Defining educational success through the eyes of young people who have been in foster care: A qualitative case study

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Educational Psychology

at Massey University, Albany,

New Zealand.

Hannah Miller

2019

Abstract

All children have the right to an education and a voice, as protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, ratified by New Zealand in 1993. Children and young people in foster care face unique and often challenging experiences that can make them vulnerable to having these basic rights eroded. This study explored how educational success was determined by young people who were in, or had been in, foster care. Specifically, this research addressed how success in educational experiences is identified and enacted by foster care experienced young people, and in what ways formal and informal educational experiences are perceived by, and impact on, these young people's lives.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants, aged between 16 and 29 years old, who had experienced foster care and compulsory education in New Zealand. Interviews were analysed using grounded theory. The findings showed that educational successes as identified by young people in this study were broad and holistic. They navigated complex obstacles posed by living in foster care and these impacted on learning and interactions within school. Specific experiences of success differed between participants, and ranged from social acceptance and a sense of belonging, varying degrees of achievement at school, to simply turning up to school. Young people demonstrated marked resilience throughout the challenges they faced, which was both supportive to success, and a success in itself. Relationships with teachers, foster carers and friends were key supports to success, along with having a voice, influence over decisions and having an advocate. The implications of this study include a broadening of the concept of educational success—a concept that takes on different meanings according to people's values and life experiences. Given the unique life experiences of children and young people in foster care, there is imperative to create space for the voices of children and young people in foster care to both determine and define what educational success means, and they need their rights to share these perspectives to enhance their own educational experiences.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisors, Professor Roseanna Bourke and Dr Vijaya Dharan, for their ongoing support, guidance and patience throughout this process. I am extremely grateful for their prompt, comprehensive feedback and advice on my work, and their provision of other opportunities during the thesis journey. Thank you.

I would like to thank Leanne Romana for kindly agreeing to be my cultural advisor and for her advice and support.

I would like to thank my research participants for so generously sharing their stories with me.

Thank you to my family and friends, who have encouraged me and cheered me on throughout this journey. Thank you for the messages to check in on me, the hugs, and the flowers to brighten my day.

Thank you to Mum and Dad who work tirelessly at the coal face to make sure that the precious children in their care feel loved and have a voice. Your passion for these children and young people are an inspiration.

Thank you to my wonderful husband, Jordan, who has stood by me and cheered me on through the happiest and hardest parts of this journey. Thank you for pushing me to keep going, celebrating the big and the small achievements, and being my biggest support.

Praise and thanks to God, through Whom all things are possible and to Him be the glory.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

Children have the right to equal access and equal opportunities in education. Positive educational experiences are critical for all children and their life chances irrespective of their home background. Equitable access to education is a child's right, protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, Article 28. People who achieve in education tend to enjoy better quality of life, including better health, and higher standard of living; and have more social, economic, civic and personal opportunities (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2014). Education has the potential to improve life outcomes (Pecora, 2012), and is described as a "passport out of poverty" (McNamara, Harvey, & Andrewartha, 2019, p. 85).

Although this is a child's right, it has been found there are children and young people who are vulnerable to having this basic right and the benefits of education eroded due to a number of factors. These children may be more vulnerable due to gender bias; living in rural or difficult to access areas, or on the street; belonging to an indigenous or minority population; being internally displaced, a refugee or immigrant; affected by armed conflict; insufficient support to accommodate disabilities and learning difficulties; and being denied education due to child labour (Verheyde, 2006). Another at-risk group is children and young people in foster care (Berridge, 2012). Children and young people in foster care (FC) face unique educational and life circumstances that impact on their educational achievement, which often results in low academic achievement. What is needed is a broader understanding of educational success that is equitable and takes into account the holistic lived experiences of children and young people in FC. Listening to the voices of children and young people in FC and paying attention to their lived experiences (Brodie & Morris, 2010) is paramount to understand their perceptions of educational success.

Children have the right to express their views and participate in decision-making as protected by UNCRC 1989, Article 12, which New Zealand ratified in 1993. UNCRC 1989, Article 12 states that,

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

(UNCRC 1989, Article 12)

To ensure children's rights to be heard are upheld, Lundy (2007) conceptualised a model of *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence* for the realisation of the full impact of Article 12. Children should be given *space* to have the ability to have meaningful input on decision-making, though this is a right and not a duty, so children should be allowed to opt in or out. Children should be allowed *voice* to express views freely, and be provided help to form or express their views if needed. *Audience* is required for children to be listened to, and their views given due weight. Finally, when children share their views, there should be *influence* and real change in response to what was shared. It should be shared with children what decision was made, how their views were taken into account, and reasons for this decision and subsequent actions (Lundy, 2007).

Children in Foster Care in New Zealand

Children and young people in FC in New Zealand are those who are under the custody of the Chief Executive, and are supported by Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children). In June 2017, there were 5708 children and young people under the custody of the Chief Executive (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). Oranga Tamariki is responsible for the care and protection of children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of harm, and of children and young people who have offended or are at risk of offending (Oranga Tamariki, n.d.). A child or young person may be placed in FC because they were at risk of, or were experiencing, maltreatment, abuse, and/or neglect (Ashton, 2014; Oranga Tamariki, 2014; Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989). The child or young person may be placed in the care of a member of their wider whānau, a caregiver from Oranga Tamariki or a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that is contracted by

Oranga Tamariki, or an Oranga Tamariki or NGO contracted group home (Ashton, 2014; Oranga Tamariki, n.d.). This is done with the goal of doing what's best for the child/young person, and providing them with a safe, loving home at the earliest opportunity (Oranga Tamariki, n.d.).

Children and young people in FC are protected by various legislation in New Zealand, most notably the Children's Act 2014 and the Children Young Persons and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017. These serve to protect the wellbeing and best interests of all children and young people. The Children's Act 2014, Part 1, Section 6 outlines that to promote the improvement of the wellbeing of vulnerable children involves, amongst other items, improving education and training, and increasing participation in decision-making about them. Although child welfare government agencies, such as Oranga Tamariki, are primarily concerned with the safety of children and young people in FC, it is important that their educational needs are not overlooked (Morton, 2015).

The educational needs of children and young people in FC are particularly important to consider, since they are at a greater risk of experiencing challenges in education (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). These challenges can be due to traumatic experiences prior to FC placement, lack of support from adults, and disrupted schooling (Mendis, Gardner, & Lehmann, 2015). The effects of traumatic experiences can lead to emotional-behavioural difficulties, and learning difficulties (Flynn, Tessier, & Coulombe, 2013; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017; Tessier, Flynn, & O'Higgins, 2018). Adult attitudes, usually from teachers and foster carers, can act as barriers if they have low expectations for the child/young person, and lack of understanding of the unique challenges faced by children and young people in FC (Clemens, Helm, Myers, Thomas, & Tis, 2017; Day et al., 2012; Johansson & Höjer, 2012). Teachers and educators often appear underequipped to manage children and young people's challenging behaviours associated with trauma experience (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Being in FC can lead to stigma and bullying in school environments, and feeling ostracised for being in FC situations (Clemens et al., 2017; Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Finally, some children and young people in FC experience a number of changes in FC placement, which often results in changing schools. This school instability and mobility negatively affects consistency in learning, achievement,

relationships with teachers and friends, and disruption to learning supports (Clemens et al., 2017; Morton, 2015; Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a).

As a result of these challenges, children and young people in FC are at greater risk of lower academic achievement (Flynn et al., 2013; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). The disproportionate underachievement of children and young people in FC is reflected in international and New Zealand statistics. For example, in New Zealand in 2017, only 42% of 18 and 19 year olds with FC experience had achieved NCEA Level 2 or higher, compared to 77% of 18 and 19 year olds with no FC experience (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019b). NCEA in New Zealand is used for employment and university and polytechnic selection processes, further, NCEA Level 2 provides foundational skills for employment (NZQA, n.d.). Not only do these statistics highlight a significant academic disadvantage for children and young people in FC, but also suggests that their underachievement disadvantages them for future life endeavours.

This disadvantage both academically and in life indicates that the that the current model of measuring educational achievement does not equitably take into account the unique life experiences or barriers to education experienced by children and young people in FC. What is needed is a broader, strengths-based understanding of educational success that is informed by and takes into account the lived experiences of children and young people in FC.

By applying this broader, strengths-based understanding, children and young people in FC can be more effectively supported towards successes on their own terms. Children and young people in FC must be specifically asked, since their relatively small population means that their needs and experiences are often not adequately captured in general research and evaluation of services (Wood & Selwyn, 2017). Gaining understanding of educational success can be achieved through giving space and voice to children and young people in FC to express their own views and perspectives of educational success. Giving space for children and young people in FC to have a voice and express their views is both a valuable resource, and a necessity to listen and act upon the views that are shared (Mitra, 2006). Children and young people in FC have the right to express views and participate in decision-making stated by UNCRC 1989, Article 12, and the Children's Act 2014, Part 1, Section 6(e). In order for effective

promotion of equitable educational success for children and young people in FC, it is imperative that their voices are not only heard, but also listened to.

This study investigates the perspectives and experiences of educational success of young people who have experienced FC in New Zealand. The purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of young people who had experienced FC in order to understand their perceptions of educational success.

Research Questions

Specifically, this research explored:

1. How is success in educational experiences identified and enacted by young people who have experienced FC?

2. In what ways are formal and informal educational experiences perceived by, and impact on, the lives of young people who have experienced FC?

Chapter 2
Literature Review

Literature that explores FC experienced children and young peoples' understandings of educational success is an emerging field. There is a vast body of knowledge about the educational outcomes and qualifications of children and young people in FC, but very little is known about their own perceptions of educational success. This chapter examines the education literature concerning FC experienced children and young people's perceptions of educational success. The first section focuses on the literature of lived experiences of success and education of children and young people in FC. The second section examines how educational success is currently identified in legislation in New Zealand and in research that informs this legislation, and the tensions between these conceptualisations. Finally, the chapter concludes with a rationale for the present study.

The search engines used to identify literature were primarily the Massey University platform Discover, and Google. Initially the search focused on finding literature that explored the perspectives of educational success of children and young people in FC. However, only two studies (Coulling, 2000; Huxtable, 2016) were identified on the topic internationally. Consequently, the search was widened to include the perspectives and experiences of educational success from large New Zealand-based surveys (Ministry of Education, 2018; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016, 2018b), as well as studies that investigated the educational experiences of FC experienced children and young people.

Perceptions of Educational Success

Educational success is experienced and understood in many different ways by individuals and groups. There is a lack of information from children from marginalised groups, such as those in FC, and this lack of data has raised concerns for the effectiveness of policy and interventions for these children (Byrne & Lundy, 2015). Children and young people in FC often have needs and experiences that are not typically shared by children and young people in the general population (Wood & Selwyn, 2017). This accentuates the necessity to listen to their voices and experiences in

order to have an authentic understanding of their needs. Wood and Selwyn (2017) highlighted the unique experiences and needs of FC experienced children and young people in a study that investigated their subjective accounts of wellbeing. Conducted in the UK, 140 children and young people aged 5–24 years were interviewed in focus groups to explore how they understood subjective wellbeing. These findings were used to inform the creation of surveys to improve services that impact on FC. The findings included the significance of contact with family, relationships with social workers, support and relationships with carers, and decision-making in care placement— concerns that are not usually felt by children who have not experienced FC (Wood & Selwyn, 2017).

Since FC children and young people's experiences are unique in some ways, it is important that there are more studies that seek to understand their perspectives. Most research investigating the educational experiences of FC experienced children and young people have assumed a model of 'educational success' as operationally defined by academic achievement, such as results on examinations (Berridge, 2012). However, as aforementioned, measures of academic achievement do not typically take into account the unique experiences related to FC, and can serve to further disadvantage children and young people in FC.

Another approach to support children and young people in FC towards success in education is to understand their own perspectives of educational success. It is only the international studies by Coulling (2000) and Huxtable (2016) that have to date investigated FC experienced children's meanings of educational success, which are examined in the next section.

Lived educational experiences
Perceptions of educational success reflect learners' lived experiences. As children and young people in FC have unique life and educational experiences, it is important that these are considered to understand their perceptions of success. Coulling (2000) explored inter-disciplinary understandings of educational success for children in FC using semi-structured interviews with 25 participants that included teachers, home finding officers, social workers, caregivers and children in FC. Using Personal Construct Psychology with adult participants, Coulling (2000) created constructs of

success by asking participants to indicate their meaning of successful education, then to describe and compare characteristics of children whom they felt had been successful in education, and children whom they felt had not been successful in education. These comparisons created constructs that were later ranked by the adult participants. Children were asked what a past and a present teacher might say about them, and three things that they considered as supportive to their educational success. All children in the study had recently changed schools, and reasons for this were explored. Findings revealed the constructs of success for children in FC as *sociability*, *attendance* and *reaching potential*. The study identified quality of FC placement and frequent communication between the school and FC home as being integral to supporting students. The findings are congruent with literature that has investigated the lived educational experiences of children and young people in FC.

This study showed *sociability* as a key concept for success, suggested by both adult and children participants. Specifically, the adults referred to *sociability* as the child integrating into the school community, making friends, and taking part in extracurricular activities. The children indicated that their ability to make and keep friends was an indicator of success in school (Coulling, 2000). Integrating into the school community and making friends is particularly pertinent to children and young people in FC, as they tend to have higher rates of school mobility than their non-fostered peers. In June 2017, 22% of children and young people aged 5–17 in FC in New Zealand had changed schools in the previous year, compared to 6% of same-age children and young people with no FC experience (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019b). High school mobility is often due to changes in FC placements (Strolin-Goltzman, Woodhouse, Suter, & Werrbach, 2016). The effect of this is that children and young people in FC must frequently assimilate into new schools, and form new relationships with teachers and peers (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Consequently, children may have difficulties forming new friendships, as children often are unsure of how long they may be at a particular school (Del Quest, Fullerton, Geenen, & Powers, 2012).

Supporting the construct of *sociability*, school as an important space for social opportunities was found by Sugden (2013), who explored the perceptions of six 8–9 year-old children in FC in the UK about what supports them to learn. This study found that children in FC regard school as a place to find a sense of belonging and have

relationships with key adults (such as teachers) and friends. When home-life is difficult, school can become a safe haven for children and young people in FC (Morton, 2016).

Additionally, the benefit of participation in extracurricular activities is supported by White, Scott, and Munson (2018), who investigated the effect of involvement in extracurricular activities on academic achievement. They found that involvement in extracurricular activities was positively associated with higher educational aspirations in a longitudinal study of 312 young people transitioning out of FC in Missouri. However, home mobility often impedes opportunities for consistent involvement in extracurricular activities (Day et al., 2012). Consideration of the difficulties associated with school mobility, but the importance of extracurricular activities and friendships strengthens Coulling's (2000) finding that *sociability* may be regarded as a key indicator for FC experienced children and young people's success in education.

Similarly, Coulling's (2000) finding of *attendance* as a key indicator of success for children and young people in FC is supported by other studies. Carers, social workers and home finding officers understood *attendance* with respect to consistent school attendance, and seen as an indication of a child's commitment to school (Coulling, 2000). This is a significant concept for success considering that children who have experienced neglect and maltreatment have been found to show poorer learning behaviours, poorer school attendance, and higher rates of school suspension (Fantuzzo, Perlman, & Dobbins, 2011). In New Zealand, of the children and young people in FC aged 5–17 in the year prior to June 2017, 9% had been stood down, 3% had been suspended, 6% showed low to moderate truancy, and 4% showed high truancy (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019b). Comparatively, of the children and young people aged 5–17 with no FC experience in the year prior to June 2017, 1% had been stood down, less than 1% had been suspended, 2% showed low to moderate truancy, and 1% showed high truancy (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019b, p. 10). School attendance can be hindered in situations where there are delays in enrolling in a new school due to changes in home placement; if basic needs such as transportation, uniforms, books or lunch are not provided; or responsibilities related to family or home compete with school (Clemens et al., 2017; Day et al., 2012).

Despite these statistics and barriers, the importance of *attendance* is supported by findings from Martin and Jackson's (2002) study in the UK of interviews with 38 high achieving FC experienced young people. The FC experienced high achievers

commented that attendance is necessary for educational success, and truancy should not be tolerated for FC children whether it was a result of care-related appointments or moving schools mid-term (Martin & Jackson, 2002). *Attendance* may be seen as an important concept of educational success for children and young people in FC considering the disproportionate rates of non-attendance, and the value placed on attendance by both adult FC stakeholders and high achieving FC experienced people.

The final construct of success for children in FC, *reaching potential,* was identified by social workers, teachers and home finding officers in Coulling's (2000) study. *Reaching potential* referred to children in FC doing their best to reach their potential (Coulling, 2000). Building upon this, domains that can affect reaching potential and academic achievement were theorised by focus groups of 16 FC experienced youth in the study by Clemens et al. (2017) in Colorado. Themes indicated the need for resilience, and the effect of expectations from professionals (Clemens et al., 2017). Further, the cross-sectional and longitudinal study by Flynn et al. (2013) that investigated the influences on educational achievement of 1106 children and young people in FC aged 12–17 years in Canada found internal developmental assets and caregivers' aspirations for the young person's education as some of the most influential predictors of educational achievement. A later cross-sectional and longitudinal study of the same population by Tessier et al. (2018) added youth educational aspirations to these findings of supports to educational achievement. Morton's (2016) phenomenological study of in-depth interviews with eleven young people who had aged out of FC in Oregon expands on the need for resilience. Her study identified resilience as 'self-reliance', which included inner strength of having determination and hope, viewing school as a means to gain control over their lives, and finding empowerment through self-advocacy. The supportive concepts of the young person's internal assets such as resilience, high aspirations from adults and self-reliance resonate with Coulling's (2000) finding of *reaching potential* as success.

To support these success, all professionals and children in Coulling's (2000) study identified *quality of foster care* as essential. The quality and support received from foster carers affects whether the FC system is perceived as a support or a barrier (Morton, 2016). FC experienced children and young people in Wood and Selwyn's (2017) study concur that support from foster carers for learning is important for

resilience building. Foster carer support for school achievement of young people in FC was also identified by Skilbred, Moldestad, and Iversen (2017), who investigated the characteristics of foster homes of 16 FC experienced young people who were completing or had completed university studies, and 13 foster carers in Norway. Supports included creating a sense of belonging in the foster home, modelling attitudes and values of doing one's best and persistence; and that a strong sense of structure and routine in the foster home provided children with security, predictability and supported successful school work. Additionally, Day et al. (2012) identified the importance of stable relationships with caring adults outside of school to support FC experienced young people's educational successes. They analysed transcripts of 43 FC experienced high school and college students' presentations before two panels of policy-makers in Michigan about their challenges transitioning from high school to college. FC experienced children and young people and related stakeholders identified that the quality of FC can be a significant support in education for the children and young people in their care.

Lastly, in Coulling's (2000) study, all professionals and foster children valued "the role of the school and its teachers' ability to understand the needs of the foster child and to liaise openly and frequently with the foster carer" (p. 32) to support educational success. Children specifically commented that they wanted quality relationships between their school and foster carers, and that foster carers' frequent communication to the school demonstrated their investment in the child's education (Coulling, 2000). Foster carers are an important resource for supporting educational success, as foster carer involvement in young people's school activities has been found to be positively associated with an increase in academic achievement (Flynn et al., 2013).

Foster carers are in an integral position to advocate for the needs children and young people in their care to the teacher and school (Morton, 2016). Children and young people in FC need their teachers to have appreciation for their difficulties, and for the school to personalise learning (Sugden, 2013). Children and young people in FC also need connections with teachers who understand the unique challenges they face; and for teachers to be flexible, creative and sensitive to address these challenges (Day et al., 2012). The New Zealand Ministry of Education booklet for teachers working with students in FC recommends that teachers endeavour to frequently liaise with children's

carers and social workers to give daily or weekly progress (Ministry of Education, 2017). Schools can significantly support children in FC to succeed through understanding their needs and tapping into the resources and expertise of foster carers through frequent liaison.

Space and voice for success

In order to understand FC experienced children and young people's lived experiences of education and perceptions of educational success, space and voice must be given for their voices to be heard. Coulling (2000) did not particularly place the voices of children at the centre of the study, in fact they were only asked to reflect on what a past and present teacher might think about them, and not asked to consider their own perceptions or considerations of success. Children's agreement with adult perceptions was only mentioned with respect to *sociability*, *quality of FC*, and *foster home-school communication*, and children's voices or agreement were not evident in *attendance* or *reaching potential* constructs (Coulling, 2000).

In contrast, the study by Huxtable (2016) placed the children in FC at the centre of the study, and the data collection activities caused participants to reflect on their current school discourse. Huxtable (2016) explored the perceptions of success held by children in FC to provide teachers and practitioners with insight into their views. Eight children in FC, aged 12–14 were interviewed using three activities: sorting cards with various school subjects and activities into 'enjoy' and 'don't enjoy' piles; imagining and describing their ideal teacher and school; and finishing the 'tweets': "I think success is", "I think my teacher thinks success is", "I think my parents/carers think success is", "to be successful I need" (p. 23). Findings indicated three areas for success, *learn, achieve, live*, and the importance of teachers in each domain. *Learn* was seen as a current personal development or improvement. Teachers enabled this through being approachable and supportive, as well as having positive communication. *Achieve* referred to success as academic achievement, and achieving short-term goals. To attain this success, teachers were recognised as more influential for students' enjoyment of the subject than the subject content itself, and were significant in the provision of opportunities for achievement in extracurricular activities. Finally, *live* was seen as future success and a successful life, including future development and goals. Teachers were important for educational development to future goals, but friends and foster

carers were seen as more influential in future aspirations for success (Huxtable, 2016). While only the voices of children in FC were given in Huxtable's (2016) study, the successes were not situated within the context and experiences of the participants, and the findings do not reflect the unique experiences related to FC.

Since children and young people in FC have unique lived experiences, inclusion of their voices is pivotal to improve and inform the services that affect them. As aforementioned, Huxtable (2016) placed FC experienced children's voices at the forefront of his study, with the intent to encourage schools and educators to consider how to support children and young people in FC towards positive outcomes and success. If the goal is to improve the services of education and child welfare, which affect children and young people in FC, then as the service users, it is essential that their voices and experiences are listened to and taken into account (Head, 2011). Because of this, children and young people's voices should be treated as a credible and relevant tool in research and evaluation (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018), and a legitimate source for change (Mitra, 2006).

A ground-breaking example of using children's voices for service planning and evaluation was the inclusion of FC experienced young people in two Youth Advisory Panels for the review and planning of Oranga Tamariki (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). These young people shared their experiences of the previous system, Child, Youth and Family, and their aspirations and needs for the new system, Oranga Tamariki. Child, Youth and Family was previously the government agency that was responsible for the protection and care of children and young people who were experiencing, or at risk of, abuse and maltreatment, and youth justice systems. After extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders, Child, Youth and Family was overhauled and replaced with the new government agency, Oranga Tamariki (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). Key messages from consultation with FC experienced young people is that they "crave love; need lasting relationships; need to be included in decision-making; need to belong; need to be told the truth; [and] need to connect to their culture" (Oranga Tamariki, 2017, p. 13). In response, many of the objectives of the new government agency, Oranga Tamariki, reflect these key messages. The objectives include: children and young people are provided with a stable and loving family at the earliest opportunity; each child's needs are addressed; victimisation is prevented; children are helped to heal and recover;

children are supported in their transition to adulthood; children are supported to take responsibility for their actions and live crime-free (Modernising Child Youth and Family Panel, 2015, p. 7). As a positive outcome of this consultation, Oranga Tamariki continues to endeavour to include the voices of children and young people in decision-making at the individual and system level (Oranga Tamariki, 2017).

The commitment to inclusion of children and young people's voices in matters that concern them fulfils legal and ethical obligations (Lundy, 2007). Legally, all children and young people have the right to express views and participate in decision-making according to UNCRC 1989, Article 12. Inclusion of the voices of children and young people in FC is also mandated by the Children's Act (2014) Part 1, Section 6(e). Ethically, FC experienced children and young people are often the recipients of many public services including child welfare and education, they are often the primary focus for policies and interventions, and finally, they can be psychologically harmed by the services and systems that are supposed to protect them due to being denied appropriate services or exposed to further trauma (Day et al., 2012, p. 1007). Therefore, it is essential that their voices be given space, audience and influence on such matters.

This section has reviewed studies such as Coulling (2000) and Huxtable (2016) that gave space and voice to FC experienced children to demonstrate that educational success is contextually located. To the researchers' knowledge, these are the only two studies internationally that have investigated FC experienced children's perceptions of educational success. Further, to the researcher's knowledge there are no studies that have investigated FC experienced young people's (aged 16 and over) perceptions of educational success both in New Zealand and internationally, revealing space in the literature for this research.

The next section of this chapter focuses on large surveys that were completed by people in the general population of New Zealand, including children, young people and adults. These surveys are used to demonstrate how children's voices were given audience and influence to inform evaluation and planning for education in New Zealand.

Educational Success in New Zealand Legislation

This section discusses and compares how educational success is conceptualised in legislation in New Zealand, and incorporates the findings of large surveys investigating New Zealanders' interpretations of educational success.

In New Zealand, the objectives of early childhood and compulsory education are detailed under the Education Act 1989, Part 1AA(3). Part 1AA(3)(a) states that the objectives of early childhood and compulsory education are "to focus on helping each child and young person to attain educational achievement to the best of his or her potential." Part 1AA(3)(b) details the development of children and young people's abilities and attributes, including resilience, social skills, participation in community and civic activities, and work readiness. Part 1AA(3)(c) features the instilment of appreciation of inclusion, diversity, cultural knowledge, and Treaty of Waitangi and Te Reo Māori. Part 1AA(4A) also includes the requirement for consultation with children and young people, and other educational and cultural stakeholders.

In recent years, the Education Act 1989 and vision for education has been under rigorous review. Large surveys have been conducted in New Zealand to seek the voice and input of children, young people, and related stakeholders to evaluate the current status of education, and inform the vision and changes to legislation. This is in conjunction with Part 1AA(4A) of the Education Act 1989, which stipulates that the Minister must make reasonable efforts to consult stakeholders in early childhood and compulsory education sectors. The three recent surveys that are relevant for this study include: the *Education Conversation, Kōrero Mātauranga* (Ministry of Education, 2018); *What Kids Say About Education and Achievement* (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016); and *Education Matters to Me* (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b).

New Zealand Surveys

Ministry of Education survey

The Ministry of Education (2018) initiated an online survey, *Education Conversation, Kōrero Mātauranga*, available to the New Zealand public from March 23, 2018 to July 3, 2018. The findings from this survey were to be used to inform the development of the vision of learning and education in New Zealand for the next thirty years. The survey

received over 14,000 responses. The report of the initial analysis of the first 11,077 responses as at May 25, 2018 is discussed here. These findings indicated that the New Zealand public perceived a 'successful student' to be resilient, well rounded, community focused, and confident. Furthermore, to be successful, students need flexible and diverse curriculum, less standardisation, smaller class sizes and better resourcing for teachers, and a supportive home environment.

Several of the broad themes of traits of a 'successful student' correspond with the objectives of the Education Act 1989, Part 1AA(3)(b), including recognition of resilience and participation in the community. The responses from this survey add a wellbeing dimension to the conceptualisation of a 'successful student', in that a 'successful student' is well rounded and confident; a notion not currently represented in the Education Act 1989. These themes suggest that children and adults view educational success more broadly than academic achievement alone.

Building on the finding that a 'successful student' requires a supportive home environment, quality FC placements and strong working relationships between the foster home and school are an essential support for children and young people in FC to experience educational success (Coulling, 2000). Further, foster carers and friends are seen as significant to their future successes and goals (Huxtable, 2016). Therefore a supportive home environment is recognised as important for all students, and particularly children and young people in FC.

A limitation of the *Education Conversation, Kōrero Mātauranga* is that relatively few primary school and secondary school aged students (3% and 9% respectively) were involved, whereas 85% of respondents were over the age of 26 years old. It may be inferred that the results were highly influenced by adult voices and concerns, and children's voices may be not accurately represented. Therefore, this is potentially an issue when making generalisations.

Office of the Children's Commissioner surveys
Conversely, the surveys conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016, 2018b) were dedicated to capturing the voices of children and young people in New Zealand. These projects were intended to inform the Office of the Children's Commissioner submissions for changes to the Education Act 1989 (Office of the

Children's Commissioner, 2016, 2018a). The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016) report, *What Kids Say About Education and Achievement,* reported on 554 primary and secondary students in New Zealand aged 8–18, and of these, 77% were males. In this survey, students were asked what achievement means to them. The highest-equal concepts selected were "Getting good marks" and "Feeling confident about my future", followed by "Making my family proud of me", "Making friends", and "Being able to participate in society (i.e., sport and social activities)" (p. 2). Another 12% of respondents selected "Something else". Students were also asked how their school could support them to achieve their goals, and 83% of students selected "Teachers who can explain things to me in a way I understand" (p. 2). Students were also asked if they think they should be consulted about school rules and decisions, to which 42% responded that they felt that they and their family should be asked.

The students' perspectives of achievement as feeling confident about future, making friends and participating in society aligns with objectives of the Education Act 1989, Part 1AA(3)(b) including work readiness, social skills and participation in community. Children in the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016) survey identified achievement as broad and holistic, with acknowledgement of success within and outside the typical realm of the classroom. While the notions of achievement as broad and holistic is similar to the Ministry of Education (2018) findings, specific attributes of success differed between the two surveys. For example the social aspect of achievement of making family proud and making friends in Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016) was not recognised as traits of a successful student in the Ministry of Education (2018) survey. Further, the importance of teachers explaining so that students can understand was highly valued by students in the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016) survey; however, the findings to the Ministry of Education (2018) survey valued flexible and diverse curriculum rather than teacher's delivery of the curriculum.

One limitation of the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016) survey was the overrepresentation of males, as one boys' school was particularly proactive to support their students to respond (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016). Another limitation of the survey was that not all notions of achievement were captured by the statements, as indicated by 12% of respondents who selected "Something else" in response to this question. A challenge for children's voices in educational research is

not to exclude underrepresented voices (Cook-Sather, 2014). In this case, female students' voices may not have been appropriately represented; nor did the survey's predetermined statements represent some students' notions of achievement.

Later, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018b) conducted a larger survey, the *Education Matters to Me* series. This was conducted to listen to children and young people's voices to inform the Office of the Children's Commissioner submission on the changes to the Education Act 1989 and creation of the National Education Learning Priorities Bill 2018a). The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018b) survey involved 144 face-to-face interviews with children and young people aged 3–19 (or unknown), and 1534 online submissions from students aged 5–19. The survey intentionally engaged with diverse learners, particularly priority learners. Participants included children and young people enrolled in "primary and secondary schools, alternative education units, early childhood centres, kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, learning support units, home-based schools and teen parent units" (p. 6). The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018b) survey found that children and young people wanted to be understood in light of their home life and experiences, which included feeling known, and having their goals, strengths and culture recognised. Racism and discrimination was conveyed as a big concern, with children and young people wanting to be treated fairly and without judgement. Relationships with friends were crucial for a sense of belonging in school, relationships with teachers were considered as imperative and foundational for learning to occur, and children and young people wanted to make their whānau proud. Children and young people wanted to be taught according to their strengths and abilities, including recognising any barriers to learning, and be taught content that had utility for their current and future lives. Finally, children and young people reported that they wanted to have a say in decision-making and to be involved in their learning (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b).

Evidence of children's voices being heard is seen through the influence of the surveys on informing the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018a) submission on the changes to the Education Act 1989. For example, one suggestion was to change the existing wording of "attain educational achievement" in Part 1AA(3)(a), as this may be interpreted as meaning academic achievement. The findings of the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016, 2018b) surveys identified that children and young

people view success and achievement more broadly than academic achievement alone. Therefore, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018a) recommended that Part 1AA(3)(a) be replaced with "to provide learning experiences that support children and young people to reach their potential, and a system that aims to achieve equitable outcomes for all" (p. 2). This submission and the corresponding surveys used children's voices to influence decision-making on legislation that affect children and young people.

As these surveys showed, educational success is understood in broad and holistic ways, encapsulating academic achievement and wider lived experiences. Although there are conceptualisations of success that align with existing legislation, other views incorporate a richer nuanced understanding that sit outside or expanded on these legislative definitions. The contrasts between the Ministry of Education (2018) and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016, 2018b) surveys indicate that children's voices must be listened to as they may differ from adults' views, and definitions in legislation.

In summary, this chapter has explored how notions of educational success are contextually located, and that it is ethically and legally mandatory to seek the voices of children and young people to inform individual- and systems-level practices. It is imperative that children and young people's voices are intentionally sought, and are not overshadowed by adult views. Educational success is a broad and holistic concept, and viewed uniquely through the lens of lived experiences by individuals and groups. Research investigating students' perspectives of educational success is an emerging field, and there is space, and imperative, to add the voices of children and young people in FC to this field. This research endeavours to provide FC experienced young people voice to articulate and share their views and experiences of education. The voices in this research will provide a valuable insight into the lived experiences of education and FC in New Zealand.

Chapter 3
Methods

This chapter explains the research methodology for this qualitative instrumental case study exploring FC experienced young people's understandings of educational success. Semi-structured interviews with seven participants were conducted and analysed using grounded theory. Justification for the constructionist, interpretivist approach to the instrumental case study is explained, followed by details of participant selection, interview procedures, the researcher's position, and data analysis. Further, ethical considerations and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the study are detailed. The selected methodological approaches allowed for a deeper understanding of how young people who were in, or had been in, FC identified educational success, and how these educational experiences impacted on their lives.

Research Design
Qualitative research

The mode of qualitative research design was deemed as the most appropriate approach to understand participants' educational experiences and meanings of educational success. Qualitative research design allows for insight into people's understandings, perceptions, meanings and interactions with respect to phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Punch, 2014). This design is useful to contribute emergent knowledge to a developing field. Currently, there are only two published studies internationally that have examined FC experienced children's perceptions of educational success (Coulling, 2000; Huxtable, 2016), and there is a gap in the literature examining FC experienced young people's (aged 16 years and older) own experiences of educational success in New Zealand.

Epistemology

The present study used constructionist epistemology, as is founded on the assumption that the concept of success is not ubiquitous, but its meaning is constructed in different ways and influenced by lived experiences. Constructionism emphasises that truth and meaning are constructed as people interact with the world, that there is no objective truth, and that meaning is not something that is discovered (Crotty, 1998).

Constructionist research explores how and why meanings are constructed in specific situations (Charmaz, 2006). This study engaged in conversations with FC experienced young people to understand how they constructed meanings of success.

Theoretical perspective

This research is based on an interpretivist theoretical perspective, as the intention of this research is to give voice to FC experienced young people through exploring their interpretations, and experiences with regards to educational success. Interpretivism attempts to understand phenomena and human reality (Charmaz, 2006; Crotty, 1998). The goal of interpretivist research is to provide opportunities for participant's voice and focuses on their understanding of the topic or phenomena (Tracy, 2013).

Methodology

The present study used instrumental case study methodology, as FC experienced young people have unique experiences of home life and education that differ from the general populace, and often experience educational disadvantage. Case study research enables in-depth investigation of experiences and relationships related to the studied phenomena (Denscombe, 2010). An instrumental case study approach is used when the case itself is used to facilitate the understanding of something else (Stake, 2008). This methodology is useful in the discovery of information and facilitates learning from specific cases; particularly where there is shallow or fragmented information available, and can contribute to a wider research area (Denscombe, 2010; Punch, 2014). The relatively small population of children and young people in FC means that their experiences are not easily represented in general surveys (Wood & Selwyn, 2017); therefore, instrumental case study was most appropriate for this study.

Sample

Participants

This study involved seven participants aged between 16 and 29 years. Selection criteria for participation were that individuals were 16 years or older, had experienced FC in New Zealand and had received compulsory education in New Zealand. At the time of the interviews, all participants were living in New Zealand: five participants were living in a large city, while two were in a rural town. This age range means that a range of experiences are reflected here, including a young person who was still in high school,

two who had very recently finished school, as well as some who were well into their adult years. Further, the ages include those who were in FC at the time of the adoption of the new Oranga Tamariki and the Children's Act 2014, and those who had aged out of FC before these changes.

Seven participants in a sample for interviews can ensure that each case is explored in-depth, and allows for comparison of the heterogeneous experiences and constructions of meanings between each case (Tracy, 2013). The researcher endeavoured to involve participants with a range of educational and living experiences in ways that demonstrated heterogeneous and diverse experiences. The participants' home background and educational experiences are described in individual vignettes in the results chapter.

Participant selection

Participants were selected using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves a few key people nominating individuals who they consider to be relevant for the purposes of the research (Denscombe, 2010).

Snowball sampling was necessary because of the population of children and young people who have experienced FC is relatively small and are naturally often reluctant to be reached or to participate in such research. As discussed in Chapter One, many children and young people in FC have adverse experiences within school, and thus may be unwilling to share these experiences. As the researcher, I had initially liaised with up to three organisations that supported FC experienced young people. However, policy constraints limited these organisations' ability to support this research. Therefore snowball sampling was found to be the most appropriate and successful means for participant recruitment.

As the researcher, I identified key people within my personal contacts that were involved and trusted in the FC community, notably foster carers. An invitation to participate in the research was sent to these informants, who were asked to identify and forward the invitation to young people in their personal contacts who met the criteria (see Appendix 1).

Eligible young people indicated interest in the research by either contacting the researcher directly, or by responding to the intermediary person, who then forwarded, with permission, the young person's contact details to the researcher. The researcher sent the information sheet and the consent form to these young people.

Participants provided their informed consent to the research either by signing and emailing the researcher a scanned copy of the consent form, or by indicating agreement with intent to sign the consent form at the interview. Once consent was gained, participants were asked if they would prefer an individual interview or focus group, and the time and place for the interviews were organised. Informed consent was an ongoing throughout the research, and at each interview, participants were asked again if they were comfortable and agreeable to participating.

 Procedure

Data collection

A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted: five participants were interviewed individually and two participants were interviewed together at their request. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour long. The individual interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location that was convenient to the participant. The pair interview was conducted via Internet video call, as the participants were living in a different city to the researcher, and a video call was agreed as a viable option for the interview. Participants were provided with the information sheet at the interview, and encouraged to seek clarification as needed. They signed the consent form prior to the commencement of the interview. Participants in the pair interview were also asked to sign the focus group consent form. The information sheets, individual consent forms and focus group consent forms were developed for this research (see Appendix 2, Appendix 3 and Appendix 4).

The researcher conducted all interviews, which were sound recorded and transcribed. Interviews are effective in obtaining unique information and interpretations from the interviewee, particularly information that cannot be observed (Stake, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of their efficiency and effectiveness to gain understanding of participants' experiences and views. Interviews are a way for participants to share lived experiences and views with the researcher, and provide opportunities for participants to share stories that illuminate how they see the world, and to account for their views and actions (Tracy, 2013). Qualitative interviewing is compatible with grounded theory, as they are both "open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28).

The interview questions were developed with support and feedback from supervisors, which helped to ensure that data collection methods supported the collection of in-depth data. The interview schedule was guided by the research questions, and each participant was asked the same questions according to the interview structure. Though, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews also allowed for probing to explore participants' assumptions, experiences and ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview schedule is attached as Appendix 5.

The researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument for data collection and analysis (Stake, 2010). As a young adult, I experienced of children and young people being fostered in my home. My parents are foster carers who have fostered approximately 100 children and young people since 2012 in both our family home and in group-home settings. Through this, I have seen first-hand how children and young people in FC can be educationally disadvantaged. These observations inspired my thesis topic, in order to portray the educational experiences and successes of young people in FC in a positive, strengths-based light.

Ethical Considerations

The Massey University Human Ethics Committee Southern B, Application SOB 18/45, approved this research. Key ethical considerations regarded confidentiality, and minimising the risk of psychological harm.

Confidentiality

Participants' real names only appeared in the consent forms and original transcripts. Pseudonyms were used in this thesis and identifying information was removed.

Risk of psychological harm

Due to the nature of participants' complex and unsettling life experiences, the research process included the provision of additional support and procedures to reduce any psychological distress that may have been experienced as participants recounted their experiences. Participants were provided with contact details for free counselling services, and were encouraged to use them if they felt distressed as a result of the

interview. Participants were informed that they could stop or pause the interview if they felt distressed or uncomfortable at any time (see Appendix 6).

Voluntary consent and dissent

Ethical processes were followed throughout the interview and thereafter, where participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Due to the possible nature of participants wanting to *please* the researcher by providing consent, the researcher was vigilant for signs of distress or dissent. Consent to participate in research is important at every stage of the research process, thus being a reflexive, continuing process (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). As a researcher and with personal experience of living with children and young people in FC, I was acutely aware of the emotional influence that the questions or responses could have on these participants. During the interviews, I took a respectful approach and monitored both the spoken and emotional responses from participants. In times where I sensed tension or upset, I paused the interview questions to check that the participants were okay and asked if they wanted to continue. In one interview, I broke the tension by sharing a joke with the participant who responded with ease. At the end of the interview, I encouraged participants to contact the free counselling services if they felt they needed such support.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was selected as a data analysis technique because, as Chapter Two revealed, FC experienced young people's understandings of educational success is a developing field and theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that uses ground-up, inductive strategies to generate theory from the data (Punch, 2014). It is typically used when the literature shows gaps in understanding of a topic, or that there are no satisfactory theories to explain the topic (Punch, 2014). Grounded theory is useful for social justice issues, as it focuses on action so is able to uncover processes and actions that contribute to issues (Charmaz, 2008). Coding using a grounded theory approach can enable the researcher to see their own assumptions and the participants' assumptions (Charmaz, 2008).

Charmaz's grounded theory data analysis uses tools such as line-by-line coding, focused coding, and memos (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding involved reading the transcripts line-by-line and breaking up the data into codes (Charmaz, 2015). Analysis was also

attentive to the participants' language, and how this shaped meaning (Charmaz, 2008). An example of this was participants' use of the word 'normal'; the researcher examined how participants defined 'normal' and compared themselves to this idea. An example of line-by-line coding on a transcript is included as Appendix 7.

Focused coding involved taking the initial codes from the line-by-line coding and elevating them to a more conceptual level (Charmaz, 2013). The line-by-line codes were grouped together and visually displayed as a mind-map (see Appendix 8). From the mind-map, the codes were again grouped, and then elevated to the conceptual themes that are discussed in the results chapter.

Finally, memo writing is an important exercise for developing analytic codes, and was exercised throughout analysis for self-reflection, improvements, musings of the data and codes, and examining assumptions (Charmaz, 2015). Memo writing included noting key emergent ideas from each interview transcript, which were compared to the ideas from other interview transcripts. The researcher also kept a document of ideas and musings whilst analysing the transcripts, which included notes about what was surprising from the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the means to ensure rigor in qualitative studies and involves credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher sought to obtain thick, rich data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) through data collection methods, sample, data analysis and external review. Considering that the interview is pivotal in the collection of rich, thick data, the interview strategy should be well articulated and the quality, length and depth of the interview considered (Morrow, 2005). As described earlier in this chapter, the interview questions were developed with support from supervisors so that the questions would elicit thick, rich data that was appropriate to the purpose of this study.

Credibility refers to the internal validity of the data, and can be achieved through familiarity with the topic, sufficient and rich data, external review and member checks (Charmaz, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 2007). The researcher's vicarious experience of FC as aforementioned offers credibility through familiarity with the experiences of children

and young people in FC. Further, interviews are a well-established data collection method in qualitative research, strengthening the credibility of the research method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Analysis and coding were constantly compared to the data to ensure that emergent themes reflected the data. Ideas for emerging themes were discussed with supervisors, which aided with external review (Shenton, 2004). In addition, member checking, which involves verifying inferences and findings from the data with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), was achieved by sending participants a brief summary of key ideas that were used from their respective individual interviews and the shared themes. Participants were asked to check that they agreed with the ideas and to comment if there was anything they did not agree with or understand. Six participants responded that they were okay with the summaries, and one participant did not respond.

Transferability refers to the ability to transfer the findings to another context, which is achieved by thick descriptive data (Lincoln & Guba, 2007; Morse, 2015). It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide sufficient contextual information such as participants' contexts and data collection methods, which can be used by the reader to judge the transferability of the findings to their own context (Shenton, 2004). Recruitment and data collection methods, including the interview schedule are detailed in this chapter and as an appendix. Individual vignettes and the use of quotes in the results chapter provide the reader with rich descriptions of participants' experiences to which the reader can judge the transferability of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability, which is the reliability of the data, can be achieved through in-depth coverage of the research processes so that the research could be replicated and achieve similar results (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability, which is objectivity, can be achieved through explanation of the researcher's position, and the audit trail. This chapter has described the research design and procedures, and the vignettes in the results chapter give more in-depth information about participants, which supports dependability. The position of the key research instrument, the researcher, is explained in this chapter, which supports confirmability. Further, the audit trail has been included in the description of data analysis and appendices, which supports the confirmability of this research.

In summary, this chapter detailed the research design, sample, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and considerations for ethics and trustworthiness. The next chapter presents the findings through both vignettes and themes deriving from the results of this instrumental case study.

Chapter 4
Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how educational success has been experienced and is perceived by FC experienced young people. Also explored were how they identified these experiences as successes, and how these experiences impacted on their lives. Understandings of educational success were broad and holistic, and are contextually located according to each participant's unique experiences. This chapter presents the findings from individual and pair interviews with seven participants. Findings are presented in vignettes for each participant, and then an explanation of shared themes.

Vignettes

The following are vignettes for each participant in this study: Athena, Brianna, Caitlin, Tama, Daneen, Aroha and Teuila.

Athena

Athena is a female in her mid twenties who was placed in FC as an infant. She was moved into other foster homes more than 20 times, and by the end of her schooling experience in Year 13, had attended six different schools.

Athena felt that her biggest success was to remain in education until the end of Year 13 and not quitting, despite obstacles. Due to the legislation at the time, she aged out of care while in still in Year 12 and moved into a training flat, which required her to juggle work commitments to pay rent in addition to school demands. A teacher recommended that her foster carer remove Athena from school and enrol her in a course at a nearby institute of technology. Athena's foster carer insisted that she stay and finish school.

> *But it was my caregiver that was like, Na, she's staying in school. And my caregiver knew that I wasn't going to pass but she just wanted me to stay in school, she just hated that people were giving me that label of, Oh she's the foster care child.*

Another highlight for Athena was her selection to participate in a youth leadership development programme. This was special to Athena, as she was selected as one of two students from around 45 applicants from her school, and that her school was willing to put her forward for the programme.

> *Cause I just never saw myself as just like, being a good leader, I guess. But then to know that my school thought of me as a great leader and someone good to represent the school made me feel pretty proud.*

Speaking up for herself and helping others was another success for Athena. Athena felt confident to explain to her teachers about her FC situation and how they can support her. Additionally, the leadership development programme boosted her confidence to speak on others' behalf, such as speaking on behalf of her class in assemblies, and supporting other fostered students at her school.

> *But as soon as I realised that actually I've got a voice and I'm pretty powerful and I've got the leadership skills, that it actually started helping me. So that was another success I guess, just helping other kids at school.*

Brianna and Caitlin

This vignette includes two participants who are sisters. The sisters lived together, and so requested to be interviewed together. Each sister has specific experiences and raised these freely and with confidence with the other present. The vignette explores each sister separately.

Brianna. Brianna is a female in her late teens who was placed in FC with her sister when she was three years old. In her early years, she had lived in four foster homes, but had some consistency in her teenage years, as she lived in one foster home during that time and attended one secondary school.

Brianna shared about her English teacher for Year 12–13 with whom she built a trusting relationship. Brianna commented that most of her teachers allowed her to be lazy at school and do the bare minimum, but this teacher was the exception, and encouraged her to try harder and apply herself to her studies. It was through this encouragement and support from her teacher that Brianna felt empowered and successful.

And she just really pushed me to use my potential. So I guess that was
good for me, and helped me to be more successful and reach my
potential.

Brianna found it helpful when her teachers knew that she was in FC, and shared about her FC experiences with selected trusted teachers. She found that teachers whom she had opened up to were more supportive and she felt comfortable to talk to them, whereas teachers who didn't know her circumstances were not as understanding towards her. Brianna emphasised the importance of relationships with teachers.

There was some [teachers] that I'd told, and they knew by me telling
them, and then there was, yeah, [English teacher], who was very aware
and then, other teachers might have known, but I don't know that they
did know.

Fitting in was important to Brianna, and she reflected that making friends in her second year of high school was a happy time for her in school. However, she struggled with being labelled as the 'foster kid' and considered that she might never feel 'normal' because of her FC experiences.

I kind of feel not normal because I am a foster kid, and that I didn't have
normal raising with my two parents… So I was saying that I wouldn't
feel successful if I became normal, because it's not going to happen,
because you can't foster kid out of me.

Caitlin. Caitlin is a female in her early twenties who was placed in FC with her sister when she was four years old. Along with Brianna, Caitlin lived in four foster homes in her early years and had attended five primary schools. She attended one secondary school and chose to leave her long-term foster home to live with a friend in Year 11, though later returned to this foster home.

Caitlin explained a successful experience in school where she had won a competition on a sports science trip. This was a success to Caitlin because fitness was important to her at the time and she enjoyed winning. This impacted her self-efficacy in sports science, and subsequently felt motivated to work harder in it. Caitlin also reported that after she

won, she received affirmation through Hi-5's and congratulations from her peers and felt like all the boys liked her.

> *It made me work harder in that subject than in other subjects because I*
> *felt like I was good at that.*

Fitting in was most important to Caitlin in school, even at the cost of her academic achievement and foster home. A happy time for her in school was at the end of Year 10 when she started "hanging out" with the "wrong crowd". She prioritised her friendships and began "wagging" school, and subsequently her grades fell. She rejected her foster family and moved to her best friend's house in Year 11.

> *Mine is probably a bad answer, it was probably when I starting hanging*
> *out with the wrong crowd, but at that time, I was pretty happy that I had*
> *friends.*

During her school years, Caitlin didn't like to draw attention to her FC experience with teachers and peers, as she wanted to feel 'normal' and fit in. She did not feel comfortable seeking support and help through the school counsellor for fear that people would think there was something wrong with her. However, she had a supportive relationship with one teacher and felt comfortable talking to him and sharing about her FC experiences.

> *I felt comfortable around him, and like I said, he was encouraging to me,*
> *so it took a while for me to tell him, definitely. But yeah I felt I could be*
> *open and honest with him.*

Tama

Tama is a male in his late teens who was placed in FC as an infant. As a child he was moved around foster homes within a large urban city. He had been with the same foster carer since the beginning of his secondary school years. Tama completed Year 9 and 10 at a local secondary school, and then transferred to Te Kura (Correspondence School) for Years 11 and 12 where he completed NCEA Levels 1–3.

A key success for Tama was completing both NCEA Level 1 and 2 in one year, and then completing NCEA Level 3 and University Entrance the following year. Tama

contrasted this success to his experiences at school where he struggled to stay concentrated and did not complete or pass any of his work. As he noted:

> *'Cause when I was at college, I wasn't completing anything, or passing anything. And then as soon as I started correspondence, I don't know what happened, it's like I got a new brain or something, and then I just started completing everything.*

Tama felt more motivated to engage in his study through Te Kura, as he was able to choose his subjects and topics, and incorporate his interests in his learning, such as sports and his interest in a career in the police force.

> *There was a, I think it was a school English correspondence like an article about policing or something. I wanted to be a police officer but after seeing that article and doing research about it and stuff, I think motivated me more.*

Tama also felt more motivated in Te Kura because he received one-on-one help from his tutors and foster carer.

> *I don't think I got any help at school. So when I started this one-on-one, I felt it was pretty, it helped me and motivated me more.*

Moving homes and schools resulted in gaps in his knowledge, and difficulty making and maintaining friendships. He referred to keeping up with one friend, though he also alluded to losing friends through moving homes and schools.

> *But with me it was like, I was home at one place in [city], and then another place, so you're always meeting new people, rather than being consistent.*

Daneen

Daneen is a female in her mid teens, and was placed in FC when she was 11 years old. She had lived in eight different foster homes but had been attending the same high school where she was completing Year 12 at the time of the interview.

Daneen was most proud of achieving NCEA Level 1 with Merit endorsement. This was particularly meaningful, given that she was significantly behind in her schoolwork

earlier in the year due to supporting her family, was 'hating' school and was unsettled in her previous foster home.

> *And so that was the year that my brother was in and out of jail and we had to be his support. And so it was really hard and my home was unsettled… And so I just hated school, my family was in so much trouble and stuff, so that reflected on my schoolwork.*

Moving into a new foster home was Daneen's turning point. It had been the first time since being placed in FC that she had felt loved and got along with her foster carers. She was also assigned a new social worker, with whom she built a special relationship. She was motivated to achieve high grades in NCEA Level 2 to show gratitude to her foster carers and social worker, and to make them proud.

> *And once that happened, right at the last term of school, and I think because I was happy, I did so well in school. Like I was happy to go to school, I was happy to come back and see them.*

Daneen had explained to her teachers about her FC situation and how she can be supported in her learning. Daneen's teachers supported her to study how and when she needed, which included being allowed to spend class time in the library, resubmit assignments, and being sent extra work. She considered that her "brain operates differently" to the other students in her class, and sometimes she needs space and time, though she also wanted to be treated as everyone else.

Having stable friends was another major success for Daneen. She reflected that it was so important to have stable friends because life is so unstable in FC. Her 'real' friends pushed her, encouraged her, studied with her, and were also driven to achieve in their schoolwork.

> *You feel so successful when you find your real friends at school; it makes you feel so good…. you can just count on them.*

Aroha

Aroha is a female in her late teens who was placed in FC around the age of four. She had lived with the same foster family since she was eight years old, and had attended

one secondary school. She left secondary school at the end of Year 12 and enrolled in a course at a Bible College.

Aroha was enthusiastic and passionate about her course, motivated in her studies, and was glad that she had left school to go to Bible College. Her decision to leave school was supported by her foster carers and teachers.

> *And then I was like, in school, I didn't really care unless I had a good connection with the teacher and I was thinking, I'm not going to do too well if I'm going to carry on like that. So I found an alternative, which was to study at [Bible College], 'cause it was something I was passionate about.*

One of Aroha's successes in her course was getting the second highest grade for an assignment. This was impressive for Aroha, as she hadn't received anything higher than Achieved for her tasks in school.

> *But in [Bible College], I guess I'm succeeding because I'm motivated to do well.*

Another success for Aroha was that she grew in confidence and found a greater sense of belonging in her church through volunteering for numerous ministries as a requirement for her course. She noted that since leaving school, she had made new friends in her church and felt that these friends were supportive of her course studies.

> *I think so, it's definitely grown my confidence around church, I was that quiet person who didn't know if they belonged, and now with me being able to speak, I can, not so much fit in because everyone fits in, you just feel more comfortable around people.*

While at school, Aroha felt successful in her sports. She reflected that she was good at sports and that it was all she cared about. Her foster carers had given her opportunities to play a variety of sports and had encouraged her to play.

> *So I was at school for the attendance, I think sports was my biggest success in college, my grades were never that high.*

Teuila

Teuila is a female in her late twenties who was placed in FC from the age of eight, and then after a brief return home, was in FC long term from 11 years old. During her time in FC, she had been moved across home settings over 20 times. She had attended one secondary school followed by an alternative education setting.

Teuila reported that her 'best' year in school was in primary, when she had a supportive teacher who understood her home situation. At that time, Teuila had just moved from the Islands and struggled with English. She also reported being abused at home and was being moved around family. Her supportive teacher was what she needed at that time, and despite her home difficulties, she was learning and achieving well at school, such as improving her spelling and reading. As she noted, this teacher "spoke to me like I was there".

At school, Teuila felt successful when she was praised by her teachers, such as receiving certificates or acknowledged for completing a task. This improved her confidence, as she noted that she was shy as a child.

> *'Cause it felt like people actually cared. And that you, and what you were doing, they were actually paying attention. And for them to even encourage and give you advice or comment afterwards, then they've actually made that special.*

When she was older, Teuila was placed with her long-term foster carer who encouraged her in her studies and pushed her to keep going, particularly when Teuila had no motivation of her own.

> *I had no drive of finishing anything but it was just like, Oh yeah, I'll just do it for you. But at the end of it, she was proud because I got a certificate and everything at the end of it. And not knowing that while I'm doing it for her, I'm also doing it for myself.*

Teuila remembered being helpful and being told that she was helpful during her life, which she counted as successes. In primary school, she remembered feeling empathy with new or lonely students and would befriend them. As an adult, she saw her life experiences as learning and opportunities to help others, and was a foster carer herself.

Themes

The following section describes shared themes that emerged from the interviews. While specific conceptions of success differed between participants, some overarching themes emerged. These related to having support and connections in relationships, having a voice, and navigating FC and school.

Support and connection in relationships

Inherent to participants' successes and positive school experiences was feeling supported by, and connected to others. Key relationships that were discussed were supportive relationships with teachers, foster carers and social workers, and the importance of friendships.

All participants spoke about support received from teachers, and some benefitted from supportive relationships with their teachers. Key qualities of supportive teachers were that they were accommodating, encouraging, sympathetic and trustworthy. Supportive teachers were flexible to allow participants to leave the classroom if they were emotionally overwhelmed, gave one-on-one support and would break down tasks, and would give extra attention to participants.

Teachers' high expectations, encouragement and praise, and constructive criticism and feedback supported participants to feel empowered and that they were succeeding in reaching their potential. This was particularly evident for Brianna and Teuila, who felt successful when they were encouraged by teachers and achieving in those subjects. This was also the case for Athena, whose acceptance into the leadership development programme demonstrated the schools' belief in her leadership potential—something she had not previously considered.

Teachers were often more sympathetic and empathetic to participants once they understood participants' situations and needs. Although, participants still needed their teachers to have boundaries and hold participants accountable for school work and behaviour. Caitlin, Brianna and Teuila specifically mentioned trusting relationships with teachers who showed these key qualities, and felt safe to share with these teachers.

[English teacher would] always tell me, You've got the potential, I know
you can do better than this, stop being lazy… And she just really pushed
me to use my potential. So I guess that was good for me, and helped me
to be more successful and reach my potential. – Brianna

A settled and supportive home life from foster carers and social workers enabled participants to focus on their endeavours and successes, as Athena commented, "Because to be honest, in FC, whatever happens at home or in life actually carries on through school". Foster carers supported participants through showing love and care, supporting their decisions, and giving encouragement and praise. In response to feeling loved and encouraged, Teuila and Daneen strove in their education to make their foster carers proud.

A close connection and feeling part of the family was evident with Tama, Aroha and Teuila, who referred to their foster carer as "Mum", and Caitlin and Brianna who continued to stay with their foster family despite having aged out of FC.

Foster carers supported and enabled participants' educational success through being involved in their education. This included keeping them in school, helping with schoolwork, and not allowing participants to use their FC situation as an excuse or reason to give up.

Foster carers and social workers supported participants through meeting basic needs and providing opportunities. Tama and Aroha's long-term foster carers enabled them to pursue their chosen sports and other activities, which helped them to feel successful. Daneen's social worker drove her places, including to the mosque for prayer. In contrast, Caitlin and Brianna's home mobility limited their ability to have consistency in their sports and hobbies, and one home didn't provide them lunch for school.

My mum, my foster mum, she always was one of my biggest encouragers
and she always knew, she was always proud. – Teuila

All participants discussed the importance of friendships and how these contributed to a sense of belonging. Given the transience of social workers and caregivers, participants regarded friends as an important constant, though three participants did not experience this.

Daneen, Aroha, Caitlin and Brianna shared about how their friends were a success to them at the time, and that they were happy to have friends. These friendships affirmed their values at the time, such as Aroha's church friends, Daneen's academically driven school friends, and Caitlin's membership in the "popular crowd".

In contrast, Athena, Tama and Teuila struggled to make and maintain friendships because of the barriers that FC posed. Athena recounted that it was difficult to see friends outside of school, as she was barely allowed friends over or friends' parents needed to be police vetted. Tama struggled to maintain friendships after moving FC placements and schools. Teuila struggled to make friends due to her shyness as a result of her traumatic experiences, or that friendships would end due to the stigma of FC.

> *You feel so successful when you find your real friends at school; it makes*
> *you feel so good. Because all this shit, caregivers come and go, social*
> *workers come and go, you attach to someone and they leave and it just*
> *shatters you right back to start. And for you to find solid friends, even if*
> *it might be one. – Daneen*

Having a voice

The participants in this study highlighted the importance of being confident and selective to use their voice, being heard, having an influence over decisions that affected them, and having an advocate. These were viewed as both successes in their own rights, but also a means to success.

Telling their teachers and others about their FC situation and asking for help were central ways that participants used their voices. When participants felt comfortable to share with their teachers about being in FC, there was an expectation that their teachers would be more understanding and supportive, and keep these conversations in confidence. Speaking up for herself and others was a successful experience for Athena. Daneen and Athena explained their situation to their teachers when they needed their teachers to be especially understanding, usually after an emotional outburst in class or when they needed more time and support in their course work. Caitlin and Brianna were selective about the teachers that they told. Teuila also confided in a teacher about some problems at home; however, this particular teacher reported this back to Teuila's family and she didn't disclose to anyone after that.

So for me when I told my teachers, 'cause there'd be days when I just cry in class and I'd walk out crying. Something would just trigger it, or I was just having a shitty day. It wasn't until I told my teachers and they understood. – Athena

Participants needed their teachers and other adults to listen, to hear and to understand their concerns, and create opportunities for participants to share. Teuila described a positive experience of being heard, saying that her foster carer "always spoke to me like she heard me".

Participants felt that it would have been beneficial if more opportunities had been created for them to share about their needs and concerns. Tama and Athena both felt the impact of school mobility and gaps in learning. They suggested that it would have been helpful for their teachers or social workers to regularly check in about their progress in schoolwork. Teuila, Daneen, Caitlin and Brianna felt that it was important for teachers to talk with their students to get to know their students and understand what they're going through.

So if [the teacher would] check up, it will give them more of an understanding of where I'm at compared to someone else that understands the task. Because if I don't, then from that, you can go from that. – Tama

Four participants shared about decisions that that they had influence over and were enabled to make, and the impact these had on their lives. Caitlin and Daneen both had influence over where they would live, Aroha chose to leave high school for Bible College, and Tama had opportunities daily to choose what topics and subjects he would study in Te Kura. Feeling settled at her new foster home, Daneen was able to focus on her schoolwork and achieve her desired grades. In contrast, Caitlin chose to move to her friends' house, and prioritised her friendships over school. For Aroha and Tama, the impact of doing something that they were passionate about motivated them in their studies, and they felt successful in their preferred studies.

The biggest decision with [Bible College] was my passion for kids. – Aroha

Four participants had an adult who understood their needs and aspirations, and advocated for them. The impact of the advocates and subsequent decisions positively impacted participants' wellbeing and successes. Athena's foster carer insisted that she stayed in school, Daneen's social worker placed (and kept) her with her new foster carers, Aroha's foster carers met with any new teachers to explain her backstory, and Teuila's school counsellor was the one who got her into FC permanently.

> *Once my household settled in, everything else just fell into the right space, and you just feel better about yourself, that you know apart from school that you have another place to go to. And so that just helped me and my new social worker who put me into here… I don't think if I didn't end up here that I wouldn't have done well. – Daneen*

Navigating foster care and school

Participants had to manage barriers related to their FC placement that impacted on their learning and social interactions at school. Participants' successes were emphasised by showing resilience through these obstacles.

Participants were acutely aware that their experiences were different to most students. They were affected by their FC identity, stigma and different life circumstances, but wanted to be treated the same as their peers. For Athena, Brianna, Caitlin, Aroha and Teuila, being in FC, or labelled as a 'foster kid' was an inherent, (and often unwanted) part of their identity.

Participants felt affected by the stigma attached to being in FC, and were concerned that it cast a shameful light on them and their parents. Teuila considered the stigma of FC interfered with her friendships in primary school, and Caitlin and Brianna expressed frustrations when teachers or peers would ask unsolicited questions about their parents or FC.

Being in FC resulted in different life circumstances, and participants contrasted these to 'normal' experiences. Aging out of care, moving homes and schools disrupted their learning, friendships and secure relationships with foster carers and other adults. However, despite these differences, participants wanted to be treated the same as everyone else, and didn't want special treatment, or to have attention drawn to their FC situation.

I would say treating us like any other normal kid would make me feel better at school. Not a teacher that's coming up to me all the time and trying to say, Oh I know how you feel, and empathise with me. – Caitlin

Traumatic experiences from participants' biological family or from moving FC placements affected participants' relationships, emotional regulation, and school engagement. Trauma impacted participants' relationships within school, and it was difficult for participants to trust people, such as teachers and foster carers, and make meaningful relationships.

For some participants events at home had a carry on effect at school. Participants had to manage triggers, and drew attention to constantly being in an emotionally heightened state. Athena, Tama, Daneen and Teuila referred to struggling to focus and learn in school because they had so much "going in their mind". Difficulties at home were often prioritised over school, which affected their motivation to even attend school, as well their ability to focus on schoolwork.

Participants were able to deal with their past trauma when home and school life were more settled. School was a safe haven when home life was unsafe or unsettled, and it was a positive place in contrast to the negativity that was at home.

I really liked school, I always felt good at school, 'cause I hated being at home. So it was like my time of peace. So I really enjoyed school because you just get away from everything that happened at home, so that was my place all the time – Daneen

Participants demonstrated resilience, and were proud to have overcome obstacles, defy low expectations, and had worked hard to achieve their successes. Obstacles and setbacks such as those previously described often made participants more determined to achieve their successes.

At times, teachers would lower their expectations of participants because of the obstacles and barriers that the participants faced. Participants responded to others' low expectations with a determination to prove them wrong.

Participants worked hard to be successful, and often their hard work and motivation was fuelled by a passion for a subject or area. Big and small successes were linked to effort, ranging from working hard in favoured subjects and courses, finishing NCEA Levels, and finishing school, to simply turning up to school when life was hard.

And I'm big on my past, never wanting to change anything, 'cause if I didn't go through all of that bad stuff, I wouldn't be where I am now. – Aroha

In summary, findings from the interviews reflect that conceptions and understandings of educational success were uniquely identified by each participant, and reflected their lived experiences. Conceptions of success were broad and holistic, and included success within relationships, having a voice, and were foregrounded by experiences and obstacles within FC. Educational successes were supported by key relationships with adults and peers, opportunities to be heard and listened to, and by showing resilience to overcome obstacles. The next chapter discusses the findings with respect to related literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Articles 12 and 28, reserves the right for all children to have access to education, and all children have the right to a voice and influence over decisions that affect them. In support of their rights to be heard, this research created space to listen to the voices of young people who had experienced FC in order to understand, and demonstrate, their perceptions of educational success.

This research aimed to highlight the rights of FC experienced young people to report on their own experiences and perspectives of educational success.

International accountability for the education of children and young people in FC is typically measured by academic achievement such as examination results (Berridge, 2012). These measures do not typically take into account the lived experiences associated with FC. Children and young people are often educationally disadvantaged due to their experiences in FC (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017), and have poorer academic achievement than their peers not in FC (Berridge, 2012; Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019b). Listening to FC experienced young people's identification of educational successes enables a broader understanding of educational success that takes into account their unique social, educational and living experiences.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two demonstrated that success is contextually located. It also argued that it is necessary to listen to the voices of children and young people in decision-making and in the evaluation of legislation.

Findings from this research identified how young people who have experienced FC really experience what 'success' and 'getting through' means to them. Themes from the interviews were presented in the previous chapter. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature.

Support and Connection in Relationships

One of the most significant factors for educational success identified by the young people in this study were the key relationships that they had with teachers, foster carers, social workers, and friends. This finding supports international and national literature

emphasising the importance of support and relationships from key adults as necessary for positive educational outcomes for children and young people in FC.

Perceptions of teacher support

Participants in this study identified and constructed educational success through receiving acknowledgement from teachers and foster carers. Children and young people in the general population of New Zealand have expressed that they want their strengths to be recognised (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b). This research identifies that children and young people in FC also need teachers to recognise their strengths, as this can be a means to support them to identify their unique experiences of educational success.

Alongside this, it was apparent that teachers' and schools' flexible learning arrangements were particularly important for these young people who did not have stable home backgrounds, and who often required different conditions for learning. FC experienced children have identified the importance of schools to personalise learning (Sugden, 2013), and for teachers to be flexible, creative and sensitive to meet their needs (Day et al., 2012). Children and young people in FC often experience high school mobility due to changes in home placement, which results in gaps in learning (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). This study identified that flexibility in teaching methods, such as being taught one-on-one, can support successful engagement and address any gaps in knowledge. Furthermore, children and young people in FC often experience heightened emotions and anxiety (Clemens et al., 2017). This study suggests that flexibility and accommodations for where children and young people in FC study and learn are helpful to mitigate emotional overwhelm.

Therefore, flexible and diverse curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2018) is as relevant for these young people as their peers. Similarly, children and young people in New Zealand want their teachers to explain things in a way they understand (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016), be taught in a way that complements their individual strengths and abilities, and have barriers to learning removed (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b). Young people in this study identified that the effect of trauma and FC experiences affect the way they learn, which is sometimes different to their peers. While flexible learning arrangements and accommodations are important for all students, the present study shows that these are particularly important for children

and young people in FC to address any gaps in their learning due to school mobility and to accommodate heightened anxiety (Day et al., 2012).

As well as the need for flexibility and accommodations, this study highlights the need for teachers to have sympathy and appreciation for the difficulties children and young people in FC face (Sugden, 2013). Children and young people in FC often face difficult experiences that are additional to typical school demands, and may exhibit challenging behaviours (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). Children and young people in New Zealand shared that they want their teachers to view them in light of their home life (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b). Likewise for young people in the present study, they needed their teachers to be sympathetic to the challenges they had faced or were facing.

Interestingly, while participants identified that they needed their teachers to be sympathetic, they also emphasised that teachers shouldn't be 'too soft'. Specifically, they need their teachers to have effective strategies to manage their challenging behaviours. Teachers, too, have identified that they need support to effectively manage any disruptive behaviour of children and young people in FC (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a).

Additionally, teachers' high expectations have been well documented as a support for all students towards educational success, and particularly so for children and young people in FC (Clemens et al., 2017). In cases where participants felt that certain teachers had high expectations for them, they strove to meet these. These high expectations were reflected in the provision of opportunities to develop potential, even where participants lacked confidence in themselves. This supports Coulling's (2000) concept of success as 'reaching potential'. Additionally, the Education Act 1989, Part 1AA(3)(a) states that children and young people should be helped to attain the best of their potential. While children and young people in FC may require special flexibility and accommodations, these should not impinge on the teacher's expectations for the potential of children and young people in FC.

In a survey conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018b), it was found that teacher relationships with their students are foundational for learning for all

students. For children in FC, trusting relationships with teachers are just as important. Teachers help to create a sense of belonging in the school (Sugden, 2013), which is particularly needed for children with transient school and home lives (Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Teachers of children in FC were supportive and approachable to support Huxtable's (2016) notion of educational success as *learning*. Further, teachers were influential for children's enjoyment of subjects, which supported Huxtable's (2016) notion of educational success as *achievement*. This research extends the importance of trusting relationships with teachers beyond typical teaching and learning discourse, wherein relationships with teachers were also seen as a safe space for the young people to share their concerns and experiences in confidence.

Perceptions of foster carer and social worker support

The standard of care was an important finding in this study, as the young people consistently identified how they benefitted from relational support from foster carers and social workers. In a similar way, Wood and Selwyn (2017) noted that children and young people in FC value relationships with social workers and foster carers for subjective wellbeing. Children in FC have similarly identified that foster carers are influential for future development and goals (Huxtable, 2016). Further, FC experienced young people in New Zealand have expressed the necessity to be loved and have lasting relationships (Oranga Tamariki, 2017).

This study reiterates the importance of the quality of FC as a key support for educational success (Coulling, 2000; Morton, 2016). This study also reinforces that foster carers can support educational success through creating a sense of belonging in the home, have high aspirations for the children and young people in their care (Skilbred et al., 2017), and be involved in their education (Flynn et al., 2013). As found in general surveys, all children benefit from a supportive home environment for positive educational experiences (Ministry of Education, 2018). Most students come to school with some form of support from biological parents or grandparents. However, children and young people in FC must draw on non-traditional forms of support from foster carers, social workers, and other adults (Morton, 2016); therefore, their support is critical.

The impact of foster carer and social worker support on the lives of some participants was illustrated through their motivation in education to make these adults proud. As

noted in national New Zealand surveys, making family and whānau proud is an indication of success for many children and young people (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016, 2018b). For two young people in this study, such experiences were particularly evident. For example, they wanted to make their foster carers proud, and often expressed this through success in education as a demonstration of gratitude to the foster family.

Foster carers also influenced educational success through the provision of opportunities to be involved in extracurricular activities, of which was identified as a success for two participants who had this experience. Extracurricular activity participation and incorporating sports interests into school tasks contributed to higher levels of school engagement. This supports previous research that involvement in extracurricular activities positively affects FC experienced young people's educational aspirations (White et al., 2018). Success in extracurricular activities supports Coulling's (2000) notion of success as 'sociability', which included taking part in extracurricular activities. Further, the Education Act 1989, Part 1AA(3)(b) includes participation in community and civic activities as an objective of education in New Zealand. In the general population, children and young people in New Zealand view participation in community activities, such as sports and social activities, as a success (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016). For children and young people in in FC, involvement in extracurricular activities can be a support to success, and can be a success in its own right.

Participants in this study solely identified foster carers as the gatekeepers for involvement in extracurricular activities. This contrasts with children in FC in Huxtable's (2016) study, who identified teachers as significant for the provision of opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities. For some participants in the present study, the lack of opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities was due to foster carers' restrictions and home mobility, as also found by Day et al. (2012). Both these barriers resulted in a sense of lost opportunity for success, and so reiterating the importance of supportive foster carers as important for educational success.

The role of friendships
Four participants in this study experienced having friends as a success. This is consistent with the research by Coulling (2000), who found that children in FC viewed

making and keeping friendships as a success. According to general surveys in New Zealand, making friends was an indicator of success for children and young people (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016), and friendships are an important aspect within the learning environment as they provide a sense of belonging in school (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b).

However, for children and young people in FC, school mobility poses a barrier to making and maintaining friendships (Del Quest et al., 2012; Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Consequently, one participant identified her friendships as a definition for success in light of her transient life. Some young people were able to stay at the same school despite changing homes. For these young people at least, their friendships were stable relationships amidst unstable home life and new adult relationships. In light of the barriers school and home mobility pose, friendships as a success may be particularly significant for children and young people in FC.

Although success is often defined as academic success, one participant rejected success in academic achievement in favour of success in friendships; thus demonstrating the significance of her friendships at that time. This is in contrast to how 'educational success' is operationally defined as academic achievement in many studies that have investigated the educational experiences of FC experienced children and young people (e.g., Clemens et al., 2017; Flynn et al., 2013; Tessier et al., 2018). FC experienced young people's perspectives of success may lie outside dominant discourses of educational success, therefore there is need to listen to their unique understandings.

Having a Voice

As stated prior, children and young people have a right to a voice and influence over decisions, as protected by UNCRC 1989 and in New Zealand legislation. In this study, these young people were supported towards educational success through speaking up and being listened to, having influence over decisions, and having an advocate.

Selective and confident to use voice

Coulling (2000) highlighted the importance of the school's liaison with foster carers to understand the needs of the child in FC. Building on this, participants in this study acknowledged foster carers' liaison with the school, but also accentuated the need for

direct liaison between children/young people and the school. When children and young people in FC experience home instability and constant changes in the adults caring for them, the adults may not fully understand their needs (Morton, 2015). It could be that participants were acknowledging their transient home lives, and recognising that they understood their own educational needs better than the changing adults in their lives.

The importance of schools and teachers to understand the needs of children in FC to support educational success is critical (Coulling, 2000). Extending Coulling's (2000) findings, when participants shared about their FC experiences and needs to teachers, there was an expectation that these teachers would have better a understanding of their needs and could support them more effectively.

For one participant, speaking up for herself and others was a success in itself. Lundy's (2007) framework for including young people's voices in authentic and meaningful, and indeed influential ways is relevant to this study's findings. In the present study, young people expressed the importance of feeling confident to share with their teachers. Teachers became an audience for their voice, and reflected to these young people a belief that their views mattered. In other words, these young people felt they could influence decisions about them at school. Lundy's (2007) notion of *space* and *audience* means that young people are afforded a means to share their voice, and that their voices are listened to.

This study highlights the critical importance of trusting relationships with teachers to provide space and audience to children and young people in FC. When this trust is evident, the young people in this study expressed a view that these teachers created a safe space for them to share about their needs and concerns. This is consistent with the analysis by Day et al. (2012) of FC experienced young people's need for connections with teachers who understand their unique needs.

Participants in the current study were selective about whom they disclosed to, reiterating Lundy's (2007) assertion that voice is a right, not a duty, and that children should be allowed to opt in or out. Additionally, Lundy's (2007) notion of *audience* was demonstrated when teachers listened to, and took into account, the needs of participants. This audience was evidenced by teachers' flexibility and accommodations, indicating that participants' voices were given due weight (Lundy, 2007).

Creating space

It is not solely the responsibility of the child/young person in FC to take initiative to share their needs with teachers. Using Lundy's (2007) notion of *space*, these participants identified that space should be created for children and young people in FC to share their needs. Participants in this study highlighted that they should be asked about their needs and concerns, thus providing space for their voice.

The importance of feeling known by their teachers was a critical factor that afforded participants a voice. To achieve this, participants recommended that teachers regularly check in with students, and advocated that teachers intentionally get to know their students to understand their needs. This is a critical piece of advice, given that children and young people in FC make up a small proportion of New Zealand, and their specific needs have traditionally been underrepresented (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.; Wood & Selwyn, 2017).

However, creating space to hear FC experienced young people's voices is complex. A limitation of large surveys such as those by the Ministry of Education (2018) and Office of the Children's Commissioner (2016, 2018b) is that underrepresented voices may not be sufficiently addressed. This poses a challenge for teachers and educational stakeholders to ensure that underrepresented voices, such as the voices of children and young people in FC, are effectively included and understood (Cook-Sather, 2014); therefore, space must be intentionally created.

To address this, an example of creating space for FC experienced young people at the systemic level was the inclusion of two Youth Advisory Panels in the evaluation and planning for the new Oranga Tamariki (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). Another example was the opportunity for FC experienced high school and college students to present their testimonies of the barriers they experienced in education to policy makers in Michigan (Day et al., 2012).

As already highlighted, creating space, listening to, and acting upon the voice and needs of children and young people in FC can be an effective support towards educational success. The recommendations presented by participants in this research regard how

space can be intentionally created at the individual level for children and young people in FC. As stipulated by Head (2011), child voice is integral for effective evaluation of the services that affect them.

Influence over decisions

Having influence over decisions is a key aspect of having a voice. In cases where this was afforded to participants, the effect of their decisions supported their experiences of educational success. At the individual level, this research identified that it is important for children to feel a sense of autonomy, as this can be motivating to achieve their personal goals. Similarly, children and young people in New Zealand have expressed the need to be included in decision-making and involved in their learning (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b). FC experienced young in the Youth Advisory Boards expressed that they need to have a say in decisions that affect them (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). Decisions concerning children and young people in FC extend further than what and how they will learn, to where and with whom they will live and what school they will attend (Wood & Selwyn, 2017). Often the gatekeepers of these decisions are not their biological family. Therefore, there is greater need for children and young people in FC to have influence over decisions that affect them as they may be representing their own best interests.

Advocacy

Having an advocate has been identified as a key strength to support young people towards educational success in this study. Adults who intentionally advocate for young people is seen as a supportive mechanism for them to have a say, especially for young people whose living situation may be out of their control. Advocates in this study were foster carers, a social worker and a school counsellor, adding to Morton's (2015) stipulation that foster carers are key adults who can act as advocates. These advocates were significant to represent participants' voices where space for voice was limited. Congruent with Lundy's (2007) recommendations, the advocates in this study created space for participants to share their needs and supported influence over decisions. UNCRC 1989, Article 12, Part 2 stipulates that children's voices may be heard through a representative. Lundy's (2007) concept of *voice* emphasises that if needed, children are provided with help to form and share their views.

Help to form and share their perspectives is identified as a support from the home environment for all children, including children and young people in FC. Children in New Zealand indicated that they prefer that they and their whānau should be consulted for school-wide decision-making (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016). Further, professionals and children in FC have recognised the value of schools and teachers to liaise with foster carers to understand the needs of the child (Coulling, 2000). Building on this, participants in this study shared positive experiences of when adults who understood their needs were pivotal to advocate for their needs.

Navigating Foster Care and School

Educational successes identified by young people in this study were foregrounded by navigating obstacles posed by FC that impacted on learning and interactions within school. Specific achievements despite obstacles addressed how success was identified and enacted, and also how these experiences impacted on participants' lives. Participants demonstrated strength and determination to overcome the obstacles posed by trauma and being in FC. This resilience was supportive to their successes.

Feeling different

Participants identified experiences as successful in light of feeling different and having different life experiences due to their FC situation. Young people in FC have asserted that events related to FC such as moving schools mid-term should not supersede the importance of school attendance and engagement (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Young people in this study similarly valued school attendance and engagement despite having to manage difficulties posed by aging out of care and moving schools. Successes such as staying in school to graduation or even turning up to school may be considered regular discourse to most students in the general population. However, in light of the difficulties participants endured with their situations in order to stay in school, these taken-for-granted, apparently 'ordinary' experiences were identified as successes. Success in this situation is a celebration of sticking with school despite 'not normal' challenges.

Another obstacle some participants felt was the difficulties associated with the stigma of FC, which has also been identified in studies with children and young people in FC both nationally and internationally (Clemens et al., 2017; Voices of Children and Young

People team, 2019a). Consistent with Clemens et al. (2017), the stigma of being in FC interfered with participants' ability to make and maintain friendships, as they felt judged by their peers. The experiences of participants in this study supports the findings of the Voices of Children and Young People team (2019a), where children and young people in FC face difficulties seeing friends outside of school due to the need for police checks, or keeping up with friends due to school and home mobility.

Furthermore, this study supports previous literature that the stigma of FC at times affected teachers' interactions with participants, as they reported that some teachers and educators had lower expectations for them (Johansson & Höjer, 2012). The stigma associated with being in FC also affected some participants' willingness to share their experiences and seek help from teachers.

Although an objective of the Education Act 1989 is to instil an appreciation of inclusion and diversity, this is not always realised in schools. Some children and young people in the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018b) survey identified that they experience racism and discrimination in school, and want to be treated fairly and without judgement. Children and young people in FC represent a particular subset of the population, who also deserve to be treated fairly and without judgement, and not have opportunities obstructed by the stigma of FC.

Effects of trauma

Some of these young people's experiences were perceived as successes with consideration of the effect of traumatic experiences on their emotional regulation, social interactions and school engagement. The effect of traumatic experiences on social-emotional functioning and thus school achievement has been well documented. Compared to peers who have not experienced trauma, children and young people in FC are more likely to have maladaptive social and emotional functioning, which can affect behavioural skills and school functioning (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). In correlational studies, behavioural problems have been found to be associated with poorer academic outcomes (Flynn et al., 2013; Tessier et al., 2018). To add a different perspective to these studies, the participants in this study found ways to adapt and manage the effects of trauma, such as self-advocating to teachers about their needs and how they can be supported.

Participants found success in navigating and overcoming the effects on trauma on their social-emotional and academic functioning, and thus being able to learn and

engage in school. These identified experiences of success add to Huxtable's (2016) *learn* and *achieve* notions of success for children in FC.

The participants also discussed having to navigate the effects of trauma experienced from biological family or home instability on their confidence and ability to trust adults and make friends. As a result, the achievement making friends and having trusting relationships with adults was considered particularly successful. This hardship expressed by participants adds weight to why professionals and children in FC in Coulling's (2000) study regarded 'sociability' as the leading indicator of educational success. As already noted, friendships and trusting relationships are regarded as successes and important supports to educational success for children and young people in the general population (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016, 2018b). This research adds that being able to form trusting relationships with peers and adults may be particularly significant for children and young people in FC who are simultaneously managing the effects of trauma in relationships.

Finally, attendance and turning up to school was identified as a success in its own right because of the difficulties that participants were facing at the time. These difficulties included supporting family, moving homes and schools, and aging out of care whilst still in school. Other studies have similarly found that young people in FC prioritise family concerns over school attendance (Clemens et al., 2017). Coulling (2000) identified *attendance* as a success for children in FC, positing that attendance indicated the child/young person's 'commitment to school'. However, this explanation does not seem to take into account the other things that may be going on in FC experienced children and young people's lives that may be interfering with their 'commitment to school'. It should be noted that it was the adult participants in Coulling's (2000) study who conceptualised *attendance* as a success, and there is no mention of children participants' voice on this construct. This research, drawing on the lived experiences of young people who have been in FC, adds a different meaning behind attendance as success. Adult perspectives may differ from the perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people in FC. Therefore, it is imperative to create space to listen to, and understand, FC experienced people's voices and lived experiences.

Being resilient

The determination shown by these young people, especially their ability to overcome obstacles was both a support to success, and a success within itself. Resilience has been identified as an important support for academic achievement in studies investigating how children and young people in FC can be supported to succeed in education (Clemens et al., 2017). All participants reflected on the effort and hard work that went into achieving their successes and overcoming any obstacles to achieve these.

One obstacle that was overcome was teachers' lowered expectations of participants. The effect of teacher expectations has been well researched. FC experienced young people internalise both positive and negative messages from adults about their education, which affected their own aspirations for education (Clemens et al., 2017). Further, professionals' and caregivers' low expectations for young people in FC can be a barrier to their pursuit of continued education after school (Johansson & Höjer, 2012). However, participants in this study spoke confidently about proving these adults wrong and feeling motivated to succeed.

Resilience has been identified as an important protective factor for children and young people in FC (Flynn et al., 2013). The determination shown by young people in this study is congruent with Morton's (2016) reporting of the self-reliance shown by young people in FC in facing challenges. Success as resilience and determination in this study supports Coulling's (2000) construct of success as 'reaching potential', which was acknowledged as children in FC doing their best. Resilience was also identified as an important quality for all children and young people, in the Ministry of Education (2018) survey, where resilience was seen as both a characteristic of a successful student, and a key support to success. The role of schools to develop resilience and determination is key, as it is postulated as an objective of compulsory education in New Zealand (Education Act, 1989, Part 1AA(3)(b)). In this study, teachers, foster carers, and their own determination supported the development of resilience.

Overall, the participants in this study expressed resilience in their life and educational choices in order to achieve their successes, which did include achieving high grades in favoured subjects and courses. In their survey, the Office of the Children's

Commissioner (2016) also identified children and young people reporting on obtaining good marks on their formal assessments as an indicator of success.

While the present study aimed to identify conceptualisations of success that were broader than academic achievement alone, academic achievement still featured in participants' expressed successful experiences. Often though, these successes were foregrounded by overcoming obstacles in working towards these achievements. The obstacles that have been discussed include school and home mobility, feeling stigmatised due to being in FC, the affect of trauma on social-emotional, behavioural and academic functioning, adults' lowered expectations, and managing family concerns. When considering successes, regardless of how it is conceptualised by children and young people in FC, it is important to understand the lived experiences, and potential barriers that may have been faced in striving for these successes.

In summary, educational success reflects the context and values of each individual. Young people in this study identified successes through receiving praise and acknowledgement from others. Overcoming barriers also transformed typical school discourse into experiences of success for these young people. Formal and informal experiences impacted on experiences of success, which included support from key adults and peers, having space and voice, having an advocate, and being resilient.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research explored how educational success was experienced and identified by young people who were in, or had been in, foster care. These young people identified a range of ways to define success including retention in high school until Year 13 graduation to simply turning up to school when life was hard. Other successes included being selected to participate in a leadership development programme, being assertive, trying hard, feeling empowered and achieving in certain subjects, winning sports competitions, having friends, completing NCEA with Merit endorsement, feeling confident and a sense of belonging, receiving praise and certificates, and helping others. Such understandings of 'success' reflected participants' values, past experiences, and their joy in overcoming barriers faced. Strategies to 'get there' included the supportive relationships with teachers, foster carers, social workers and friends that helped them to be successful. Additionally, being enabled to have a voice, or having an advocate who supported their decisions and best interests helped to achieve their goals, and these relationships were seen as a success in their own rights. Participants demonstrated marked resilience to overcome the effects of trauma and FC experience. Regardless of the barriers they faced, all the participants were able to identify their unique experiences of educational success in their lives.

Educational success is identified uniquely and individually according to people's lived experiences. Children and young people in FC experience different educational and home situations than typically experienced in the general population (Wood & Selwyn, 2017). For young people in FC, educational successes will differ in some ways from the general population. The participants in this study shared their experiences with confidence. At a very personal level, the voices of these young people in this study were honest, unabated, angry at times, happy in other moments, but always representing an authentic account of their experiences in education and successes. Participants throughout the interviews demonstrated courage through challenges, and how they developed resilience and determination.

The findings of the present study supports, extends, and at times contrasts with findings from the international research with FC experienced children and young people, and national surveys with students and related educational stakeholders. Support from teachers, including encouragement, high expectations, flexibility, sympathy and supportive relationships are important for all students (Ministry of Education, 2018; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2018b). Children and young people in FC particularly need their teachers to have understanding of their unique needs (Day et al., 2012; Sugden, 2013), and to feel that they can build trusting relationships with their teachers. Foster carers' and social workers' love, encouragement and involvement in education are key supports towards educational success for young people in FC (Coulling, 2000; Morton, 2016), as these adults represent the home environment. Having friends is important for all students (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2016), and significantly so for children and young people in FC (Coulling, 2000; Sugden, 2013). This is because friends can be stable relationships amidst transient home lives, or being able to make friends in a new school is a key way to feel a sense of belonging. Social goals may be prioritised over academic achievement, demonstrating that research into educational experiences of children and young people in FC should not assume academic achievement as a model for success.

Children have a right to education and a voice (UNCRC 1989, Articles 12, 28). For the full realisation of this right, children and young people in FC must be afforded space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007). This study highlighted that having a 'voice' in itself was a success. Speaking up is a key way that young people in FC can have their needs and concerns appropriately addressed. Teachers must create space for the voices of children and young people in FC through trusting relationships, and checking in with students. Creating space is complex but necessary to hear the unique needs and concerns felt by these young people.

Listening to young people's views requires an audience, and this is demonstrated through others, particularly adults, listening to young people and providing necessary support in response. Critically, children and young people in FC must have influence over decisions, as these decisions often concern more than what to learn at school, to where they will live and what school they will attend. Where space for voice and influence is limited, adults who know and understand the will of the child/young person, such as teachers or foster carers, can be effective advocates.

Success for these young people was experienced through overcoming barriers, and demonstrating resilience and determination through these challenges. The barriers posed by FC can include home and school mobility, stigma, trauma, aging out of care, and family difficulties (Clemens et al., 2017; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017; Voices of Children and Young People team, 2019a). Resilience was both a support to success and a success within itself. Moreover, resilience has been identified as an important characteristic for all students, and is particularly significant for children and young people in FC.

This research contributes to the building literature representing FC experienced children and young people's voices on educational success. The present study reflects the authentic lived experiences of education, FC and educational success of young people who were in, or had been in, FC. Since the participant inclusion was confined to people who have experienced FC, the findings reflect only their lived experiences and perspectives. The inclusion of young people, rather than children, meant that participants were able to reflect on their actual experiences. Finally, the timing and age range of participants provides insight into the lived experiences of education and FC both before and after the 2014 changes to legislation and practice with the creation of the Children's Act 2014 and Oranga Tamariki.

This study used a strengths-based approach to explore and understand some of the different ways that FC experienced young people perceive and have experienced success. These successes are important to recognise, as they are not always measured by tests, nor can be used to gain academic credit, but are nonetheless significant in these young people's lives. The benefits of support from adults, being afforded voice and having resilience is important not only for academic achievement, but also for individuals' unique perceptions of success. These supports set up young people in FC for educational success, and for success in life.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of the current research extend to the selection of participants, with limited access to those who have experienced FC and were willing to discuss 'success' with regards to their own understandings of education and home experiences. For example, although this research aimed to investigate broad and holistic understandings

of success, some young people who were invited to participate in the study declined because they 'did not do well in school'. It was possible that the wording of 'educational success' deterred people from participating as they considered that they had not achieved according to the dominant view of success as academic achievement and school completion. This indicates a potential gap in this research where voices and perspectives of FC experienced young people who were not confident in their educational experiences chose not to participate and share in this research. Future research in the experiences and perspectives of educational success of children and young people in FC may benefit from using terminology such as 'meaningful experiences' rather than 'success' given the connotations that it currently holds.

Although, as the researcher, I had approached organisations that support young people in FC, policy constraints limited these organisations from involvement in participant recruitment. Therefore, participant recruitment was constrained to my personal contacts. Similar future research could benefit from support from other organisations for participant recruitment so that a wider range of experiences and values may be represented.

Implications for Practice

The experiences and insights shared by young people in this study can support those working with young people to think about some of the issues, support strategies and enabling practices that create more successful futures for them. These young people provide examples of how teachers, foster carers and social workers effectively engaged with children and young people in FC. Through relationships and empathetic listening, these adults created space to listen to their voices. Educators and FC stakeholders may wish to endeavour to create space for the voices of all children and young people, and particularly children and young people in FC using these strategies. Provision of space and voice to children and young people in FC can inform provision of effective support and education that reflects the values and contexts of the affected children and young people.

Based on the findings of this study, educators and FC stakeholders can consider how meanings of educational success reflect the context and values held by each individual. Children and young people in FC have experienced different, and often difficult experiences that are not often shared by non-fostered peers. Therefore, these educators

and FC stakeholders need to find respectful ways to seek out the experiences of those FC experienced children and young people they work with, to learn about their own individual understandings and meanings of success. By understanding their unique needs and meanings of success, educators and foster care stakeholders would be better equipped to support children and young people towards their definitions of success. This means really listening to every child about his or her own experience. As suggested by one of the participants: "I think that the thing that worked best for me was just basically speaking up and having a voice".

Educational success takes on broad, holistic and unique meanings according to different people and different groups. Children and young people in FC have different and often difficult life experiences that make them particularly vulnerable to educational disadvantage. What is needed is to create space for the voices of children and young people in FC, and be an audience for their voices, so that they can have influence over decisions and discourse that affect them. The last words go to one of the current participants:

> I think if the teacher got to know foster kids quite closely and personally, then they would know what they need to acknowledge—successes.

References

Ashton, S. (2014). The rights of children and young people in state care. *Educational Philosophy & Theory, 46*(9), 1082—1088. doi:10.1080/00131857.2014.931432

Berridge, D. (2012). Educating young people in care: What have we learned? *Children and Youth Services Review, 34,* 1171–1175. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.032

Bourke, R., & Loveridge, J. (2014). Exploring informed consent and dissent through children's participation in educational research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 37*(2), 151–165.

Bourke, R., & MacDonald, J. (2018). Creating a space for student voice in an educational evaluation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 41*(2), 156–168.

Brodie, I., & Morris, M. (2010). *Improving educational outcomes for looked after children and young people*. Retrieved from: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/improving-educational-outcomes-for-looked-after-children-and-young-people

Byrne, B., & Lundy, L. (2015). Reconciling children's policy and children's rights: Barriers to effective government delivery. *Children & Society, 29*(4), 266–276. doi:10.1111/chso.12045

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2008). Grounded theory in the 21st Century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 203–241). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2013) *A discussion with Prof Kathy Charmaz on Grounded Theory/Interviewer: G. R. Gibbs*.

Charmaz, K. (2015). Teaching theory construction with initial grounded theory tools: A reflection on lessons and learning. *25,* 1610–1622. doi:10.1177/1049732315613982

Children Young Persons and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017.

Children's Act 2014.

Clemens, E. V., Helm, H. M., Myers, K., Thomas, C., & Tis, M. (2017). The voices of youth formerly in foster care: Perspectives on educational attainment gaps. *Children and Youth Services Review, 79,* 65–77. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.003

Cook-Sather, A. (2014). The trajectory of student voice in educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 49*(2), 131–148.

Coulling, N. (2000). Definitions of successful education for the 'looked after' child: A multi-agency perspective. *Support for Learning, 15*(1), 30–35.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St. Leonard's, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Day, A., Riebschleger, J., Dworsky, A., Damashek, A., & Fogarty, K. (2012). Maximizing educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care by engaging youth voices in a partnership for social change. *Children and Youth Services Review, 5,* 1007–1014.

Del Quest, A., Fullerton, A., Geenen, S., & Powers, L. (2012). Voices of youth in foster care and special education regarding their educational experiences and transition to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34,* 1604–1615. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.04.018

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (4th ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Education Act 1989.

Fantuzzo, J. W., Perlman, S. M., & Dobbins, E. K. (2011). Types and timing of child maltreatment and early school success: A population-based investigation. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1404–1411. doi:doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.04.010

Flynn, R. J., Tessier, N. G., & Coulombe, D. (2013). Placement, protective and risk factors in the educational success of young people in care: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *European Journal of Social Work, 16*(1), 70–87. doi:10.1080/13691457.2012.722985

Head, B. W. (2011). Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(4), 541–547. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.015

Huxtable, R. (2016). Learn, achieve, live, succeed: The perspectives of looked after children on success. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, 15*(2), 19–39.

Johansson, H., & Höjer, I. (2012). Education for disadvantaged groups—Structural and individual challenges. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 1135–1142. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.042

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation, 2007*(114), 11–25. doi:10.1002/ev.223

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 927–942.

Martin, P. Y., & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: Advice from a group of high achievers. *Child & Family Social Work, 7*(2), 121–130.

McNamara, P. M., Harvey, A., & Andrewartha, L. (2019). Passports out of poverty: Raising access to higher education for care leavers in Australia. *Children and Youth Services Review, 97*(C), 85–93. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.0

Mendis, K., Gardner, F., & Lehmann, J. (2015). The education of children in out-of-home care. *Australian Social Work, 68*(4), 483–496. doi:10.1080/0312407X.2014.963134

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ministry of Education. (2014). *Ministry of Education statement of intent: 2014–2018.* Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2017). *Supporting children in care: A guide for educators.* Retrieved from https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/Supporting-in-care/SES-Supporting-Children-in-Care-Guide-ENG.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2018). Kōrero Mātauranga Survey: Initial analysis of responses as at 25 May 2018. Retrieved from https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Korero-Matauranga-Survey-Initial-Analysis-2019.pdf

Ministry of Social Development. (n.d.). Kids in care. Retrieved from https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/cyf/kids-in-care.html

Mitra, D. L. (2006). Student voice from the inside and outside: The positioning of challengers. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(4), 315–328.

Modernising Child Youth and Family Panel. (2015). *Expert panel final report: Investing in New Zealand's children and their families*. Retrieved from https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/corporate/expert-panel-cyf/investing-in-children-report.pdf

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 250–260. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. *25*(9), 1212–1222. doi:10.1177/1049732315588501

Morton, B. M. (2015). Barriers to academic achievement for foster youth: The story behind the statistics. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 29*(4), 476–491. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1073817

Morton, B. M. (2016). The power of community: How foster parents, teachers, and community members support academic achievement for foster youth. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 30*(1), 99–112. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1105334

NZQA. (n.d.). *Using NCEA after leaving school.* Retrieved from https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/understanding-ncea/using-ncea-after-leaving-school/

Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2016). *What kids say about education and achievement*. Retrieved from http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/What-kids-say-about-education-and-achievement.pdf

Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2018a). *Education (National Education and Learning Priorities) Amendment Bill: Submission from the Office of the Children's Commissioner*. Retrieved from http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/2018-April-NELPs-Bill-Final-OCC.pdf

Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2018b). Education matters to me: Key insights. Retrieved from http://www.occ.org.nz

Oranga Tamariki. (2014). Custody, guardianship and wardship. Retrieved from https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/policy/caring-for-children-and-young-people/key-information/custody-guardianship-and-wardship/

Oranga Tamariki. (2017). *Strategic intentions 2017–2022*. Retrieved from https://orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Strategic-Intentions-2017-2022.pdf

Oranga Tamariki. (n.d.). Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children. Retrieved from https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz

Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.

Palmieri, L. E., & La Salle, T. P. (2017). Supporting students in foster care. *Psychology in the Schools, 54*(2), 117–126. doi:10.1002/pits.21990

Pecora, P. J. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children & Youth Services Review, 34*(6), 1121-1129. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.044

Punch, K. F. (2014). *Introduction to social research* (3rd ed.). London, England: Sage.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*, 63–75.

Skilbred, D. T., Moldestad, B., & Iversen, A. C. (2017). Successful academic achievement among foster children: What did the foster parents do? *Child Care in Practice, 23*(4), 356–371. doi:10.1080/13575279.2016.1188764

Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 119–149). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Strolin-Goltzman, J., Woodhouse, V., Suter, J., & Werrbach, M. (2016). A mixed method study on educational well-being and resilience among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70*, 30-36. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.08.014

Sugden, E. J. (2013). Looked-after children: What supports them to learn? *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(4), 367–382. doi:10.1080/02667363.2013.846849

Tessier, N. G., Flynn, R. J., & O'Higgins, A. (2018). Neglect, educational success, and young people in out-of-home care: Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 75*, 115–129. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.005

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*: Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

Verheyde, M. (2006). *Article 28: The right to education*. Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff.

Voices of Children and Young People team. (2019a). *Experiences of Education for Children in Care: Part 1: Voices of children in care in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Retrieved from: https://orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Research/Latest-research/Educational-experiences-of-children-in-care/Experiences-of-Education-Part-1-Voices.pdf

Voices of Children and Young People team. (2019b). *Experiences of Education for Children in Care: Part 2: Review of New Zealand Government Data.* Retrieved from: https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Research/Latest-research/Educational-experiences-of-children-in-care/Experiences-of-Education-Part-2-Data-Review.pdf

White, T., Scott, L. D., & Munson, M. R. (2018). Extracurricular activity participation and educational outcomes among older youth transitioning from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 85*, 1–8. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.11.010

Wood, M., & Selwyn, J. (2017). Looked after children and young people's views on what matters to their subjective well-being. *Adoption and Fostering, 41*(1), 20–34. doi:10.1177/0308575916686034

Appendix 1: Invitation to Participate in Research

Educational successes of care-experienced young people study

Young people who have experienced foster care are invited to participate in a study that will be exploring how young people who have experienced foster care determine and understand educational success.

Aim of the research
This research aims to gain an understanding of how young people perceive and interpret what success at school is, and celebrate their successes.

Why do the research?
The findings from this research will help teachers, educators and others to understand the unique circumstances of educational experiences while in foster care.

Who can take part?
Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years, have experienced foster care and education in New Zealand, and are in the Auckland area. Young people can get involved.

You can choose to participate in either an individual interview or a small focus group (of up to four other young people) that will be run in the Auckland area in **February– April 2019.** You will be asked to share your experiences and perspectives of educational success.

Want to know more?
To find out more about this research, please read the information sheet (attached). If you know someone who might be interested in taking part in this research, please pass along the information sheet or this invitation to them.

If you are keen to take part in this research, or would like to know more about this research, please contact Hannah hannahgrace.berry@gmail.com, or her supervisors.

This research is being conducted by Hannah Miller hannahgrace.berry@gmail.com, who is completing a thesis for the Masters in Educational Psychology at Massey University.

This research is supervised by Professor Roseanna Bourke r.bourke@massey.ac.nz and Dr. Vijaya Dharan v.m.dharan@massey.ac.nz at the Institute of Education, Massey University.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 18/45. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

Understanding experiences of education and learning of young people who have been in care

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Hannah Miller, I am a student completing a Masters in Educational Psychology at Massey University.

What is the study about?
This study is about how learning works for you. You have been asked to take part because I would like to hear the views of young people who have been in foster care. I want to hear what you think about learning at school, alternative education, or outside of school. This work will help teachers, educators and others to think about what school can be like for kids in care.

How will the study be undertaken?
If you would like to take part, I can talk with you by yourself or with a small group of people if that is more comfortable. I will ask questions about how and where you learn best, and what success looks like for you.

Who will be taking part in this study?
I am looking for young people who:
- Have been in foster care

- Went to school in New Zealand

- Are over the age of 16

If this is you, I would love to hear from you. To take part, please email me as soon as you can – hannahgrace.berry@gmail.com

Recruitment
If you have friends who would also like to take part, let me know!

Project Procedures
I will talk with you at a public place that works for you. It should only take an hour. If it is easier for you, we could also do a video call. I will bring along snacks to share.
If you are talking with me on your own, you may bring someone to support you if that will make you feel more comfortable. Just let me know.

To help me to listen to what you are saying, I will record our talk. I will use this recording to find out where lots of people said the same thing.

What happens to the information?

I will write up the interview and the findings will be used for my Masters. If you want, I can send you a short version of the main topics we talked about. If you want to change anything at that time, you will be able to.

Your name will not be shared with anyone else.
The tapes will be kept on a password protected device by me.

Your Rights

You do not have to accept this invitation. If you decide to take part, you have the right to:

- Say that you don't want to answer any question.
- Stop at any time.
- Ask questions about what I am doing.
- Have your details kept private and your name will not be used in this research.
- Be sent a short version of the main topics we talked about when I have finished talking to everyone.

Keeping you safe

If you want to take part, I will make sure that you are safe to tell your story and I will listen to you. If you find anything upsetting, I can give you a list of services that can help you.

This research is supervised by Professor Roseanna Bourke r.bourke@massey.ac.nz and Dr. Vijaya Dharan v.m.dharan@massey.ac.nz at the Institute of Education, Massey University.

If you have any questions about the study, you are welcome to contact my supervisors (above) or me at: hannahgrace.berry@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Individual Consent Form

Understanding experiences of education and learning of young people who have been in care

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview/focus group being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree to a summary of this interview/focus group to be sent to me.

I agree/do not agree to the overall summary of the research to be sent to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: .... **Date:** ....

Full Name - printed ....

Appendix 4: Focus Group Consent Form

School successes of care-experienced young people study

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.

I understand that all information I give will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the focus group. There are risks in taking part in focus group research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.

I agree to participate in the focus group under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: ....   **Date:** ....

Full Name - printed ....

Appendix 5: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Introduction questions

- Think back to your time at school, and see if you can remember a particular time when you felt really happy, or content or experiencing real satisfaction with your life. It might be when you were at primary, intermediate, or secondary school.
- Can you tell me a little about this memory?
- Probe: school level; school context; peer context; family context.
- Probe: What do remember learning well? In other words, where did you find success?
- Then probe – other times you were...

Talking about own successes/achievements

I am interested in what helps people feel successful, and this is so different for everyone. What would you think about this?

- Tell me about times you felt successes at school? How did you know? Who else knew? Who helped you with this success?
- When you think 'school' and think 'success' what are some of the things you think about.
- What are some of the things that you did well in school? Tell me more.
- Do you think this experience has helped you now? How does it influence what you do, or what choices you make?
- Did anyone else notice your success/achievements/what you did well?

Thinking about what success means to them

We have been talking about success and your experiences of school. Now we are going to talk about whether there are other ways you can do well in school.

- Probe: context, activity, people
- What are some things that you wanted to do well in school? Tell me more.
- Have you ever been asked about your ideas of success?

Thinking about what could be considered successful for children and young people in foster care

You have been through foster care and will have very important ideas and knowledge about this experience.

- As a student, what worked best for you?
- What would you want your teacher to know?
- What would you tell teachers and principals today, about foster care children and how best to acknowledge their successes. What might some of those successes to watch out for be?

Appendix 6: Information for Support Services

If something that is upsetting comes up in the interview and you would like to talk to someone, here are some details for some free counselling helplines where trained people will be able to help you.

Youth Line: 0800 376 633

Need to Talk: call or text 1737

Lifeline Aotearoa: 0800 LIFELINE (0800 543 354) or text HELP to 4357

Whats Up: 0800 WHATSUP (0800 942 8787)
www.whatsup.co.nz

Appendix 7: Line-by-Line Coding

Interview 4 – 31 March 2019

I think it was really hard because, when you're in care, there's so much more than just school for you, school isn't the top priority for you. Like for me, I'd put my family. And so we don't have it as easy as some of the kids who just go to school, do their stuff and have a tiny bit of trouble. We have so much added to it, so I really struggled. And that was the year... when my family goes through stuff, I go through it. And so that was the year that my brother was in and out of jail and we had to be his support. And so it was really hard and my home was unsettled, like I didn't live here, and I think when the base where you're supposed to be happy and safe and stuff, if that's not well, then I don't think you do well in the rest of your stuff. And so I just hated school, my family was in so much trouble and stuff, so that reflected on my school-work, and I just didn't want to go to school, I prioritised my brother's courts times, dates, stuff. And so I did really bad. People were there to support, but they weren't there to support me for the right reasons, like they were just doing it because that's their job. Do you know how there's a difference with actually wanting to do it and being forced to do it? Yeah and so I think that happened, and at the end, they were really good people and so I just decided that I had to pull my shit together towards the end of the year, because all the stuff and all these people aren't going to matter to me in years when I'm being successful and stuff. Like all these people, and so many people didn't believe in me, like _____ had _____ enrolment forms ready for me to move because they were so adamant I wouldn't pass and then they wanted to move me. And those are the stuff, mean stuff like that, they just make me want to just go, do so well to prove them wrong. Because it just feels like I'm back to square one with my parents, it's like they've replaced my parents. And so even though I'm not with my parents, that mentality of getting beaten up if I don't do well, it's still in my head and so I just decided I can do it. I know I can, I just needed that little push. And so I helped, my brother got out of jail, we helped him settle down, job and everything, and so I was really glad with that. And so once he was happy, that made me happy, but then that was just one of the hundreds of stuff else that was going on. And then, it just never stops. But when I came here, I hated _____ I was meant to move out, one of my friend's, she's in my room right now, and I was going to move to her house because I just hated my life here. During the little transition time, I got put in here, in the lounge, and I just loved _____ and _____ from then. And so that was the first time in like five years of being in foster care, that... 'cause when you get taken away from your parents, and stuff, all the violence is gone but even though all the stuff that happened at home, there's always love in the house, like with your family and that stuff. But all the five years, there was none of that for me. Like, we get taken away from violence and stuff but there's never the love and family thing, and so when I came into here, you really felt it. And so that was the first time for me in like five years, it felt like there are people that actually care, and it was a really good family to come into. And _____ and _____ really actually care about the people, and so from moving into here, I decided that I don't want to go to my friend's, and I want to stay with _____ and _____, and that really worked out. And so I just ended up staying, and I think from then on, my home-life settled, and so I loved where I stayed and I was happy for the first time. And once that happened, right at the last term of school, and I think because I was happy, I did so well in school. Like I was happy to go to school, I was happy to come back and see them. And I think because I was happy, everything

Appendix 8: Mind Map of Codes