As Creswell (1997) says, "Grounded theory provides a procedure for developing

categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial

coding), building a "story" that connects the categories (selective coding), and

ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions" (p. 150). Categories and

concepts identified in the literature that were thematically, conceptually or

theoretically similar were grouped together (Saldana, 2013).

Participant Demographic Information

The demographic data consisted of age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, primary language spoken in the home and income. The data revealed that five of the eight participants were between the ages of 35-44. Two participants were between the age of 45-54 and one participant was between the age of 55-64. A majority of the participants were females. There were seven females and one male. The participants' marital or relationship status included five married, two single, and one divorced or separated. The majority of the participants were African American. Four were African American, one was Asian American, two were Caucasian and one was Latino. The primary language spoke in the home was English for six of the participants and one participant was bilingual. The sample included three tiers of income levels before the foster care stipend. One participant's income was $15,001 to $25,000, two participants' income was $55,001 to $65,000 and five participants' income range was $75, 000 or more.

Foster Parents' Perceived Role within Education

The themes that emerged that had to do with the exploration of the role of foster parents were multi-faceted. Foster parents stressed that the children's emotional well-being was not only a factor that was important to address but it affected their academic overall well-being. Foster parents expressed that they made it a goal to ensure that the children placed in their home felt as if they were part of their family. Several parents within this study made it a point not to

address the children within their home as their foster child but as their daughter or son, niece, and so on. Many foster parents believed that this helped the foster child feel as if he or she were a part of their family.

> (Participant): I do a lot family stuff; just family fun time I do not refer to her as my foster child I refer to her as my niece by her choice I would have easily … by her choice … I would have easily called her my daughter … she was comfortable with me calling her niece because she referred to me as Auntie. We also have pictures up and all that (Participant 1, December 2016).

Foster parents often allowed the foster children to decide how they referred to the foster parent. The foster parents believed that they established a sense connection and/or family in the home, which they believed contributed to what Maslow (1967) envisioned as the third level in his hierarchy of needs. This level refers to love and belongingness. Several participants made it clear that making memories was part of ensuring that the children within their home felt as if they were part of their family. For example:

> We make memories with friends, we say I'm sorry, we make mistakes, we love a lot, we live deeply and we live life. At home, we say be nice, caring, work hard, do your best (Participant 2, January 2017).

> Treat them just like my own kids ... We do things, go places. They know what's going on. I don't lower them, or put them down and I don't call them my foster kids or anything like that (Participant 3, December 2016).

Foster parents also said that they aimed to create an atmosphere of inclusion and belonging, which they ultimately felt resulted in greater school achievement.

Foster Parent's Educational Responsibility

All the foster parents within this study defined their role within education by comparing it with the role of a biological parent. For example:

My role is to be a mom … (Participant 4, December 2016).

Several participants were able to express their role similarly but also identified actions that would result in foster parents playing an active role in the foster child's academic success.

> It would be just like my own kids going to the school, keeping contact with the teacher, making sure the child does their homework, look over their homework, they have a reading time twenty minutes or so … and that their homework is complete … whatever it is that the teacher said as far as homework, is complete and returned to the school (Participant 5, January 2017).
> .
>
> ... they know me in the district. The elementary, the junior high and the high school. I fight for them. If they told me no we can't do it. I tell them yes you can. I don't take no for an answer (Participant 8, January 2017).

It is noticeable here, as it was for others, that the position of being a

foster parent was a comparison with the role of a biological parent. From

this perspective, perhaps it was harder to think of the role of the foster

parent as distinctive, particularly in relation to education.

Encouragement

Foster parents expressed a need to ensure academic success but

participants also said that they provided the foster children in their care with

encouragement. That encouragement encompassed giving advice, guidance

and emotional support to help guide the foster children through their academic

journey. Foster parents identified that support as not only geared towards

academics but also towards their emotional wellbeing.

> At times. They sometimes doubt they are loved since they are not
> officially adopted. Lots of doubt and uncertainty (Participant 6,
> January 2017).
>
> Yes, you just have to.... remind them like... example I have one kid
> that has been beaten down so much and told that they are not
> going to amount to anything and all that stuff. So, you have to take
> all of that and once they trust you and tell you stuff. So, you have to
> take all that and iterate that they are valued, they are capable, they
> are worthy. That they can do anything they want to do and choose
> to do (Participant 5, January 2017).

Ultimately, foster parents believed that they had helped children in foster

care deal with negative stigmas regarding their placement in foster care by

providing the children in their care with a sense of safety and security. This is

represented in the second tier of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which

encompasses safety. The above examples reflect how emotional experience

can undermine a child's belief in their academic ability. The foster parents have

to continue to work with the "story of self" that children enter into their home with.

Several participants described the way that they worked on uplifting the children

in their care to ensure that they felt valued, capable and worthy. Several

participants described how this helped result in greater academic success and

ultimately feelings of capability. Foster parents believed that, if children were

comfortable within their home, they had a better opportunity of being a change

agent within the foster child's life. However, foster parents also recounted the

obstacles to being a foster parent. One participant described how she felt as she

started the foster care journey:

> They showed me a lot, when I started working with kids,
> really… really, I don't have any idea about... Nothing… Nothing.
> And I started working with my biological kids, it is so different …
> extremely different, I don't have any kind of behavior in my kids and
> I'm very surprised. I start to notice, wow they are so different …
> they are so different a lot, especially for how kids have tantrums.
> When they start to throw everything, and getting scared of us. It
> isn't easy for a kid to come into a new home, because they never
> know who is the family, how is the mom, how everything does. You
> guys come in here, because the county put you here to help you.
> Nobody can hit you, hurt you, touch you. Everything about the
> rules, we just do what we can to help you in the best way, to help,
> we can help you. Just explain the rules for the kids and everything
> will be good (Participant 5, January 2017).

Foster parents entered into foster care with a variety of backgrounds and expectations. One key to foster parent's success was patience. Many foster children have some sort of disability or have experienced abuse, which is counter to the experience of their biological children. Compassion is also vital, because children in foster care face many constraints. Oftentimes, children in foster care are naturally looking for someone to love and care for them appropriately. According to Maslow (1967) this will help a child achieve greater self-actualization, which may be expected to result in grade level success in school. Foster parents play in important role within a foster child's overall development. However, when discussing their educational rights, several foster parents expressed disappointment with the educational system. Bronfenbrenner (1990) claims that what happens in the microsystem of the parent-child relationship is critical to the child's overall development. The foster parents realized that they played an important role in how the child(ren) performed in all areas of life, including school. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), defined parental involvement as:

> "the presence of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in

school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance." (p. 4).

<center>Foster Parent's Educational Rights</center>

The concept of foster parents' educational rights emerged in several interviews in different ways. Educational rights as referred to by foster parents can be defined as the ability to make "decisions". Foster parents executed daily education-related decisions. However, generally they do not have the authority to make critical education decisions (Levine, 2005 & Gerber & Dicker, 2005). Major decisions include choice of school, special education placement, retention, and so on. On the one hand, some foster parents talked about being able to make decisions regarding school enrollment, attendance, and so on. On the other hand, several foster parents felt as if their educational rights as a foster parent were limited, particularly when biological parents still held educational rights.

> With the biological parent still holding the educational right I can go in as a liaison for them as a foster parent. We don't have that much to say so, so everything has to go through the biological parent unless parental rights have not been terminated and they still hold educational rights … so for me I mean I don't particularly care for the way that the system is written as far as the rights of a foster parent and in lieu of a foster child and their educational if they have an IEP or what not … but I can request … but I have had other parents tell us we did not need an IEP so it was stopped there or it would hold up (Participant 3, December 2016)..

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I said to get the social worker involved to facilitate when they go to preschool … to the public school in the district you have to have educational rights and … sometimes you don't always want to but you have to. We were granted them but it's not always the case (Participant 1, December 2016).

Multiple foster parents, therefore, did not take an active role in making educational decisions, even some minor ones, until they were granted educational rights. One foster parent articulated that when a child is not meeting grade level standards, their goal is to obtain educational rights for the child to ensure that the best decisions are being made for the interests of the child.

As a teacher, I have a different perspective in this department. I want all children in my care to be successful. Sometimes I get a child that is very behind and I know that they should be a grade below. So, you wait to be granted educational rights and you make decisions (Participant 6, January 2017).

One participant said that she has never encountered a problem getting the children the necessary services that were required and that included enrolling the child(ren) in special education services, even with not being granted education rights.

I enrolled the little boy in special education. When he comes to my home I try to enroll him in regular school but in regular school I had to explain everything about him because he has hard behavior, lot of traumas, inappropriate sexual behavior and then she gave me an

evaluation … a test. Different test different evaluation and she told he needs to stay in a special program … cannot stay in regular school for now (Participant 2, January 2017).

Currently the law states that biological parents maintain the educational rights of the child while in foster care, unless the rights have been terminated or the court has made a decision to limit their educational rights. Throughout the study, foster parents reported different experiences, when making educational decisions for the children in their care. Many foster parents experienced frustration, while others experienced the implementation in practice of their educational rights. Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem assigns conceptually (rather than legally) the educational rights of foster parents. The foster parents' inability to make major educational decisions can affect the development of a child. This development can ultimately be hindered, when the child does not receive the educational services they are entitled to and eligible for.

Foster Children's Education

Throughout the interviews, foster parents provided an overall depiction of the foster children's educational experience from their perception. The foster children's education was divided into four sub-codes to represent this category of responses. The sub-codes included teacher recommendation/implementation, school enrollment, academic resources/extracurricular activities and constraints.

<u>Enrolling Foster Child in School</u>

School enrollment typically takes place immediately after a child is placed within the foster home. All participants said that, when they enrolled foster children in school, they did not experience any issues.

> Not, typically. The district has to legally enroll. But sometimes you get a foster child during the middle of the year and for some reason the placement papers haven't made its way to me so that I may enroll them (Participant 4, December 2016).

> No. All they needed was, the paper work, to prove that I am the foster parent. They didn't give me no hassle, no problems, no nothing. I just showed them my paperwork and that was it (Participant 1, December 2016).

Several foster parents indicated that, although they had not encountered any issues when enrolling the child in foster care, on the other hand, after the enrollment process was completed, many were faced with other problems related to the current school receiving paperwork in a timely manner.

> Like ... my concern [name] that is in school ed, well I had no clue she was special ed when I first got her. When they got her records from the prior school, they were like oh that is why she is struggling, because we have her in the wrong class. So, what they did was ... so I got her when she was in the fifth grade ... So, what they did was instead of taking her out and putting her in the special education class ... they left her there but brought in an aide for her and work with her. I was like why would you do that now? She came at the end of the year in April, why would you change her

now when it's only a month left in school? We did the IEP for the
next school year (Participant 5, January 2017).

After a change of placement has occurred, although the school district is

required to have a foster child continue to attend the school of enrollment,

change of placement often results in change of school. This further complicates

enrollment, which results in problems transferring records and credits.

> Yes, in regards to getting the paperwork from one school to a new
> school there seems to be a wait period there … there appears to be
> confusion if you do not have up-to-date shot record you cannot ...
> you can because they're foster care, they have to take the child and
> enroll the child in school but there seems to be some red tape
> there, because you always have for documentation when enrolling
> a child. So, the answer is yes some hiccups there. By red tape ...
> I'll go to enroll the child in school but I'll always get privy to ... as an
> academic stronghold or weakness in a child, because of the
> confidentiality thing, and then if we try to call the other school they
> don't wanna give the information to me ... And you have to get a
> social worker with their letterhead to fax, and I get the privacy but I
> think they can tweak it a little bit better than what they do
> (Participant 3, December 2016).

When the foster child's current school of enrollment does not receive

paperwork, it may result in the child not receiving the proper educational

services. The foster parents gave examples of what happened when the school

did not receive adequate paperwork. The child did not receive the proper

resources to be successful in school. This, in turn, hindered their progress.

Research shows that when children in foster care transfer schools, they often fall

behind three to six months academically (Levine, 2005; Gerber & Dicker, 2005).

Foster parents are stating that they desire more rights and responsibilities to ensure that the foster child's paperwork is received in a timely manner.

How Foster Parents Implemented Teacher Recommendations

All participants identified teachers as the primary source of information and resources. Teachers provided foster parents with ideas to assist the foster child at home. Foster parents reported themselves very diligently implementing those recommendations.

> Yes. You know what, I like both of the teachers … they are very open they are very honest, they explain what their expectations from the child, each child was. If they had any issues, we will start addressing those issues at that time (Participant 1, December 2016).

All foster parents indicated information received during parent-teacher conferences was useful.

> Yes, in the conference meeting the teacher talked to me about how my boy is doing in the classroom, how his behavior, how is his academic and his points in reading and writing or in everything and what to expect for the future. What he has to finish his book and his test on the computer and tested (Participant 8, January 2017).

Several stated that during parent-teacher conferences that the outcome was always positive.

Oh, yes, yes. The parent teacher conferences have been good.
Very good (Participant 4, December 2016).

Several participants identified the teacher as the most resourceful

individual while working with foster children. The teacher was the main source of

information regarding the foster child.

We have a great first grade teacher here that is very supportive.
She herself has a son who has ADHD and she always is
accommodating and patient with my two children that she has
taught. She picks up on their cues and is able to manage varying
behaviors effectively (Participant 8, January 2017).

One foster parent indicated that through the teacher's personal experience

with her own son, she was able to manage challenging behaviors more

effectively and efficiently when dealing with foster children in her classroom.

Yes, yes … the teacher gives me academy program. The teacher
told me you can work with [name] in this kind of program ... you can
use the computer and do that ... you can read to him twenty to thirty
minutes every night and then ask questions to him about the
reading time ... different things ... put some prize for him if he does
reading or does his letters or colors very well (Participant 2,
January 2017).

The teacher not only provided resources but also ways to implement those

resources. Foster parents within this study were instrumental in, not only

remembering what the recommendations from the teacher were, but also in

implementing the recommendations. The teacher and the foster parents both

collaborated to ensure the success of the children within their care.

Collaboration between the foster parent and teacher was seen as a key

component to the success of the foster child.

> The teacher gave me a summary of what level she thought each child was at and made the suggestion of reading or doing math. There is a website on the computer that they do to practice their math. So, we implemented that … [name] seemed to excel, [name] was more resistant (Participant 3, December 2016).

> Yes, the teacher has provided me with ideas. Well for like my six-year-old who didn't know how to spell his name. He has a hard time just remembering what a B looks like, even though his name starts with a B. If you show him the letter he will say V or whatever. So, she … well we connect her or email her and say okay what do you think we should do for him to get certain things down. She will say just have him do, they have ... Ten Steps to Brilliance … she will say just have him do it a little bit more … instead of him having him write his name, maybe he will retain that but we couldn't get him to ... well it wouldn't come up on the tablet but it would come up on the desktop but he doesn't get the click the mouse thing, so that is how far behind he is. But he will make progress (Participant 7, January 2017).

Two foster parents identified the school as a whole as providing the most

resources to the children in her care. Nevertheless, one foster parent believed

that the support from the school as a whole was long overdue.

> Yes, the school can help when they have problems. Send notes, the school has a lot resources to help the kids, if the kids want it.

But sometimes if they refuse. They give everything for the kids to help them but sometimes, they have mental … If I put you thirty minutes and you start to cry. If I take out the privilege and you continue to refuse to read. I can't really work with them, because it builds up stress. And the school they try to do their best but it is not easy sometimes (Participant 2, January 2017).

This story appeals as an example of collaboration. Through this collaboration over an educational challenge between the teacher and the foster parent, followed by ongoing attempted implementation from the foster parent, the foster parent was able to identify that the child had been unable to complete the task the teacher had assigned. Together, they continued to generate new responses. This had resulted in a collaborative relationship that was imperative to the success of the child. Parent-teacher collaboration is one example of this microsystem at work.

I had a meeting at the school. The experience was very good actually … it was a two-hour meeting … we went over all the needs that the child needed. We had the special ed teacher in there, we had her teacher, the principal, psychologist in there, so it was a very good experience. They are getting down to the wire for her finally ... finally (Participant 7, January 2017).

Overall, the data suggest that, in the present study, schools and teachers were being used by foster parents as a collaborative resource. Foster parents spoke of being provided with many opportunities to contribute to their children's education. One dynamic of collaboration throughout the study can be defined as

the foster parent and the school providing information to one another, assisting children in foster care and working toward a common goal that ultimately results in the success of the child in foster care.

The Benefits of Foster Parents' Engagement

Within the data, the concept of foster parent engagement emerged in most interviews, in different capacities. Foster parents ultimately believed that it was important to be part of their foster children's education.

> You have to know where to meet the kids, how to engage the kids, and how to meet their own educational goal (Participant 1, December 2016).

One foster parent expressed that her continual engagement within the foster child's academic journey has resulted in her being a visible entity on the school campus.

> Everything actually ... they know me in the district. The elementary, the junior high and the high school. I fight for them. If they told me, no we can't do it. I tell them yes you can. I don't take no for an answer (Participant 3, December 2016).

When foster parents are engaged in the foster child's education they are as seen as one of the child's biggest advocates. As mentioned above, the foster

parent was not willing to take no for an answer, especially when she knew that

the services and resources could be provided to the child.

> The teacher gives her tools; we use tools around here. We let her use the tablet to use different ways. When I say, she does not even know her times table. We are really working hard. You just have to know (Participant 4, December 2016).

> Yes, Yes … the teacher gives me academy program. The teacher told me you can work with [name] in this kind of program ... you can use the computer and do that ... you can read to him twenty to thirty minutes every night and then ask questions to him about the reading time ... different things ... put some prize for him if he does reading or does his letters or colors very well (Participant 1, December 2016).

> The program that the school has set forth for them and then they bring you home so I am really assuming that they are getting what they need at the school. And then trickle down home with the homework and the back up from me (Participant 8, January 2017).

The above examples were examples of the ways in which

collaboration was a key component within the educational success of

children in foster care.

Research shows that when biological parents are engaged in their

child's academic achievement, children generally achieve better grades,

standardized test scores, and increased attendance rates, consistently

completed their homework, had better self-esteem, were more self-

disciplined, and show higher aspirations and stronger motivation for

schoolwork (Epstein, 2002). The present study found that foster parents

believed that their engagement was instrumental to their foster child's

success. Overall, the data suggest that foster parents believe they have

the capability to be involved in the foster child's educational journey

<u>Foster Parent's Expectations</u>

In the present study, the concept of "foster parent's expectations" was

coded when participants were able to articulate what they envisioned for the

children in their care. This concern emerged in all interviews. Several

participants articulated that they had expectations for foster children similar to

those of their biological children. The foster parents expected them to get good

grades in school, to try their best, to exhibit their best behavior at school, and to

have a successful career after graduating from high school.

My kids know that they are expected to behave and perform well at
my school. They sometimes get in trouble for outbursts but mostly
minor (Participant 3, December 2016).

I expect all my children to perform in the 70th to 80th percentile in
their grade level. But this expectation is directly related to what my
children have shown me that they are capable of handling
(Participant 6, January 2017).

This foster parent stated that children in his care must perform within the

70th to 80th percentile. These were high expectations for the foster children but at

least they did not indicate an expectation of an educational deficit. However, there was a clear variation in such expectations.

> For me ... I have always been a B or better as far as grades, as a mother of six of my own biological, I have learned that for each child is different. My mindset is that you do your best if you are a C child, I have no tolerance for a D. That is just me but I am pushing her to do ... right now she wants to go in and do what is it called she wants to go to do something with the psychology of behavior so she is looking to go to college, before she wasn't ready to do anything (Participant 7, January 2017).

This foster parent's expectations for her foster children seemed to be influenced by her own educational achievements. By contrast, the following foster parent was a little more relaxed and open-ended about her expectations for performance at school by foster children.

> I want to make sure that they're meeting at least basic standards ... I want to make sure that they're receiving of all the support that they need in order to be successful in the classroom. And if they do require special education services and seek that out (Participant 4, December 2016).

Another foster parent responded in terms of overall educational goals, rather than in the more immediate terms of school performance.

> (Participant): My expectation is that they ... finish high school and go to college. If no, then finish high school and get a job and be

good for the community, that's what I want. Maybe some can finish college and have a good career or profession ... maybe others no. My goal or wish for everyone is to at least be good for the community. And have a family … to have a family and have good things for his sons, for his kids, for his family (Participant 4, December 2016).

Foster parents were very clear when articulating their expectations for children in foster care. Foster parents provided both current and/or future expectations as it related to the children in their care. Since there exists evidence of the importance of teacher expectations (Sorhagen, 2013; Calarco, 2013), it is reasonable to assume that foster parent expectations might also have an impact on foster children's educational progress.

Academic Resources/Extracurricular Activities

The next theme that emerged from the interviews was access to academic resources and extracurricular activities. The academic resources and extracurricular activities used by children in foster care varied. However, the academic resources and extracurricular activities were sought after by the foster parents and primarily provided by the school of attendance.

The school has the resources to help all the kids and every kids and different kinds of kids (Participant 2, January 2017).

Yes, well they get it. Well the academic resources for my kids are given to them at the school (Participant 5, January 2017).

Yes, they were in Think Together through the school ... the agency didn't really have a program they could become involved in. It was basically me having to apply for extra extracurricular activities. The tutoring, no they didn't have it (Participant 1, December 2016).

Think Together (2017) is an after-school resource provided to all students, including those not in foster care. This participant believed that children in foster care should be provided with priority when enrolling in this program, because it provided a quality educational, recreational and social program that children in foster care critically needed. After school programs through the school not only provided quality educational, recreational and social opportunities but also enabled a child to be exposed to different activities and individuals within the community. After school programs provided students with community-driven and expanded learning opportunities that supported educational success, which foster parents reported were essential to children in foster care. Extracurricular activities not offered through the school also could also expand the foster child's ability to explore community activities.

(Participant): For extracurricular activities like sports and things like that, I just find things myself and my community, I don't think they offered things like that type of stuff through the county. Like the camps and stuff like that I never find out about it. They don't tell me anything about that. I had another foster parent tell me stuff about that. So, they didn't give me any information about that type of stuff. Which I would have wanted. They don't tell you stuff (Participant 8, January 2017).

This foster parent was expressing a complaint. She was complaining about not being informed about these opportunities. The limited number of extracurricular activities was a subject of concern. Foster parents expressed that due to biological parent visits, waiting lists and time constraints it was often difficult for foster children to participate in extracurricular activities.

Several participants expressed feelings of disappointment and stress when enrolling children placed in their home in academic and extracurricular activities.

Yes. Absolutely. In some case I have to wait a while like regular parents. I tried to put my kid in after school program but I had to wait a while, because I had a waiting list and not that they are foster, that they are special I had to wait. I was a little disagree with that, because I believe they have priority as my foster kids. If I enroll him in after school but it is good for him, not that I want my foster kid to stay away from me. But because I know that at the after-school program they have more resources, my computer the kids love to play at home, I can let my kids run … play soccer or basketball … a different sport, do something with the hands, different activities … if maybe not at school maybe other programs, the county can think, and open up programs for foster kids (Participant 2, January 2017).

The extracurricular activities are kind of hard, because unfortunately how are they going to do extracurricular activities ... for example, how are they going to do basketball when they have a [parent] visit so it is kind of hard to get the kids involved when in anything … when they have a game or something like that. I would love for them to be involved in stuff. For example, I have six kids. My thing is, I would love to put them in stuff but how do you do put

them in stuff when I have a visit on this day, then I have a visit on this day and then they don't get home from until 4:30 p.m. How am I going to do anything? So, it is kinda ... yes it's there but can they do it, no. Not if their family is involved and the kids that want to do stuff their family is involved. So, that's the hard part you have to try and figure it out and that's the hard part (Participant 7, January 2017).

Foster parents expressed the importance of extracurricular activities and academic resources which many stated contributed to the success of children in foster care. However, some parents expressed the frustration they encountered such as with biological parents' visits and waiting lists. This finding indicates that foster parents believed that education was a vital part of their foster child's development. On the other hand, many foster parents believed that their authority was less than it could be.

Counseling Services for Children in Foster Care

The present study found that, according to foster parents, counseling services were the primary service used, needed and sought after by children in foster care. Such services were intended to provide children in foster care with a non-judgmental and safe environment. The overall goal of counseling is to enrich the emotional and mental health of foster children, which in turn results in an enriched overall quality of life.

(Participant): They have counselors that they meet with [name] once a week, no academic intervention (Participant 5, January 2017).

(Participant): Yes, she is a part of two core groups that deal with foster care and building self-esteem (Participant 3, December 2016).

(Participant): They get counseling, well the older one stopped … she got it for a few years, then she didn't need it anymore. Uh I just had an IEP for the little one for her special needs so she is going to start getting counseling so that was good (Participant 8, January 2017).

(Participant): Yes, they did receive counseling but one counseling session is over for the oldest and for the youngest it's just now starting up … she hasn't received the special ed services yet (Participant 7, January 2017).

Emotional and psychological issues have the potential to distract students from academic achievement. Counseling services address the esteem needs of the child and were implicitly valued by these foster parents. Within the study, counseling services were not utilized by all foster children. However, they are a major service within foster care. Foster parents identified counseling as a major source of growth within the overall well-being of the foster child.

Support/Intervention (Special Services)

This category was related to the idea of specially-designed instruction, support and services provided to students. Support and interventions provide supplemental services. which helped improve educational outcomes of children in foster care. Support and interventions included child mental health services,

special education, alternative placement and wraparound programs. These

services address the multiple needs of a foster child to be successful in school.

> My children receive as many services and resources that I
> personally advocate for. They are also exposed to many
> extracurricular activities but once again it's what I have provided for
> them and not given by county (Participant 6, January 2017).

Several foster parents indicated that they advocated for the children

in their care to receive the services that they needed to be successful.

Special Education. Special education placement was another frequently used

service by children in foster care. In the present study, children in foster care

often received personalized services that were implemented following diagnostic

reviews, foster parents' concerns, and/or teacher concerns.

> Yes, right now my oldest she received RSP support in occupational
> therapy (Participant 5, January 2017).

Resource Specialist Program (RSP) is a special education program that enables

students to be successful with thorough accommodations and modifications

provided by the teacher. Students who receive RSP services typically spend

more than fifty percent of the day in a general education setting.

> I have one kid in the special education program. The little boy and
> it helps a lot too. He starts to live with me when he is three years
> old. I enrolled him in the special education program, because he
> has inappropriate sexual behavior … we work with him a lot. With

the school and at home … we have to check him a lot and focusing him (Participant 2, January 2017).

Occupational therapy and behavior (Participant 8, January 2017).

The little boy that I have, he does have speech therapy at the school, then the other little girl that I have, she was not doing good in school with her reading, math, nothing … but now they just addressed it so she will now be getting special needs for that. She will be getting like extra help for that … I guess they will be one-on-one and then the teacher will have special ... like things that she will do with the … you know, just pull her in my smaller groups. I guess they are not going to take her fully out of the class that she's in now and put her just in the special ed class … they want to see how she's going to do in the class that she's in now with the help that they are going to give her first, because I held her back … she supposed to be in third [grade] but I held her back this year so … hopefully she'll pick up faster but with the special-needs … hopefully she will (Participant 7, January 2017).

Special education resource was another service frequently used by children in foster care. Multiple foster parents indicated that they had one or more children receiving special education services. Many foster parents stated that the special education services were a result of the child not being able to perform grade level tasks, while several other foster parents contributed special education enrollment to behavioral concerns.

Foster Parents Expressed Educational Constraints of Foster Children

Foster parents encountered many constraints when dealing with the educational needs of children of foster care.

They came to me in not so great shape … I had to hold them back but now they are getting back on track (Participant 6, January 2017).

(Participant): So my role is to make sure that they get to school, that they're meeting their educational goals, take it I have one kids that is in special education. So .... working with her, with her being in the sixth grade and she's on the second-grade level. So... I have to meet her where she is. Versus I have one kid that is a straight A student. So ... you have to know how to deal and she is something else to deal with. So, you have to know how to meet her and then make her feel like. She will say something off-the-wall so I'll take it ... [name] is literally twelve years old and does not know how to count change. She will just go spend money. I have to take her ... my mother spent two hours on New Year Day teaching her how to count money but it doesn't click, it doesn't register. So, versus her so you have to know how to ask the kids what they want to do in life and guide them in the direction they want to go, give them the educational tool they need.

A few participants expressed having felt or currently feeling stressed, while dealing with the educational needs of a foster child placed within their home with different challenges. One concept that emerged frequently was the feeling of not being considered an important stakeholder in the education of the child placed in their home.

When we handled the sit-down conference ... it was good ... They kinda reminded me that I was just a foster parent. I had to reiterate that I am her parent … I am her caregiver. I am the one who speaks life into her everyday so I look at it differently (Participant 7, January 2017).

Foster parents continued to indicate that they played a crucial role in the foster children's lives. Foster parents believed that they not only helped in the development of the educational success of a child but in the overall success of a child in their care. Another foster parent described her experience as stressful and ultimately believed that the problem was a result of the leadership or staff at the school.

> The youngest will also receive special education service after the Winter break … we just had the meeting like a week ago. So, they said they will not get started until after Winter break … so yes she will be receiving and then the little boy that I have he receives … I guess that is special needs too. Now it's been met since I had my last meeting but before it was a bit stressful. The youngest is in the second grade and can't read and can't do this. The teacher was also saying the same thing. I couldn't understand why they were not picking it up. I think it because of the administration or the principal and all this. It was a little stressful at first but now we're on track. I have had them off and on since 2011 and they have been going to the same school (Participant 8, January 2017).

The foster parent's stress seemed to bear a direct relationship to the school personnel not listening to her concerns. The foster parent believed that not only was she not taken seriously but that she was not seen as a viable resource in the foster child's education. The foster parent states that her and the teacher agreed that the child needed additional services. However, the challenge was getting others to see that the child needed additional services. Other foster parents stated one of their main concerns as equal rights for the

children placed in their homes. Several foster parents described the children in

their home exhibiting cognitive delays, physical delays or complex behaviors.

> I have two children who have bathroom challenges and we have
> been working to correct those. Another child has challenges
> engaging with his peer group. He sometimes makes choices to
> gain peer approval that seems a little immature for him (Participant
> 1, December 2016).
>
> (name) is smart … he has a delay (Participant 4, December 2016).
>
> They have their moments. The oldest one is more aggressive more
> back-talkish … has issues following direction some of the time.
> The younger one is trying to do better. She is the one that likes to
> fight at school, you have two different sides of the defense … one
> that acts at home and one that acts up at school (Participant 5,
> January 2017).

Perhaps the stresses felt by these foster parents arose because of

challenges presented by the children themselves. One foster parent indicated

that she has experienced discrimination based on the ethnicity of the child and

not based on the fact that the child was in foster care.

> Yes. I have had good and bad … more good than bad, good
> whether it be counselors, those who were even familiar with the
> foster care system or … were at that time partaking in the foster
> care outreach and then I have had some ... staff in the educational
> field that I was somewhat insensitive … did not use good verbiage
> on … the kids appear to be picked on or they felt that some were
> prejudiced you know … in nationality not so much of their status
> (Participant 7, January 2017).

Another foster parent described the experience of having a child that was

tremendously below grade level in reading and was unwilling to accept the help

that was offered to her, which ultimately led her to being further behind.

> [name] is more tries harder, she works harder, she does things to
> do and understand the reading, the math … she's more open to
> help, in the area that she needs which is math. Terrific reader.
> [name] on the other hand, is more like I don't wanna do it. I already
> know it. Fifth grader at a third-grade reading level, she says she
> understands it, and she doesn't need any help (Participant 8,
> January 2017).

One foster parent indicated that they have experienced a regression of

behavior in school and at home as a result of a biological parent's failure to

maintain a consistent role in the foster child's life.

> (Participant): The only one I really have concerns with is my
> preschooler … with him and his tantrum ... we know what they stem
> from so ... it's his biological home. Even though it seems like it's
> not affecting them children it always does. So, mom, was doing
> visit consistent and then we did a visit where the other kids ... well I
> have two and one is in one foster home and another is in another
> foster home. So well we all came together and had a nice big
> picnic at the park … it was a nice visit. Well after that mom never
> showed up again. So, he started acting up throwing traumas [sic],
> wetting the bed again ... the other one is his brother … he is the six-
> year-old … he became disruptive. Like they torn up ... like ten cars,
> the day before yesterday ... they just got them for Christmas. But
> they never had anything and the things they did have they did
> whatever they wanted to it ... before they came to me. So, they are

exhibiting those same behaviors like when I first got them so I keep telling them social workers, like hey we are digressing (Participant 4, December 2016).

Foster parents were acting as one the child's advocates but were faced with multiple constraints on meeting the educational needs of the child.

The Lack of Knowledge Regarding Foster Care Liaison

Foster care liaisons are employees of the district mandated by the State of California to ensure that the foster child is enrolled in the proper school, and records are transferred in a timely fashion.

My district has a foster liaison, which I have advocated for being a teacher in the district they attend. But I don't personally seek out assistance though I am very positive assistance would be provided if I needed it (Participant 6, January 2017).

Multiple foster parents indicated that they had never heard from a foster parent liaison employed by the school district. Many foster parents were unsure of what a foster parent liaison was. Several foster parents were under the assumption that it was the school counselor. One foster parent believed that they were contacted by the foster care liaison employed by the school district on one occasion and were invited to an event. However, the foster parent indicated that they never heard from or were contacted by the individual again.

(Participant): Yes, there was one that called through ... yes there was one that called that said there was something going on for foster children at the school. I forgot what it was but as far as activities … there was a special day just for the foster children. So, there was planned activities just for the foster children through the school. That experience was ok. He provided a chance our opportunity for us to meet other foster parents and meet the teachers and meeting, you know … having games and activities and food and things like that from the school (Participant 5, January 2017).

In this study, at least, the foster parents were not very familiar with the role of the foster care liaison and did not seem to have much contact with the person in this role.

Training

Training emerged as a topic of discussion in several interviews in different capacities. Two sub-codes were used to represent this category. The first related to the training of foster parents. The second related to the training of teachers.

Lack of Educational Training for Foster Parents

Training regarding the educational needs of foster children was something that only a few participants were able to identify. When discussing training, many foster parents addressed the non-educational training that was required of them.

Several foster parents indicated that they did not receive training regarding

educational needs.

> We have to do so many hours of training where we feel our needs
> are at. Some of the trainings in the beginning, was very briefly.
> Like with some of the issues that the kids may have or you know
> those type of things. You don't necessarily know if those were
> helpful … just because nothing prepares you. As we have the
> children and figure out what the needs were other than that ... YES!
> It was very beneficial and it was a wide range of training from you
> know the time that we need … (Participant 4, December 2016).

> No training for educational needs. Training is basically for meeting
> emotional and physical needs (Participant 8, January 2017).

> No not really. In regards to the education (Participant 1, December
> 2016).

> They didn't tell me anything about their education (Participant 5,
> January 2017).

> We received or were told what to expect from children in foster
> care. Some of the attachment issues that they may have. For
> those that were pre-exposed to drugs, what types of behavior they
> exhibit. They didn't cover a lot of the educational piece with us but it
> would have been helpful (Participant 3, December 2016).

> How was he with a special behavior ... how working with ...
> [children that] have bipolar or ADHD or post-traumatic stress
> disorder or schizophrenia something. When the kids have abuse
> … emotional abuse, neglect. In six years, I take a lot of classes
> with my husband every year (Participant 7, January 2017).

Several foster parents acknowledged that the training they had received

was in regards to foster child's psychological, physical and/or social well-being.

Other foster parents stated that there did not seem to be much emphasis on

children's educational needs. While other foster parents indicated that it was

intertwined in their yearly training.

> I am required to have 18-20 hours annually (Participant 5, January
> 2017).

> I had to do twelve hours a year for my agency and I can take
> different classes (Participant 8, January 2017).

Only one foster parent stated that they received training regarding the

educational needs that was useful when dealing with children in foster care.

> It was quite knowledgeable but it always contingent on doing the
> presentation but each time I mean … I walked away with some
> knowledge or something was added to whatever knowledge I
> preview … previously had … so yes I would say it was helpful
> (Participant 3, December 2016).

One foster parent indicated that they received training related to the

educational needs of children in foster care, however the training was not

beneficial. The foster parent went on to state that the most useful training in

regards to the educational needs of children in foster care was the "hands-on"

experience that they received on a daily basis.

Yes, basically you receive this training ... but ... how can I put … it is just not going to college and they give you all this book stuff but really you have to use real life, because it doesn't necessarily apply to all kids (Participant 7, January 2017).

One foster parent believed that the training was more reactive than proactive when addressing the needs of children in foster care.

The training that they give you is ... okay, I mean ... I am still learning stuff I no idea. I mean I'm still learning stuff. I mean you have no clue that your supposed to do something until something happens ... so ... I work for the state and to me the state is reactive instead of proactive. To me that is how the foster care system is as well. The training that [they] give you it is what it is … You take it, you use it but everything they give you is basically reactive instead of proactive until something happens. For example, I had a situation I had to fix just yesterday but I had no clue that I was supposed to do certain things and you don't find out stuff until something happens. It was a bad thing but it could have turned into something bad. So, my thing is, they need to lay out everything. They need to give you a big gigantic manual if they have to and say this is what you need to do. You should be able to go to something and know what to do. But it is not like that. Overall, I think the training was helpful … don't get me wrong. I just think there is always room for improvement (Participant 3, December 2016).

Overall, the data suggested that in the present study foster parents believed that education was extremely important, however they did not feel prepared to handle the educational challenges that children in foster care faced on a daily basis. Foster parents expressed concern about the visible disconnect between the educational system and the foster care agency when dealing with

training foster parents to adequately meet the educational needs of children in foster care.

Lack of Teacher Training Regarding Foster Children

Teacher training was a concept that also regularly emerged from current foster parents in the interviews. Although they had seen teachers as their biggest avenue of support, there was a concern regarding teachers being trained to fully handle the magnitude of issues, when dealing with children in foster care.

> But some teachers tell me that my kids are hard to manage or don't listen or are difficult. I've asked them to tell me how their behaviors differ from that of other "challenging" students and they can't really give me an answer (Participant 5, January 2017).

Within the study, two foster parents' primary occupation was within the education field. Both foster parents expressed some form of dissatisfaction within the education as it relates to their occupation:

> I am my children's best advocate. I have found that teachers are not trained to effectively cope with challenges for foster youth (Participant 6, January 2017).

> No but in my past experiences I have had kids who were in the foster care system and I think that more communication [with] social worker would've been helpful. I did have a student that had extreme behavior issues, he had ADHD and so he also had wrap around to you … I think that in terms of getting more info and a lot of it is confidential so I understand because now I've been a part of the foster care system but at the time I wish I had more information so I could help my student (Participant 8, January 2017).

Although the teachers were seen as the primary source of support for foster parents, several foster parents believed that teachers were not adequately trained to deal with the abundance of issues that were associated with children in foster care. Foster parents who were teachers felt that they did not have all the resources needed to truly meet the needs of the child.

Social Worker Involvement

A majority of the foster parents stated that they spoke to either a county social worker or an agency social worker regarding the child's academic progress at least once a month. There was also variability within participants:

> OK well educationally ... you speak with the county social worker once a month. That is if you are with the county. I think they come out once a week but I am with an agency so I see the county social worker once a month but I see my agency social worker once a week. We also discuss school, what is going on with them, what we need to do to help them all that good stuff. They will bring up the discussion. I had to notify them that my preschooler got kicked out of preschool. Because I got him at the age that I got him I am able to mold him a little bit more than the … let's say the fourteen-year-old that I had that did not care about school. The four-year-old is going to progress (Participant 1, December 2016).

Another participant articulated that their current social worker was a huge advocate for education, which had resulted in the child placed in her home having access to more services and resources.

I just recently changed agencies. I have been with them three to four months. My current agency I was with them for I don't know maybe 23 years 24 years but my current worker because she's really big on education. She's really … really big on education, so she is all about hands-on life experience as far as checking account and email to different colleges up north (Participant 7, January 2017).

Social Worker Relationship with Foster Parent

Most participants identified their social worker as an individual source of support. However, two participants noted that their worker or other workers at their agency were busy and, therefore, sometimes difficult to access.

I always communicate my educational concerns for my foster children. I have been granted educational rights and have never been challenged in the choices I make. My county workers respect my professional opinion and we have a great working relationship (Participant 6, January 2017).

(Participant): Me and the social worker were going back and forth yesterday. It's not my job for certain stuff that the social worker should have done before and now you want to put it on me. No, and I got up this morning and did the job anyway, because I need to make some stuff happen. These social workers, I know they are overwhelmed and all of that but when you place a kid you should place them with everything that's needed so that the foster parent does not have to go through a gang of drama and that is the bad part about it. I have been calling this social worker since before Christmas it's now almost a month later and I still haven't heard from her ... but I got what I needed this morning, because I just ... like I have told her I have done my due diligence you cannot place this on me. I told you and I have told her what I need and it has not happened, but I told her since you want to put it on me it's okay … I

will make it happen … don't worry about it and I did (Participant 4, December 2016).

I was letting the county social worker know all the time and I I didn't really like my social worker. I had mixed feelings about her but I did let her know that this is for the little girl and she had special needs. She didn't really help me too much. I had to take care of it on my own she didn't do nothing. She did not ask me about her educational needs. I voluntarily told her (Participant 5, January 2017).

There appeared to be a clear correlation between individuals that had a healthy relationship with their social worker and individuals who did not. Individuals that had a healthy relationship with their social worker were able to ensure that the educational needs of children in their care were a priority. On the other hand, foster parents that did not have a healthy relationship with their social worker struggled to obtain educational support from the child's social worker.

Conclusion

The foster care system is a very complex system. Foster parents play a unique and important role in the lives of foster children. Foster parents have the ability to impact several arenas of a foster child's life, including education. They often view themselves as important entities in the foster child's educational development. However, they believe that partnerships with the educational and social services systems are flawed and often inhibit the educational progress of children in foster care. Those issues included lack of adequate and sufficient

training received by teachers and foster parents regarding the educational

dynamics of children in foster care; the lack of foster parent knowledge regarding

district mandated foster parent liaisons and factors that inhibit foster parent

collaboration.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study aimed to address the gap in research within the educational field of children in foster care. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to explore the subjective experiences and perspective of foster parents regarding the educational system. The study investigates foster parents' perceptions of what affects foster children's academic successes and failures, as well as their perceptions of their role within the educational system and their impact on foster's children's academic success and failure. The study was unable to generalize due to the small sample size. On the other hand, the study will provide a rich, contextualized understanding of foster parents' perceptions. The study utilized grounded theory analysis. Overall, the study's aim was to enhance existing knowledge of the perceptions of foster parents and their effects on the foster's children education.

Summary of Findings

Children in foster care often come to school with unique educational challenges. In the present study, several major themes emerged. Foster parents confirmed previous research and at the same time raised issues that related to children in foster care.

<u>Collaboration</u>

One major theme was the importance of collaboration. Results of this study were similar to findings from previous studies regarding collaboration between parents, community and school (Epstein, et. al 2002). It is broadly regarded as essential to the child's academic success. Studies investigating family involvement in education found a positive effect from effective collaboration on students' attitudes, attendance and grades (Desforges, & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan, & Chen, 2001; Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). By working together schools, families, and communities were able to help prepare children for a promising future. When schools, families, and communities collaborate towards a common goal, children in foster care are more likely to achieve. Foster parents' involvement is imperative to this collaboration, as they said in the research.

Epstein, et. al (2002) researched the effects of family, school and community partnership on absenteeism and truancy, which could ultimately result in a child dropping out of school. Epstein, et. al (2002) stated that participants in this study supported the idea that, when partnership between community, family and school existed, absenteeism decreased and there was an increase in graduation rates. The question that arises, however, is just what is meant by partnership. The definition that was accepted was that partnership amounts to a collaboration of services between the foster parent and educational systems designed for decision-making for children in foster care (Zellman & Waterman,

1998; Tadesse, 2014; Shea, Weinberg & Zetlin, 2010). The school and community collaborated to implement activities that focused on increased attendance using parents as the driving force. Foster parents are consequently part of that collaboration. However, the partnership extends beyond monitoring school attendance. Of the eight participants, all stated that they played an active role in the educational journey of each foster child placed in their home. For example, one parent stated that she was involved in a two-hour meeting about the educational needs of a particular foster child. She said,

> I had a meeting at the school. The experience was very good … it was a two-hour meeting … we went over all the needs that the child needed.

Another foster parent stated that,

> ... they know me in the district. The elementary, the junior high and the high school. I fight for them.

Throughout the study, foster parents claimed to be an important part of the decision-making in the educational development of children in foster care.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory provides an in-depth view of the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, microsystem and chronosystem of influence and interaction that impacted a foster child's development. The ecological system theory thus acknowledges the collaboration or lack of collaboration that takes place between the foster parent, teacher, school system, social worker and social service agency. As noted in the study, academic

problems rarely occur in isolation. Typically, they occur due to problems in one of the systems. For example, the child's social worker and foster parent may be unable to communicate effectively. The mesosystem examines the relationship between two microsystems.   Foster parents not only collaborate with other subsystems but also advocate for children in foster care. Foster parents stated that they were not only engaged in the foster child's education but also implemented teacher recommendations. Foster parents said that they collaborated with teachers to ensure that the foster child's educational goals and expectations were being achieved. Foster parents used both the social worker and teacher as a source of information to better meet the needs of the foster child.

Foster parents claimed they were willing to collaborate not only with teachers but also with social workers. For example, they provide social workers with information regarding a foster children's educational progress. The social workers included both county social workers and agency social workers. Several foster parents stated that they discussed educational rights and responsibilities with the foster child's social workers. Social workers are responsible for retaining health and education passports, which includes information such as school placement course completion, and school credits. However, during the research not one foster parent mentioned the health and education passport. Lack of collaboration within different agencies was thus also apparent. Altshuler (1997) stated that school systems, social service systems, teachers, foster parents and

social workers have the potential to have a negative effect on the foster child's

education. Foster parents stated as much. For example, one said,

> Like ... my concern [name] that is in school ed, well I had no clue
> she was special ed when I first got her. When they got her records
> from the prior school, they were like oh that is why she is struggling,
> because we have her in the wrong class.

Another foster parent stated,

> Yes, in regards to getting the paperwork from one school to a new
> school there seems to be a wait period there … there appears to be
> confusion if you do not have up-to-date shot record you cannot ...
> you can because they're foster care, they have to take the child and
> enroll the child in school but there seems to be some red tape,
> there because you always have for documentation when enrolling a
> child. So, the answer is yes some hiccups there. By red tape ... I'll
> go to enroll the child in school but I'll always get privy to ... as an
> academic stronghold or weakness in a child because of the
> confidentiality thing, and then if we try to call the other school they
> wanna who, say myself is ... And you have to get a social worker
> with their letterhead to fax, and I get the privacy but I think they can
> tweak it a little bit better than what they do.

Foster parents in the study talked about seeking out information from

teachers by attending parent-teacher conferences, sending communication via

email and note and attending school activities. Foster parents in this study also

claimed to implement teacher recommendations by working with supplemental

tools such as *10 Steps to Brilliance*, providing the child with twenty to thirty

minutes of quiet reading time and having the child work on a technological device

to better understand phonemic awareness. Teachers turned to foster parents to

help support the information being taught at school, to gather information about that foster child and to work on developing the child as a whole.

The quality of a foster child's academic success also relied on the support of the social worker. The relationship between the foster child and the social worker is recognized in the literature as important (Rice & Girvin, 2014). Social workers provide the foster parents with information regarding the foster child in a prompt manner. The data suggested that the relationship between the social worker and the foster parent thrived when the social worker was respectful, honest, supportive and available to the foster parents. According to the data collected in this study, foster parents indicated that social workers depended upon the foster parents to provide them with up-to-date information regarding the educational progress of the foster child. When this is working well, as one foster parent stated,

> you speak with the county social worker once a month … We also discuss school, what is going on with them, what we need to do to help them all that good stuff. They will bring up the discussion.

Another issue that appears to arise within collaboration is the lack of biological parent involvement. Only one foster parent spoke of the biological parent's involvement in the foster child's school. Yet biological parents can be argued to provide an important contribution to the child's academic success. At the least, it may be important for foster parents to support the role of the biological parent as a stakeholder in the child's success.

Research Questions

One of the tasks of this chapter is to address the research questions in the light of the data collected. Here is the first research question.

     i. How and in what ways do foster parents perceive what contributes to the academic success foster children achieve? What do foster parents believe contributes to their foster children's academic progress and academic success?

Foster parents believe that they are an imperative part of the foster child's educational journey. For example, child abuse which occurs in the microsystem results in a child being placed in foster care which leads to foster parents being a part of the microsystem. The microsystem for these children encompasses all adult caregivers (Harden, 2004). Harden states that "Children are more likely to have trusting relationships with caregivers who are consistent and nurturing, which leads to a number of positive developmental outcomes" (p. 33). The foster parents in this study claimed to reflect caregivers who provided trusting relationships. For example, one parent stated, *Treat them just like my own kids ... We do things, go places. They know what's going on. I don't lower them, or put them down and I don't call them my foster kids or anything like that.* Foster parents see themselves as significant caregivers that have a tremendous influence in the child's immediate day-to-day environment. One foster parent

stated that one of the most important things that is taught in her household is that, *we make memories with friends, we say I'm sorry, we make mistakes, we love a lot, we live deeply and we live life. At home, we say be nice, caring, work hard, do your best.*

Foster parents believe that the progress of a foster child toward academic success can be attributed to multiple factors. One factor that helps is the foster parents' ability to encourage, guide and emotionally support the foster child. Foster parents believe that their ability to encourage the foster child is important. One foster parent indicated that in order to encourage a child to reach their full potential, a relationship had to be developed and maintained. Developing this relationship with the foster child resulted in the foster child developing a sense of safety and security. Maslow's hierarchy of needs examines five layers of needs, which include psychological needs, safety needs, loving and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. These needs are often depicted in the form of a pyramid. Children in foster care are often deprived of the first four tiers at one point in their life due to placement in care. Foster parents throughout the study indicated how they ensured that the children in their care felt as if they developed a sense of belonging and love. One foster parent stated that, *I would have easily called her my daughter … she was comfortable with me calling her niece because she referred to me as Auntie. We also have pictures up and all that.* Another foster parent stated that she does her best to ensure that the child

in her home feels a sense of security and protection. She stated that she tells

the foster children place in her home that,

> You guys come in here because the county put you here to help
> you. Nobody can hit you, hurt you, touch you. Everything about
> the rules, we just do what we can to help you in the best way, to
> help, we can help you. Just explain the rules for the kids and
> everything will be good.

Foster parents in the study said that they understood the importance of

meeting the child's psychological, interpersonal and individual needs, along with

their educational needs. Another foster parent stated the following,

> [I] treat them just like my own kids ... We do things, go places.
> They know what's going on. I don't lower them, or put them down
> and I don't call them my foster kids or anything like that.

Another foster parent addressed the needs of self-esteem, self-respect,

and positive admiration through the following example,

> I have one kid that has been beaten down so much and told that
> they are not going to amount to anything and all that stuff. So, you
> have to take all of that and once they trust you and tell you stuff.
> So, you have to take all that and iterate that they are valued, they
> are capable, they are worthy. That they can do anything they want
> to do and choose to do.

The current study thus reflects the foster parents striving to have the child

reach self-actualization. Self-actualization is the ability for self-growth, fulfilling

one's potential and creating meaning in life (Braxton & Krajewski-Jaime, 2011;

Maslow,1967). Foster parents' ability to help fulfill those needs is necessary for self-actualization.

Foster Parents' Perceived Role

In the present data, the theme of the foster parents perceived role is similar to that of biological parents in regards to educational needs. Desforges and Abouchaar, (2003) defines parental involvement as, "… the presence of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance"

(p. 5).

Expectations

Foster parents stated that they not only provided encouragement, emotional support and guidance but they also had expectations. Foster parents developed their expectations from the collaboration with the school. One foster parent stated that,

> Yes, in the conference meeting the teacher talked to me about how my boy is doing in the classroom, how his behavior, how is his academic and his points in reading and writing or in everything and what to expect for the future.

Teachers and foster parents both have expectations for children in foster care. Foster parents in this study stated that teachers expected the child to achieve at grade level standards or at their ability level, maintain appropriate

behavior and complete homework and classwork assignments in a timely

fashion. A study done by Rosenthal (1994) demonstrated that students learned

better when their teachers expected them to do so. The point here is that not

only do teachers have expectations but foster parents also have expectations. In

fact, some foster parents expressed that having expectations for the foster

children was important. Several foster parents expressed *simple* expectations

such as completing homework assignments daily and reading twenty to thirty

minutes a day, while one foster parent stated that he wanted his foster child to

perform within the 70th to 80th percentile. Expectations thus seemed to help

guide foster parents through the foster child's academic needs. In this study, it

was apparent that expectations from foster parents were tied to their level of

engagement. Foster parents indicated that they had to be engaged in the foster

child's education to determine what expectations to place on the child. The data

suggested that foster parents being engaged in the foster child's education also

helped foster children reach greater academic achievement.

Here is the second research question,

> ii. What do foster parents believe inhibits their foster children's
>
> academic progress?

Foster parents believed that there were several issues that inhibited foster

children's academic progress. Several foster parents believed that a restriction in

their educational rights and responsibilities. Foster parents believed that if they

had more authority to making decisions regarding school placement and enrollment in special services then the children would benefit.

Foster parents may well have been forgotten, because of educational process currently enacted and lack of training regarding educational needs of children in foster care. Researchers and policy makers seldom ask foster parents for their input into decisions that directly affect the lives and well-being of the children that they care for. Foster parent involvement in education and academic achievement of students in foster care are areas into which continuous research is needed (Courtney et al., 2001). Therefore, this study aims to further the body of literature regarding educational achievement of children in foster care and foster parent involvement. The literature reviewed clearly indicated that children in foster care were at high risk for poor academic achievement (Geenen & Powers, 2006). The research considered various factors that affected their problematic behaviors, with particular attention paid to the number of foster home placements and physiological and safety needs being first priority.

In this study, foster parents stated that they saw themselves as taking on a role similar to that of biological parents. Although, foster parents saw themselves as parents, foster parents often stated that the school and foster care system did not. Rightly or wrongly, this seemed to be a site of tension in the collaboration between foster parents and the education system. Foster parents provided children in foster care with encouragement, guidance and emotional support that was imperative to a child's academic success. However, they

believed that they needed more support from social workers and social service agencies.

Foster parents are an imperative part of the success in a foster child's life. However, they believe they are not equipped with the proper tools to effectively assist children in foster care with their educational needs. Foster parents appeared to see themselves as sometimes the missing link in the foster child's academic journey. For many foster parents, their frustration with the foster care system stems from their voices going unheard.

Another factor is educational rights. Educational rights include determining what school the foster child will attend and what special services the child will receive. Children in foster care often experience falling behind time when needing educational services, due to foster parents not having educational rights. Many foster children experience many gaps in services. If foster parents' ultimate goal was to help the foster child reach their full academic potential, then their concern about being equipped to perform this role seems legitimate.

Academic Resources and Extracurricular Activities

Foster parents stated that academic resources and extracurricular activities also helped contribute to the foster child's academic progress and success. Extracurricular activities help build confidence, enhance peer relationships and develop self-identity. However, children in foster care only participated in after school programs. Foster parents described the constraints of

placing them in other extracurricular activities due to parent visits, or the limited access to these activities.

Foster parents stated that academic resources and after school activities worked to attract better academic support and create greater opportunities for children in foster care. Academic resources such as tutoring and afterschool programs helped students achieve maximum success and develop a sense of identity. Academic resources were, therefore, sought out by foster parents. Although children in foster care appeared to be allowed the same resources as regular students, foster parents believed that children in foster care should be provided with priority, due to frequent placement changes, unavailable seats and waiting lists. Children in foster care were thus often not exposed to extracurricular activities.

In this study, provision of academic resources was also believed by foster parents to represent an important part of the foster child's academic success. Foster parents expressed that through services such as counseling and special education foster children were provided with tools to be able to reach towards their full potential.

Training

Another constraint as perceived by foster parents is training. Training is also another theme that really emerged in the research. Training within this study was assumed to be specifically designed to prepare foster parents and teachers to help enhance the academic success of a child in foster care. Training

important was spoken of as an important aspect of foster parent success. Foster parents were not only able to advocate more for the child when they received the appropriate training but they were also equipped with the tools to be able to provide a more successful academic environment. On the other hand, some foster parents indicated that training regarding educational needs of children in foster care was not available. Other foster parents indicated that they did not receive training or that training was minimal regarding education and that the focus on the training tended to be on the psychological, emotional and mental health needs of the child. Similarly, to other studies training was stressed as important to promote parental involvement, and to enhance the home-school link. The research suggested that foster parents were consistently unable to identify educational training as a key component in training. This often created feelings of frustration and incompetence. Educating foster parents regarding the educational needs of children in foster care may be considered vital. Training foster parents to become better informed educational advocates for children in foster care would result in foster parents possessing greater tools, more confidence in their role and developing knowledge and skills to help care for children with special needs. Foster parents indicated that, in order to ensure the foster child's success in school, the necessary training was critical. Several foster parents expressed that they did not receive any educational training regarding children in foster care. Many felt that, due to the lack of training in this

area, they were not equipped to be able to deal with the educational needs of the children in foster care.

The Lack of Knowledge regarding Foster Care Liaisons

Foster Care Liaisons are resources mandated by AB 490 in the State of California to assist students with enrollment without a waiting period, school transfers of records in a timely fashion and schools accepting graduation credits for work completed by foster children at their previous school of enrollment. Foster Care Liaisons are seen as a resource, however only one parent knew who their foster care liaison was for the district that the children were enrolled in. Foster care liaisons were thought to be the counselor. One foster parent thought it was someone who called them to invite them to an event at school designated only for children in foster care. Another foster parent stated that their foster child was placed in the wrong class, which, in turn, caused her to struggle throughout the whole year. The foster care liaison's primary responsibility is to ensure that all records are transferred in a timely fashion; however, this was not happening. Foster care liaisons are a resource within the educational system. However, either foster parents were not knowledgeable about the services available to them or the school districts did not have a foster care liaison within the district. One foster parent stated, *"My district has a foster liaison which I have advocated for being a teacher in the district they attend."*

The ecosystem represents the larger social system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The ecosystem within a foster child's development encompasses

structures such as state regulations, federal mandates and agency policy

(Johnson, 2008). One part of the ecosystem that emerged in this research was

the role of the foster care liaison. Foster care liaisons are mandated by the State

of California to provide a service to children in foster care but many foster

parents were not aware of the service or the availability of such a resource.

Another dimension of the ecosystem is the educational representative. The

educational representative is the individual that has educational rights. The

individual with educational rights is able to make decisions on behalf of the child

regarding school placement and the ability to receive special education services.

Participants varied in their responses regarding educational rights. Some of the

participants described their ability to make decisions without being legally

designated, others described obtaining legal rights and other foster parents

mentioned disappointment about the inability to make decisions regarding the

educational needs of children in their homes. Some of these concerns could be

addressed more quickly if the foster parents were in communication with the

educational representatives who sometimes do hold these educational rights.

Limitations

There is no such thing as a perfect study. One of the major limitations of

this study is the small sample size. It consisted of eight participants, seven

females and one male. The fact that there was only one male participant limits

the representation of the male perspective. Additionally, since the majority of the

foster parents interviewed were African-American females, this demographic is overrepresented in this study. A mixed-method study would provide an opportunity for a larger representation in the sample size. Due to the fact that the information was self-reported, the information provided by the foster parents could not be verified as true by triangulation. Instead, it relied on foster parents' reporting of their own experiences. The foster parent's lived experience nevertheless provided a lens into their experiences as foster parents and their perceptions and roles within the educational journey of children in foster care. During this research, it is fair to acknowledge that only one view was examined: the view of the foster parents. The view and perceptions of the foster children, social workers, teachers and those who work in the legal system were not reported. The study was also limited to individuals who lived in the Inland Empire of Southern California and did not include perspectives from elsewhere in California, let alone from other parts of the US.

In conclusion, despite the limitations of the study, the findings can be used to shed light on the importance of the foster parents in the academic journey of children in foster care. The study will also help social services and public school agencies to implement practices and policies that might change to help improve the academic success of children in foster care.

Recommendations

There are many possibilities for future research regarding the views of foster parents. More in-depth qualitative studies need to be conducted in order to bring revel and acknowledge the perceptions and real-life experiences of foster parents. A replication of this study with a larger sample size could also provide a more in-depth account of the experiences of foster parents. There is much need for research on the problems of the foster care system and how to better prepare children in foster care for academic success. The perception of foster children, social workers, teachers and those in the legal system would also help to provide a different dynamic. Also, the examination of the variation of educational outcomes of the foster children and how these were affected by the involvement of foster parents in the educational journey of children in foster care could be studied.

Implementation

Listening to the voices of foster parents is not only imperative but it is vital. They are often seen as the "silent" stakeholder. It is understandable that such neglect of the perspectives of foster parents might have prevailed, given the lack of research into their concerns, particularly about education. However, it is time that this changed. Several foster parents stated that they felt that their voices were undermined by the education and foster care system. That is not good enough. Foster parents' voices not only need to be recognized but also

validated. Foster parents need to be seen as a driving force in foster children's

lives. One foster parent stated this point passionately,

> When we handled the sit-down conference ... it was good ... They kinda
>
> reminded me that I was just a foster parent. I had to reiterate that I am her
>
> parent … I am her caregiver. I am the one who speaks life into her
>
> everyday so I look at it differently.

If foster parents are speaking life into foster children every day, then their

voices must be taken seriously in order to change and improve the education

system for children in foster care. It sometimes seems, and this research

supports this impression, that there is a passive acceptance that foster children

are not going to perform well in school. It is an impression that is easy to hold

when foster parents are neither expected nor trained to think of themselves as

having an important contribution to make to foster children's educational

progress. In order for this to change, foster parents must be seen, and see

themselves, as catalysts for change. This would require that the largely absent

foster parent support system is addressed. Figure 5.1 shows how the different

components within the foster child's environment are instrumental in increasing

their academic achievement. The components include training for social workers,

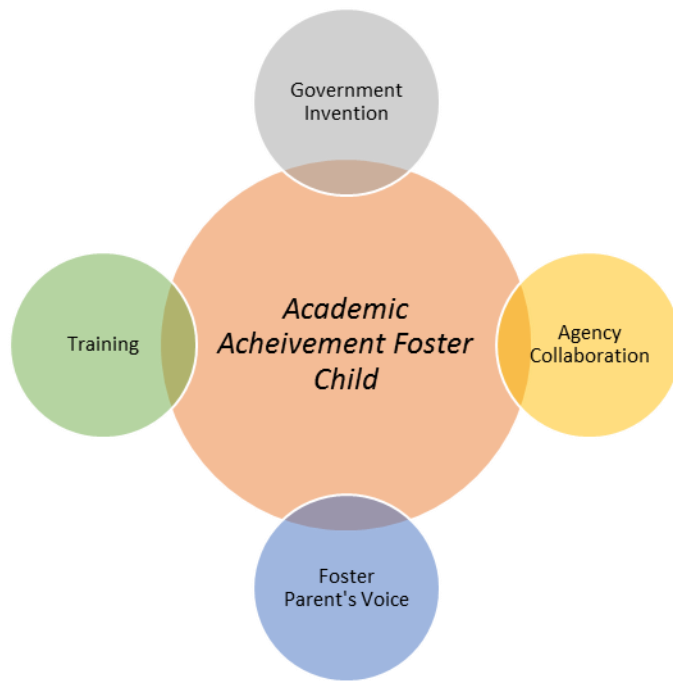teachers, foster parents, agency and school collaboration.

Figure 5.1 Academic Achievement Foster Child

From this research study, we can also venture some ideas about what needs to be addressed. An important component in this regard is training. For example, social workers need better training regarding the educational challenges for foster children. A social worker's objective is to maximize the academic achievement of children in foster care. However, currently this is not the circumstance with over fifty-nine percent of foster youth not completing high school (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Chambers & Palmer, 2011). Social workers must begin to shift their perceptions towards greater understanding of the importance of education, rather than concentrating exclusively on the provision of physical and safety needs. Social workers have the authority to act as advocates

for children in foster care. This role should include greater advocacy for these children's educational needs.

Training should not just be provided for social workers either. This research brought light to the fact that teachers needed training regarding the educational needs of children in foster care. Foster parents cited teachers as their primary support system for understanding the educational needs of children in foster care. However, several foster parents stated that they did not believe that teachers were adequately trained to deal with the issues of children in foster care. I suspect that they are right.

Foster parents also expressed concerns regarding gaps in their own training. Seven of the eight participants stated that they did not receive any training regarding the educational needs of children in foster care. This ultimately leaves foster parents unequipped with the proper tools to effectively and efficiently assist children in foster care with their unique educational needs. The educational needs of children in foster care need to be a part of the initial training provided by social service agencies as well as a component of ongoing training. Moreover, in this training, attention should be paid to what foster parents themselves have to say.

Another component of the foster care system that needs attention is government invention. Government intervention includes policies and legislation that have shaped the foster care system that we see today. Legislation that has

been established within the foster care system that assumes that foster parents are not important. This is evident in the lack of legislation regarding the role and responsibility of foster parents. The lack of legislation continues to reinforce the power structures. By contrast, as legislation continues to evolve regarding biological parents and foster children's rights, it has inadvertently undermined the rights of foster parents.

Another government intervention concerns foster care liaisons. An astounding thing is that foster care liaisons are required thorough Assembly Bill 490. However, only one out of eight foster parents in this study knew such support was available through a foster parent liaison. The school districts as well as the foster care agencies should be more knowledgeable about the role of the liaison within each school district and be able to supply that information to the foster parent as a resource.

Ultimately, collaboration between all agencies needs to be seamless. Currently there is a visible disconnect between the foster care system and the education system. The foster parent might play a useful role in addressing that disconnect. County and agency social workers must begin to ask how and to take active steps to ensure children's academic success. As a current educator in the K-12 education system, I am unaware of when a child in foster care is placed in my classroom. Without everyone knowing the unique needs of children within the foster care system, it is hard to see how educational needs might be

prioritized. Quarterly meetings with all agency representatives, teachers and foster parents are needed. The meetings are needed to establish, maintain and to discuss the educational wellbeing of the foster child. Moreover, the flow of information should always focus on what is in the best interests of the child and this should include his or her educational needs, not just physical needs. Ultimately, all stakeholders should be knowledgeable of the educational needs, educational background and ultimately what services would be needed to help the child be academically successful.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

McKellar and Cowan (2011) state that, "Schools have the potential to be a powerful force toward normalization for these students and can provide the skills that they need to support themselves as adults" (p. 12). This study appears to suggest that foster parents have the capability of providing the same support to children in foster care. However, foster parents believe and often state that they are the missing piece within the foster care system. In particular, within the arena of collaboration between stakeholders more clarity could be sought and more training provided. Furthermore, the roles of educational representatives and educational liaisons need to be better understood.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 14, 2016

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB# FY2017-49
Status : APPROVED

Ms. LaResha Richardson and Prof. John Winslade
College of Education Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Richardson and Prof. Winslade:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Foster Parent's Perceptions of the Education System" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Your application is approved for one year from 12-12-16 through 12-11-17. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Also, you cannot deviate from the approved protocol. If you need to change anything you must receive IRB approval before you can implement that change in your IRB protocol. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,
2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,
4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Caroline Vickers

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Attachments

College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

My name is La'Resha Richardson, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, San Bernardino. I will be performing a study under the direction of Dr. Winslade, professor in the College of Education at California State University, San Bernardino. You are invited to be part of a research study that focuses on the impact foster *parents' perceptions of their role within the education system and of their impact on foster children's academic achievement.* I am asking you to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview for this study.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. Once selected, you will be part of one individual face-to-face interview at the location of your choice. The interview should take about one hour. I will audiotape the interview to make sure our conversation is documented accurately. All responses will remain confidential. The data about you and foster children and schools will remain anonymous and no identifying information will be included. Gathering accurate information will be critical to the success of this study.

With your participation in this study, the findings will provide valuable information in regards to the education system from a foster parent perceptive.

Upon completion of the study, you may request a complete report on the results. Your participation and support is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, you may contact my advisor Dr. John Winslade by email at If you have further questions, Dr John Winslade can contacted at 909 537 7312 or by email at jwinslad@csusb.edu.

The Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this project.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact me if you think of a question later.
You may receive the results of this study upon completion on June 30, 2017 by contacting me. Your participation in the interviews will be of benefit to everyone and to children in foster care, as well as contributing to knowledge about the education system.

By signing below, you acknowledge you have been informed, and that you understand the nature and purpose of this study, and freely consent to participate. You also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age at the time of the study

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

You may receive the results of this study upon completion on June 30, 2017 by contacting the researcher. After the study, has been completed (including the completion of the written dissertation) all questionnaire forms will be shredded and the voice recordings will be deleted.

By signing below, I acknowledge I have been informed, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age at the time of this study.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

La'Resha Richardson

College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

Consent Form

I have read the information about the study on Foster Parents' Perceptions of the Education System, including the purpose of the interviews.

I understand what I am being asked to do and am willing to be interviewed.

Signed _____

Name   _____

Date   _____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling

Interview Questions

Part One: The following questions pertain to you (the foster parent). Please check the line or fill in the blank.

1. Age (foster parent): 25-34_____ 35-44 _____ 45-54_____ 55-64_____ > 65 _____

2. Gender (foster parent filling out form): Male Female

3. Marital/Relationship Status: Single _____ Married_____ Divorced/Separated _____ Widowed _____ Living with a Committed Partner _____ Not living with a committed partner_____

4. Ethnicity: African American _____ Asian American _____ Caucasian/White _____ Latino _____ Pacific Islander _____ Other _____

5. Primary language spoken in the home? English _____ Spanish _____ Bilingual (English & Spanish) _____ Other (Please list) _____

6. Income Level (before foster parent stipend): < 15,000 ___15,000-25,000 25,001-35,000_____ 35,001-45,000 _____ 45,001-55,000_____ 55,001-65,000 _____ 65,001-75,000 ___

> 75,000 _____

8. How long have you been a certified foster parent? (Please fill in the blank)_____

9. What is your reason for becoming a certified Foster Parent? (Check all that apply, if no reason is present please list)

Stipend _____ to help children _____ Give back to the community _____ Companionship for biological children _____ Companionship for Foster Parent _____

Other: _____

10. How many children reside in your home (both biological and foster)? _____

11. Age range of all foster children (check all that apply): 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-21

12. What type of behaviors does your foster child exhibit (Please check all that apply)? Shy ___ Friendly ___ Responsible ___ Cooperative ___ Takes Initiative ___ Helpful __ Gives up easily ___ Follows directions ___ Arguing ____ Defiance ____ Short attention spans ____ Impulsivity ____ Bed Wetting ____ fighting ____ Inappropriate sexual behavior ____ Back Talking ____ Peer Provoking ____ Truancy ____ Temper Tantrums ____ Destructive ___ Aggressive ___ Other ____

1. Do the foster children in your home know that they are valued, worthy and/or capable? If so, in what ways?

2. Did you receive any training in the educational needs of children in foster care? If so, what training did you receive? Do you believe that the training was useful? How?

3. Do you believe that the foster children placed in your home have access to academic resources, services and extracurricular activities?

4. Have you had any contact with foster care liaisons at the school? If so, how was the experience? In your experience, have they contributed to the academic progress of the foster children in foster care?

5. When enrolling children in foster care in public school have you experienced any problems? If so, what problems have you encountered?

6. What is your understanding of your role in in meeting the educational needs of foster children in your care?

7. How is the foster child placed in your home doing in school?

8. Does the child receive any special services or intervention services at school?

    a. Probe: Could you tell me more about your child's school experience? Is he or she excited about school? Are there any problems with school which concern you? Academically? Socially? Attendance?

9. How are the educational needs of your child being met by the school?

    a. Probe: Are things working out? Has it been stressful for you or your child to get what you have needed? What steps have you had to take to get the help you felt necessary? What has helped you and the foster child placed in your home educational support necessary? Have there been any issues?

10. What are the current educational needs of your child? What are the educational expectations that you have for this child?

11. When was the last time you made contact with the foster child's school? Describe that experience?

12. Has the teacher ever provided you with ideas to assist your foster child in their

academic progress? If so, please describe those ideas?

13. Have you attended or have you been invited to any parent/teacher conference meeting? If so, please describe your experience?

14. How often do you discuss the educational well-being of the foster child with the County Social Worker or any other social services support staff? Please describe your experience?

Questionnaire created by: La'Resha Richardson

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