

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330899395>

Care leavers' priorities and the corporate parent role: A self-determination theory perspective

Article in *Educational and Child Psychology* · March 2019

CITATIONS

0

READS

110

2 authors, including:



Cathy Atkinson

The University of Manchester

48 PUBLICATIONS 206 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Trainee EP supervision project [View project](#)



Motivational interviewing [View project](#)

Care leavers' priorities and the corporate parent role: A self-determination theory perspective

Rebekah Hyde & Cathy Atkinson

Aim: Corporate parenting in the UK may not be well-operationalised, with a potential role for educational psychologists (EPs) in promoting effective practice. This paper explores care leavers' needs and priorities from the perspective of self-determination theory (SDT), which relates the individual's motivation to the human need for competence, relatedness and autonomy.

Method: Ten young people aged 16–19 from two UK local authorities were interviewed about their priorities in preparing for adulthood. Interview findings were then deductively analysed using a SDT framework.

Findings: Interviews highlighted the young people's preference for graduated transition to adulthood. Analysis showed relatedness to be the most salient SDT domain, foregrounding the importance of consistent, authentic and personalised relationships. Consistent relationships motivated care leavers to engage with support and to pursue post-16 goals with enhanced self-determination. Conversely, gaps in young people's support networks undermined service engagement, potentially impeding a supported and successful transition to adulthood.

Limitations: The study was small-scale and the age range, demographics and quality of leaving care support may not have been representative of a wider population.

Conclusions: SDT is potentially useful for highlighting care leavers' needs and priorities when preparing for adulthood, with clear implications for corporate parenting, particularly within the relatedness domain. A possible role for EPs is proposed, which could strengthen service delivery through both systemic and individual work.

Keywords: care leavers; corporate parent; educational psychologist; preparing for adulthood; self-determination theory.

Introduction

The role of the corporate parent

THE CORPORATE PARENTING model within the UK confers responsibility on local authorities to put in place appropriate support for young people who are looked after, equivalent to the support and care of a 'good parent' (Department for Education [DfE] & Department of Health [DoH], 2000; HM Government, 2016). The corporate parenting model was formalised by Frank Dobson, Health Secretary, in a letter sent to all councillors in 1998 outlining the principles of corporate parenting (Dobson, 1998). This letter acknowledged 'serious failings in the management and delivery of

children's services' linked to allegations of widespread abuse across children's homes in the UK (Dobson, 1998, p.84). The advent of corporate parenting was linked to an overhaul in the delivery and management of children's services under the Quality Protects programme (Dobson, 1998). Thereafter, local authorities and their representatives were tasked with the 'legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children' (DfE & DoH, 2000, p.84). At an operational level, this placed responsibility on a host of professionals including headteachers, teaching professionals, social workers, nurses, probation officers

and EPs to work together in a joined-up way to both safeguard and meet the education and health needs of all children in public care or 'looked after'. This collective responsibility is still exercised today and provides the guiding framework for all local authority involvement with this population.

Statutory protection for care leavers under the corporate parent was extended under the Care Leaver Strategy (HM Government, 2013). Care leavers are now entitled to support from a personal advisor¹ up to the age of 25 (previously 21, or 24 if the young person was still in education). The changes led to a revised set of corporate parenting principles specific to the needs of care leavers, whereby all local authority departments were required to recognise their duties as corporate parents. Welcoming these changes, Edward Timpson, Minister for Children and Families called for 'local and central government to up their game as corporate parents' to the care leaving population; a group whom, it was acknowledged, were all too often entering adulthood without adequate support (HM Government, 2016, p.4). The resulting set of corporate parenting principles prioritised five key outcomes for care leavers in the transition to adulthood: better preparation and support for care leavers around independent living; improved access to education, employment and training; improved access to health support; improved experience of stability for care leavers and better support to achieve financial stability. Operationalisation of these outcomes is proposed in a working document entitled, 'Keep on Caring – Supporting Young People from Care to Independence' (HM Government, 2016).

Educational psychologists and the corporate parenting role

The educational psychologist's (EP's) contribution to the role of corporate parent has been relatively well explored in practice literature, although to date, studies have

focused on EP interaction with those still in care, rather than those preparing to leave it. Contributions by EPs have included: EPs using their knowledge of child development to support or train staff in residential children's homes (Lightfoot, 2013); supporting school teaching staff through consultation (Edwards, 2016; Mann, 2012); delivering therapeutic group interventions (Francis, Bennion & Humrich, 2017); delivering training to other professionals (Bradbury, 2006; McParlin, 1996); and contributing to multi-agency meetings (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich, Richards & Nash, 2010). Notably, within two studies (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich et al., 2010), the extent to which EPs were able to contribute corporate parenting support was sometimes limited by other professionals' understanding of the EP role or difficulties around multi-agency working. Under the Children and Families Act (2014), the EP's role was broadened to include vulnerable young people up to the age of 25, providing a unique opportunity to extend the scope of EP practice (Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright, 2015). This policy change led to the introduction of a new Preparing for Adulthood (PFA, 2013) agenda, the implications of which have yet to be considered in terms of the EP role in supporting care leavers or those preparing to leave care.

In tandem with the above-mentioned policy changes, there have been significant shifts to the legislative landscape involving those preparing to leave care, recognising that previous practice has been inadequate (Stein, 2004). The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced various new statutory duties on local authorities, such as pathway planning – an assessment process to determine a young person's needs across a range of domains as they prepare to leave care. Mentionable is that the pathway plan features a section devoted to education, training and employment (DfE, 2010), to which EPs do not currently contrib-

¹ The personal advisor role focuses on supporting the young person through the preparing for adulthood process. Personal advisors work with care leavers from the age of 16 to the age of 25.

ute. Further legislative impetus for an EP contribution might be found in the Children and Social Work Act (2017) under which local authorities are now obliged to publish a local offer for care leavers – a requirement of which is to make clear to care leavers those services that could aid preparations for adulthood. Given their specialist knowledge of mental health, education, transition and ability to take an interactionist perspective, EPs are well positioned as corporate parents to contribute to developing the local offer for care leavers within local authorities.

In order to facilitate effective pathway planning, it is paramount that the strengths, needs and aspirations of young people are fully understood. Included amongst the existing service gaps identified by care leavers is a lack of understanding amongst professionals of the psychological dimensions of leaving care, with many reporting increased isolation and declining mental health (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2015; Dima & Skehill, 2011). Additionally, the consistent overrepresentation of care leavers in the NEET (not in education, training and employment) population represents a significant barrier to independence on entering adulthood (DfE, 2015). Equally, evidence highlights the facilitative role that support from interested individuals can have on care leavers' ability to maintain motivation within educational or training areas (Driscoll, 2013). Against this backdrop, Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) is considered an appropriate framework for examining aspects of the leaving care process. Previously, SDT has proven effective when used by EPs to consider and focus on interventions for NEET and disaffected populations (Gabriel, 2015; Wilding, 2015). As such, it is hypothesised here that SDT, a macro-theory of motivation, will elucidate potential barriers and facilitators to care leavers' motivation to function autonomously on entering adulthood.

Self-determination theory

Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT links three psychological needs to the individual's ability to be self-determined, with regards to personal outcomes. These needs are: (1) competence, the need to feel confident and effective in one's actions and able to achieve one's goals; (2) relatedness, the need to be connected to, and cared for by significant others who support the individual's choices; and, (3) autonomy, the need for one's actions to be self-endorsed and in alignment with one's values and interests. SDT hypothesises that the ability to be self-determined enables individuals to engage in goal-directed behaviours and steer their own outcomes. It additionally understands that the social context inhabited by the individual influences the extent to which these psychological needs are met, and thus impacts on their ability to be self-determined. Another tenet to SDT is the idea that motivation is not a unitary concept but divides into differing types of motivation, including amotivation and types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which lie on a continuum.

SDT has been appropriated across sport, education and employment arenas using a range of methodologies and the core motivational processes have been found to be the same (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ntoumanis, 2001). Studies have repeatedly shown the value of autonomous motivation (self-directed) versus controlled (external) motivation on an individual's performance and psychological health and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). La Guardia et al. (2000) even found that individual need fulfillment relating to autonomy, competence and relatedness positively predicted overall attachment security to significant others amongst university students. Within educational psychology, SDT has illuminated specific factors, which aided young people aged 16–25 to move out of NEET status (Gabriel, 2015). Participants in Gabriel's study (2015) identified the role of family support and supportive environments as pivotal to maintaining education, employment and training (EET) rather than NEET status. SDT has

also elucidated mechanisms by which to understand disaffection amongst secondary-aged pupils (Wilding, 2015). To date, however, an SDT lens has not been applied to UK care leavers. The current study sought to do so through addressing the research question: *Can the needs and priorities of care leavers be identified and understood through Self-Determination Theory?* Simultaneously, it will consider general ramifications for corporate parenting, alongside specific implications for EPs.

Methodology

Design

An exploratory in-depth survey approach, employing a qualitative research design was undertaken (Willig, 2008). Qualitative data were anticipated to gain a nuanced understanding of participants' views around preparing for adulthood processes and priorities, given their ability to unveil the complexity of a phenomenon by generating 'thick descriptions [...] nested in a real context' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). Interviews were chosen to get as close as possible to care leavers' points of view (Brinkmann & Steinar, 2015), whilst simultaneously supporting calls within policy documents for greater self-advocacy amongst care leavers when preparing for adulthood (United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 2009). Interviews were also considered a means of engaging the participatory rights of care leavers under the UNCRC (1989), for whom specific guidance has been issued (UNCRC, 2009).

Participants

Individual, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 young people aged 16–19. Reasons for electing to interview this age range were threefold. Firstly, the final year of high school (age 16) is often a turning point when decisions are made that lay the foundation for one's future. Secondly, having

turned 16, participants were anticipated to be currently engaged in pathway planning, and therefore in conversations around post-16 goals and priorities (DfE, 2010). Finally, extending participation to age 19 reflected the trend for young people to leave care (i.e. living semi or fully independently) between the ages of 16 and 19 (Munro, Lushey, Ward & National Care Advisory Service, 2011; Stein, 2004; The Centre for Social Justice, 2014).

Recruitment and research process

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, from two local authorities in the North West and South West of England, respectively. For participant recruitment, personal advisors and social workers from across both local authorities identified young people, who were moving on from a range of care settings (e.g. kinship care, residential care, 'Staying Put'² arrangements) and those who met the following inclusionary criteria:

- Entered care before the age of 16.
- Had communication skills that enabled them to clearly express their views.

The exclusionary criterion was:

- The Heads of the Leaving Care services felt the participant might experience a strong emotional reaction to participation.

Subsequently letters and information sheets were sent to young people inviting their participation. Personal advisors contacted young people within a week to ask if they were interested in taking part. Those expressing interest were asked whether they wished to be contacted by the first author to arrange an interview. Participants were offered possible interview dates, arranged at a convenient time and place. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Each participant was offered a £10 voucher in recognition of the time commitment. Pen portraits of participants are provided in the table below.

² The 2014 Children and Families Act introduced the 'Staying Put' duty. It requires local authorities to support young people to remain with their former foster carers to age 21, that is, where both the young person and carer wish the arrangement to continue.

Table 1: Details of young people participating in the research.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Ethnicity (as defined by the young person)	Living Arrangement	Occupation
Alice	18	Female	White British	Semi-independence	Employed
Alison	16	Female	Black British/ Caribbean	Foster Care	At school doing General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs), thinking of college
Candice	18	Female	Black Caribbean and White British (mixed)	Semi-independence	Employed, aiming for an apprenticeship
Darren	18	Male	White British	'Staying Put' arrangement	Traineeship working towards apprenticeship
Harry	18	Male	White British	Foster Care	College
Jude	16	Male	White British	Semi-independence	College – working towards an apprenticeship
Khloe	18	Female	White British	Independence	NEET
Leanne	17	Female	White British	Semi-independence	College
Perry	19	Female	Other	Independence (bed-sit)	College
Phoebe	18	Female	Black Caribbean	Semi-independence	College

The interview schedule (available on request from the corresponding author) was structured around the priority domains set out within The Care Leavers Regulations (DfE, 2010): education, training and employment; suitability of accommodation; family and social relationships; health and development; financial arrangements, identity; and emotional and behavioural development. Each interview question addressed an SDT domain (i.e. relatedness, competence or autonomy).

Data analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised. Data were first analysed inductively using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model of thematic analysis. How the responses mapped onto an SDT framework was considered in a second, deductive round of analysis. Prior to the deductive stage, inter-rater coding was conducted with two EP colleagues. All researchers independently

coded the same section of the data and met to discuss the coding and interpretation of data. This increased the trustworthiness of the analysis by allowing other possible interpretations of codes to be considered (Barbour, 2001). The final set of codes to emerge were categorised according to whether they were supportive or undermining of SDT domains.

Ethics

The duty to minimise harm to participants was a concern informing all stages of this project, given that participants were part of an already vulnerable group. Informed consent was sought before any interviews took place. Each participant was reminded before the commencement of the interview that they could take a break or withdraw, without having to provide justification and assured that data shared would remain confidential and anonymous. Each interview ended with a debrief to assess whether any unexpected harm had

arisen. Ethical approval was granted from the host university and both local authorities involved in the research. At all times, the researchers strictly adhered to ethical guidance published by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2002) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2012).

Findings

Sixty-seven codes emerged from the analysis and were subsequently organised into 19 themes. In the deductive phase of the analysis, these were then clustered under the SDT domains of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Within the following sections, a mind map of each SDT domain is presented (in the order: relatedness, autonomy, competence) with enhancing factors in plain text, undermining factors emboldened, and factors that are potentially both undermining and enhancing in italics.

Relatedness

Themes relating to the SDT relatedness domain are shown in Figure 1. Findings indicate that young people's motivation levels with regards to transition to independent living were bolstered by engagement with responsive and personalised professional support when preparing for adulthood. For Candice this meant being able to 'ring her [mentor] pretty much every time' she needed her. Others appreciated social workers getting 'on it straight away' (Phoebe) and 'being there' (Darren) to resolve problems. A lack of availability on the part of social workers was characterised by delayed response times. An absence of care, which all young people had experienced at some time, linked to perceptions that relationships with professionals felt contractual.

Support workers attached to semi-independent living accommodation galvanised young people to develop independence skills. They were valued for their availability; 'deal with me on a day to day basis' (Leanne); emotional support, 'I know if I'm feeling rubbish now, I can talk to them' (Leanne); interest in young people's personal

goals, 'they do performing as well. And the lady was like 'oh yeah, we'd like her to come up.' And X [i.e. support worker] said she'll take me there' (Phoebe); and practical, life skills support, 'Yeah, like if I got a letter, if I didn't understand it, she'll help me with it' (Phoebe). Life skills such as applying for tenancies or passports were modelled by support worker staff.

For some female participants, boyfriends played a significant role. Partners offered emotional support and encouragement, for example, in attending college and sometimes challenged their partners to develop independence skills:

[...] oh, you're alright, you can do that Perry. Don't be so stupid, just go to college or you can catch a bus, what are you on about, you can't catch a bus? Worried you're going to catch a disease, just get on that bus!

Family contact, which seven young people had re-established at the time of the interviews, provided an anticipated safety net, thereby strengthening motivation levels for independent living. Leanne was not sure that she wanted to move to independence on her next birthday but felt reassured that her mum would help her 'buy like my furniture.' Darren was confident that: 'I've always got them [carers] to help me with anything.' Two young people described the motivating impact of ongoing foster carer support on their choice to pursue education goals.

Harry and Leanne spoke of the role of school staff in supporting their education goals. Leanne continued to struggle with attendance, but acknowledged that staff were assisting her. Harry explained how his form tutor had offered personalised support to help him achieve his GCSE grades. Two young people were less confident they could access the support they needed within educational settings. A perceived lack of support led Phoebe to become self-reliant, with resulting uncertainty about which of the

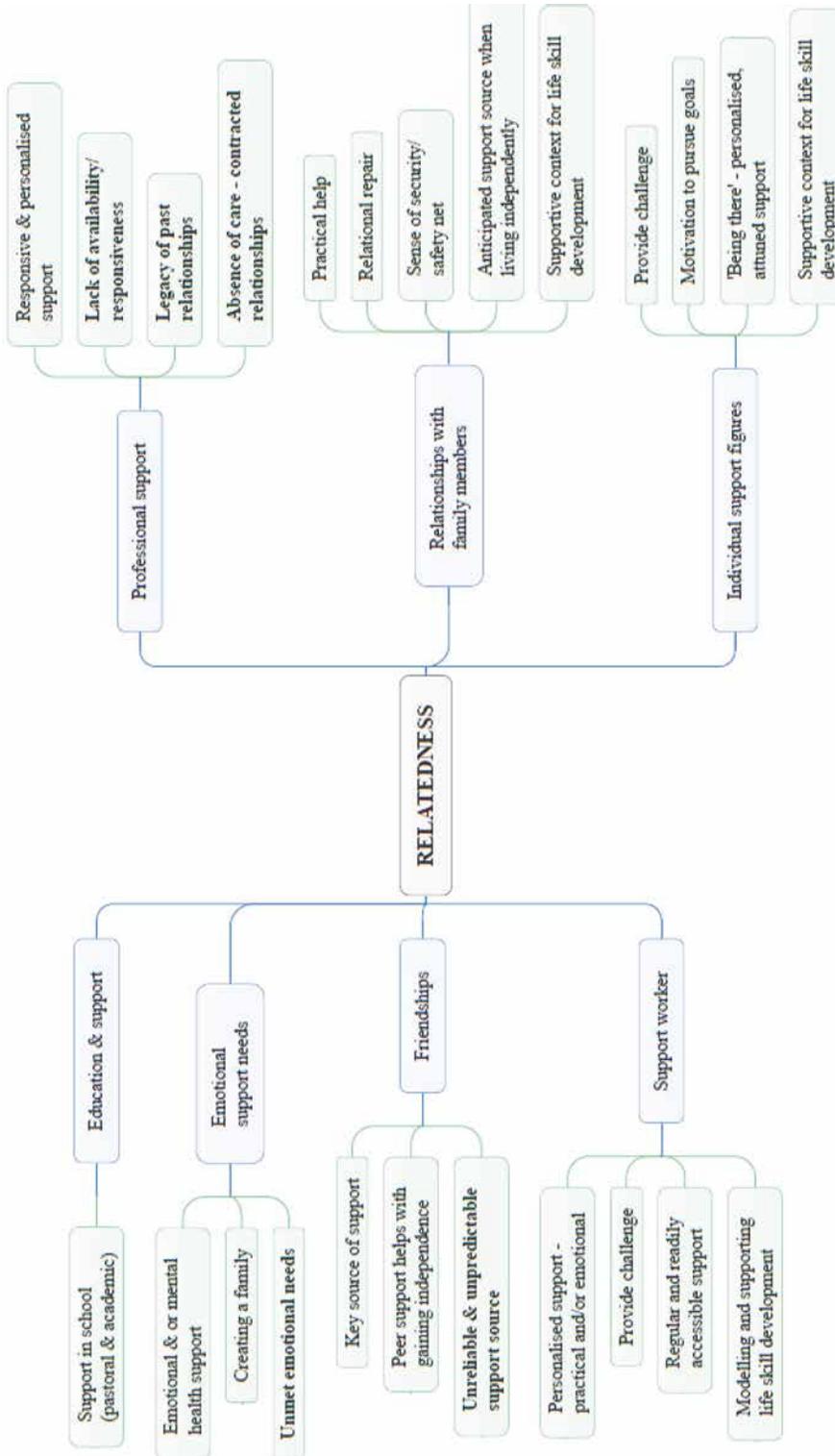


Figure 1: Emergent themes within the relatedness domain.

three possible courses she was motivated to pursue at college:

[...] at college when there's problems like there's no-one really to kind of talk, support you with it, like 24/7 so I find I have to deal with all the problems on my own [...] so they won't listen to me, like I don't have a parent to like go to and say 'this is going on' and they can't come up to the college and say, I'm not okay with this happening to my child [...].

Young people mentioned gaps in terms of relatedness, particularly in relation to emotional support. Several experienced loneliness and isolation now that they were living independently. Alison recognised that she needed mental health support but was on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) waiting list. Alice, an expectant parent, anticipated that having a baby would meet unmet emotional needs: 'I just want that child, like it's kind of like a need thing; I was never needed [...].' Parenthood was anticipated to address this emotional void.

Autonomy

Themes related to autonomy are shown below in Figure 2. Findings suggested most young people described a preference for a graduated model of independence, which included adult modelling of life skills. Harry valued his carers 'gradually teaching me what to buy, what to cook, how much to cook.' This allowed for opportunities to experiment with independence skills in a supported context. Two young people claimed to be self-reliant, but described help-seeking behaviours (e.g. calling social care to ask for emergency funds).

For several young people, mental health difficulties impacted on their ability to function independently. Leanne, Alison and Perry all drew a link between their mental health and motivation to attend college. Unmet mental health needs fractured partic-

ipants' autonomy, rendering them dependent on others for motivation to attend college and/or medical appointments. If feeling low, participants were inclined towards amotivation; Leanne, for example, had to be 'pushed' to go to the doctors to seek help for her mental health needs. Balanced against this, others described a developing ability to influence their own wellbeing over time.

Turning points in young people's lives often enhanced autonomy relating to education goals. For Alice and Jude, involvement with the criminal justice system prompted this commitment while, for others, it was pregnancy, leaving school, or the reality of semi-independent living and realising that 'no one's there to babysit you [...]. You've got to do things yourself [...]' (Candice). Turning points invariably induced self-reflection and a commitment to steering future plans.

Young people invariably described barriers and/or interruptions to education pathways resulting from a lack of intrinsic motivation. Issues related to insufficient planning for, or engagement with, post-16 options whilst at school, or poor GCSE results. Candice described how the lack of a clear post-16 pathway led to impetuous decision-making and amotivation:

[...] so I went to college and they didn't do the course I wanted to do and obviously I left college last minute, like I'm always last minute. com so I just picked a catering course for some reason, but I just wanted to do it to get my maths and English [...] And erm, then I didn't end up going in, I thought nah, I don't want to do catering, I'd rather just do beauty, so I enrolled at another college [...].

Time to reflect, dissatisfaction with current circumstances and the ability to project into the future – something not prioritised at school – inspired young people previously lacking motivation to re-evaluate their post-16 trajectories. Like Candice, most had experience of a 'yo-yo-ing' phase since leav-

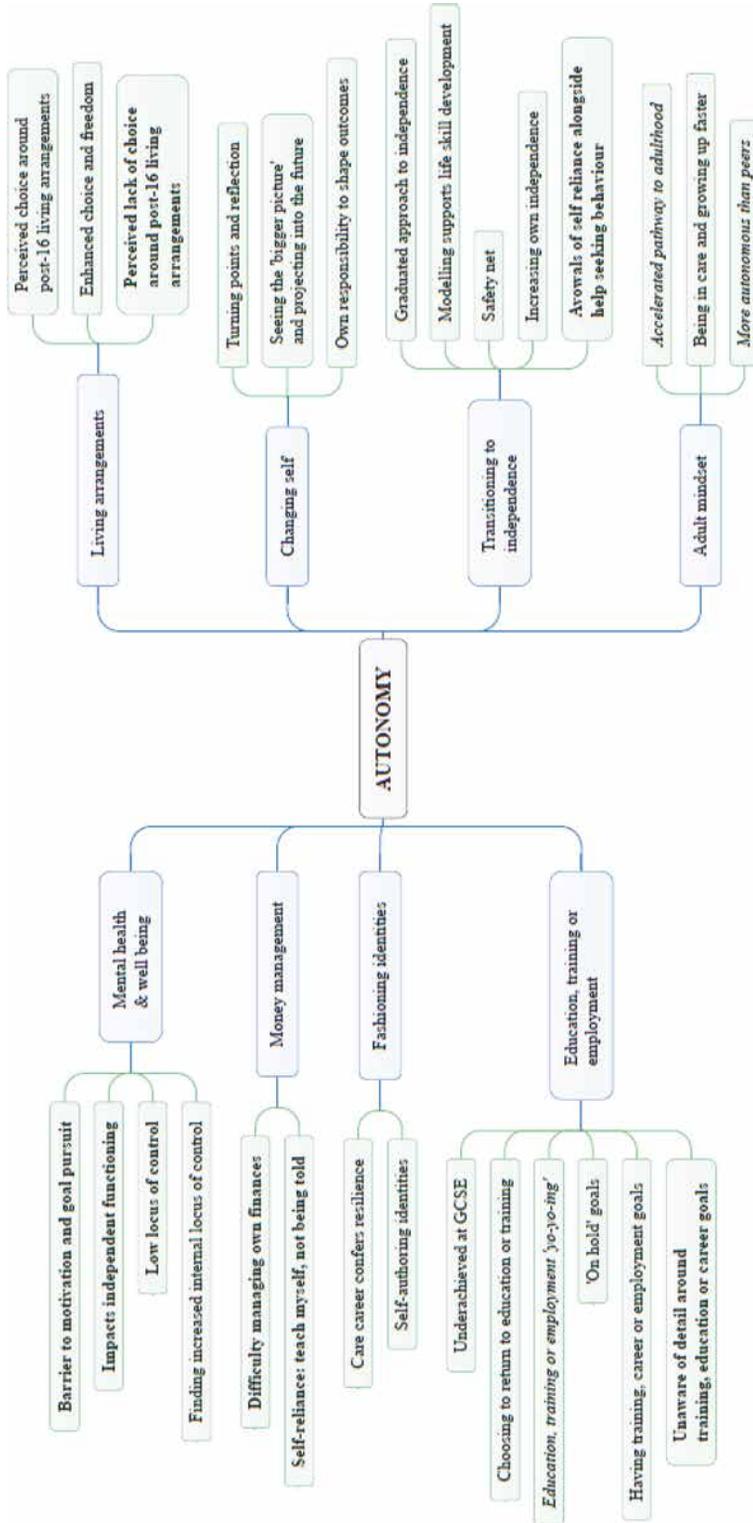


Figure 2: Emergent themes within the autonomy domain.

ing school, fluctuating between courses, jobs or unemployment. However, this experience motivated some young people to steer their lives with increased purpose: 'So I decided that no, I needed to go to college, get my maths and English...and get a job' (Candice). Balanced against narratives of increased self-determination, young people lacked some basic knowledge about their preferred training routes (e.g. course length).

With the exception of three young people, there was a general view that it had been possible to exercise choice around post-16 living arrangements. Enhanced control and freedom galvanised young people to embrace independent living. Khloe was proud of her achievements: 'at first I found it quite hard, but now I just love it. And I feel independent, I feel grown up [...].'

Most young people regarded poor money management skills as impacting on their ability to function independently. Despite being offered advice, a small number described varying states of dependency on others to financially support or rescue them.

Competence

For the final SDT domain of competence, themes are shown in Figure 3. Within this domain, money management, and for two young people diet management, were potential barriers to independent functioning. Although personal advisors offered money management advice, this was sometimes perceived as too directive or patronising, thus not accepted. Conversely, three young people were motivated to learn these skills through adult modelling because they recognised that they would soon have to manage their tenancy and diet independently.

Around half of the participants described fractured self-efficacy in relation to personal education, training or career goals. Candice aspired to work in a bank but acknowledged that negative past experiences undermined her belief in her ability to achieve this goal. Three young people spoke of their own resilience based on what they had coped with in the past. For some, this inspired the belief that

they could achieve what they put their mind to: 'If I want something, if I want to do something, I'll go ahead and do it' (Khloe). Both Khloe and Alice were determined to return to education once their children were older.

At least half of the young people reflected on how a graduated approach to independence, incorporating adult modelling, increased their confidence around living independently. Leanne recognised a change in herself, '[...] before I moved here [semi-independent living] I wasn't getting the bus anywhere, wasn't going anywhere myself, wasn't doing much.' Darren valued that he was 'starting to pay for like my phone contract and stuff like that' and gradually becoming independent. Specific independence markers included: cooking independently, making phone calls, using public transport and paying bills. Not all had reached this point through a graduated approach, but this was thought to have facilitated skills acquisition.

Discussion

SDT and the central importance of relatedness to care leavers

It was possible to organise all of the inductive themes relating to priorities identified by young people in this study within the SDT framework. Of the three domains, relatedness appeared the most salient to young people's decision-making in preparing for adulthood, proving a catalyst to enhanced autonomy and competence with regards to post-16 priorities. This domain of SDT is potentially strikingly pertinent to the role of the corporate parent. Given the limited scope within this discussion for consideration of all three domains, relatedness will be prioritised, as it offers the strongest implications for policy and practice relating to service delivery for those preparing to leave care. Implications relating to the autonomy and competence domains will be considered more briefly in Figure 4.

Consistent with past literature, supportive relationships with corporate parents including carers and partners galvanised young people's motivation towards personal education or training goals (Driscoll, 2013; Rogers, 2011).

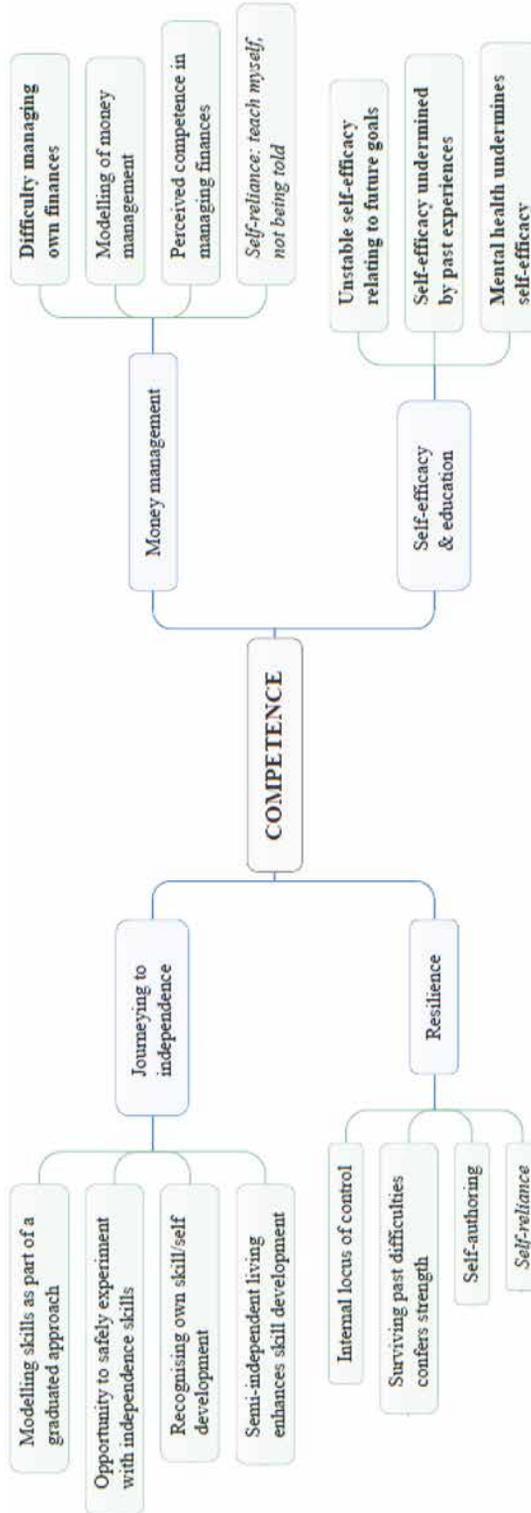


Figure 3: Emergent themes within the competence domain.

SDT domain	Suggested strategies for effective corporate parenting practice
Relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are provided with a consistent, key adult within their school, training, education or employment setting. • Key adults, particularly personal advisors, receive training around relationship factors that facilitate optimal engagement in direct work with young people. • EPs to consult with key adults throughout the pathway planning process to explore possible psychological and emotional barriers to young people's self-determination in approaching post-16 life. • Consistency and stability within relationships prioritised through stabilising staff turnover in leaving care teams. • Given the prevalence of early pregnancy in the care leaving population, access to sex and relationship advice should form part of pathway planning. • Gaps in young people's social and emotional support networks are rigorously explored and reviewed throughout pathway planning. • Corporate parents are familiar with the local offer for care leavers and can identify appropriate agencies or organisations to support young people's wellbeing and general health. • Acknowledgement given to the role of partners in supporting young people's self-determination.
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have access to life skills training (i.e. cooking etc.), delivered in a supported context. • Life skills training tailored according to gaps identified by the young person, particularly money management support. • Personal advisors to be appropriately trained to offer financial guidance to care leavers. • That corporate parents are familiar with the local offer for care leavers so that gaps in support networks can be appropriately addressed and supported. • EPs to provide an overview of services within the post-16 local offer given their strategic positioning within local authority structures.

Figure 4: Practicable steps for supporting young people's self-determination (*Continued*).

Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young parents provided with clear guidance around ways of returning to training or education with accompanying childcare options. • Young people have opportunities to experiment with independence skills in ‘real-life’ contexts as part of a graduated approach (e.g. making appointments). • To maximise young people’s engagement with career, further education or employment planning, consideration given to involving young person’s key adult in school or college settings in this process. This key adult might facilitate opportunities to attend open days, college/training site visits. • Access to high-quality work experience linked to their training or education, training or career goal. • Young people are supported to gain ownership over their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Pathway Plans. • Young people understand the benefits and purposes of the general act of planning ahead, given how PEPs and Pathway Plans figure in their lives. • Flexible systems that accommodate previous interruptions to young people’s education or training pathways if applicable. • Given the role that emotional wellbeing and mental health can play in facilitating or undermining young people’s autonomous motivation in relation to post-16 goals, early access to support services must be prioritised. • EPs could provide therapeutic support to facilitate care leavers’ engagement with post-16 priorities.
-----------------	---

Figure 4: (Continued) Practicable steps for supporting young people's self-determination.

Even for young people impacted by mental health needs, the ability of responsive adults to support them from states of amotivation to purposeful action (e.g. attending college more regularly) was clear.

Consistent relationships bolstered young people’s motivation to engage with preparing for adulthood support. Young people valued available, personalised and genuine support. Conversely, they were disinclined to engage with ‘contractual’ professional support. While past literature has emphasised the importance of continuity of care

(Driscoll, 2013; Rogers, 2011), the motivating impact of specific relational factors (e.g. personalisation and authenticity) on care leaver’s readiness to engage with support has been underexplored (Amaral, 2011). Moreover, a common response to young people’s perceived sense of adults being indifferent to their priorities was a rejection of external help. This could impact on post-16 decision-making, for example by limiting the availability of quality information about college course options.

Young people identified the value of different types of support (e.g. emotional and practical) in the transition to adulthood. Consistent with past literature, gaps in emotional and social support networks impacted on some young people's ability to thrive when living semi-independently (Matthews & Sykes, 2012; The Centre for Social Justice, 2015). Alice, who was candid about her decision to get pregnant in order to have her emotional needs met, highlighted the extent to which unmet relatedness needs could drive potentially impetuous decision-making when entering adulthood.

Findings illustrated young people's preference for graduated independence. Propp, Ortega and NewHeart (2003) proposed an interdependence model of transition for youths leaving foster care in the United States, which challenged ideas that independence, or the notion of self-sufficiency, is the end-goal of transition. Collaboration, social connectedness and a supported move to independence were proposed alternatives. Interdependence, in the context of this study, meant that young people's motivation for independence and engagement with support was enhanced through access to a relational safety net (comparable, in this regard, to the secure base within attachment theory [Bowlby, 2005]). This concept will be explored further in the following section.

Corporate parenting: interdependence in practice

Young people's prioritisation of support which engenders enhanced self-determination aligns with the emphasis on 'loyal support' (DfE & DoH, 2000, p.84) and 'stability' within current UK corporate parenting models (HM Government, 2016, p.4). Currently, however, there appears to be a discrepancy between policy and practice. Evidence both from this study and the wider literature suggests that aspects of corporate parenting are not consistent with young people's expressed needs. Rather than a gradual and supported approach to independence, literature suggests that 'instant adulthood' (Stein, 2008, p.41) is conferred on care leavers, with many

being catapulted into adulthood without adequate support networks (Butterworth et al., 2016; Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Rogers, 2011). Particular gaps appear to exist around social, emotional and mental health needs (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2015; The Centre for Social Justice, 2014).

Policy currently focuses on young people transitioning to 'independence', thereby implying that young people are aspiring to self-sufficiency and independence – not needing further support from the corporate parent. By contrast, young people's views indicate a preference for an 'interdependence' period, during which ongoing support and the ability to 'depend' on parents if and when needed is prioritised. Interdependence for care leavers is all the more pertinent in the current economic climate, where young people without experience of the care system are often obliged to return to the familial safety net either post-university or pre-full time employment (Furlong et al., 2003).

Corporate parenting and the role of EPs

Findings from this study and from previous literature reveal a number of ways in which EPs can contribute to the role of the corporate parent. These will now be described in the sections below.

Pathway and person-centred planning

The pathway plan is a statutory document following the young person through the PfA (2013) process by documenting their needs across a number of domains (DfE, 2010). Given its centrality to current practice, one development could usefully focus on strengthening its relational dimensions by incorporating a 'key people' section within each relevant domain (i.e. Education, Training and Employment) so that the young person is clear about who will be providing key support within each given area. EPs could also have a role in introducing 'Plan, Do, Review' cycles (DfE & DoH, 2014) to pathway planning. This could be useful given the reported lack of precision around target setting and reviewing processes within pathway planning

(The Centre for Social Justice, 2016).

Another priority surrounds promoting focus on young people's post-16 training or education goals from an earlier age. To prevent the 'yo-yo-ing' phase reflected in these current findings, Personal Educational Plans (PEPs) could incorporate a stronger post-16 focus, in line with Education and Health Care Plans (DfE & DoH, 2014). A proposal to start pathway planning earlier has recently been put forward (The Centre for Social Justice, 2016).

Familiarity with the Pfa (2013) agenda arising from SEND reforms means that EPs are well-positioned to promote person-centred approaches in post-16 transition planning (Morris & Atkinson, 2018), which can incorporate making sure that appropriate adults are involved. Training leaving care teams in person-centred working and approaches could facilitate greater involvement of young people in the pathway planning process. The importance of self-advocacy for care leavers when planning for transition has recently been emphasised within policy documents (DfE, 2010; Munro et al., 2011; UNCRC, 2009); nevertheless, evidence suggests that care leavers can be peripheralised in pathway planning, with many reporting that the process often seems bureaucratic and more of a 'tick box' exercise than a meaningful process (Driscoll, 2013; Ofsted, 2012).

Training

Findings also highlighted the importance of key adults offering available, personalised and authentic, non-contractual support. Personal advisor training around relationship building with care leavers has been scrutinised within recent policy discussion addressed to The Children's Commissioner for England (The Centre for Social Justice, 2016), with young people still reporting significant variation in the perceived quality of personal advisor support (Ofsted, 2012; The Centre for Social Justice, 2015). Therefore, a priority for all key adults involved in corporate parent-

ing is effective relationship building training to facilitate young people's engagement with support when preparing for adulthood. EPs, with their knowledge of psychological theory relating to human connectedness, could potentially provide this training.

While the focus of this discussion has been relatedness, corporate parenting suggestions for supporting preparation for adulthood across all three SDT domains are summarised in Figure 4.

Limitations

This study is limited in having a modest sample size of 10 young people, although it did feature the views of young people experiencing a range of care settings (e.g. foster care, semi-independent living and full independence), meaning a range of views were represented. Participants were aged between 16–19, which does not constitute the full age range of young people preparing for adulthood. It is possible that those aged between 20 and 25 would have differing priorities given that they may well be further into their journey towards independence. Moreover, another possible limitation is that some young people interviewed were supported by a leaving care team rated outstanding by Ofsted in 2015, meaning that their responses may constitute a more positive picture of the leaving care process than might be expected from those in other UK local authorities.

Future directions and conclusions

This study has shown the potential relevance of an SDT framework to the Preparing for Adulthood (Pfa, 2013) priorities for care leavers (Atkinson, Hyde & Kelly, 2019). In doing so, an interdependence model of transition has been proposed, with clear implications for corporate parents willing to offer 'loyal support' to their young people as they prepare for adulthood (DfE & DoH, 2000, p.84). Future research could explore, potentially via case studies, the impact on care leaver outcomes of EPs' involvement in path-

way planning processes. Finally, the viability of using an SDT framework with other post-16 groups in the UK could be another future direction for research.

References

- Adley, N. & Jupp Kina, V. (2015). Getting behind the closed door of care leavers: Understanding the role of emotional support for young people leaving care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 22 (1), 97–105. doi: 10.1111/cfs.12203
- Amaral, M. (2011). Care-leavers engagement with services: Motivational factors which sustain a positive relationship. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 11(1), 48–57. Retrieved [date?] from www.celcis.org/files/3014/4041/4459/2011_Vol_11_1_Amaral_Care_leavers_engagement.pdf
- Atkinson, C., Dunsmuir, S., Lang, J. & Wright, S. (2015). Developing a competency framework for the initial training of educational psychologists working with young people aged 16–25. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(2), 159–173. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2015.1004038
- Atkinson, C., Hyde, R. & Kelly, C. (2019). Working with care leavers: A model for effective transition to adulthood. In C. Arnold & J. Hardy, (Eds.), *Emerging new frameworks & perspectives: Applied educational psychology with young people 16 to 25*. DECP.
- Barbour, R.S. (2001). Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: A case of the tail wagging the dog? *British Medical Journal*, 322(7294), 1115–1117. doi: 10.1136/bmj.322.7294.1115
- Bowlby, J. (2005). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory (Vol. 393)*. London: Routledge.
- British Psychological Society (2002). *Professional practice guidelines: Division of Educational and child Psychology*. Leicester: Author.
- Bradbury, S. (2006). Corporate Parenting: A discussion of the educational psychologist's role. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22(2), 141–158. doi:10.1080/02667360600668287
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brinkmann, S. & Steinar, K. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (3rd edn.)*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Butterworth, S., Singh, S.P., Birchwood, M., Islam, Z., Munro, E.R., Vostanis, P. & Simkiss, D. (2016). Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'They set you up to fail!' *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 22(3), 138–147. doi: 10.1111/camh12171
- DfE (2010). *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: Planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*. London: DfE.
- DfE (2014). *The Children and Families Act*. London: DfE.
- DfE & DoH (2000). *Guidance on the education of children in public care*. London: Author.
- DfE & DoH (2014). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. London: Author.
- Dima, G. & Skehill, C. (2011). Making sense of leaving care: The contribution of Bridges model of transition to understanding the psycho-social process. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(12), 2532–2539. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.08.016
- Dobson, F. (1998). *Letter to councillors: Quality protects: Transforming children's services the role and responsibilities of councillors from Secretary of State for Health*. London: DoH.
- Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting care leavers to fulfil their educational aspirations: Resilience, relationships and resistance to help. *Children & Society*, 27(2), 139–149. doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00388.x
- Edwards, L.N. (2016). Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32(1), 54–72. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2015.1112256

Correspondence

Cathy Atkinson,

Manchester Institute of Education,
Ellen Wilkinson Building, University of
Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester,
M13 9PL

Email: cathy.atkinson@manchester.ac.uk

Note

This research was supported by the Department for Education (DfE) National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) for the Initial Training of Educational Psychologists (ITEP) award 2015–2018.

- Francis, Y.J., Bennion, K. & Humrich, S. (2017). Evaluating the outcomes of a school based Theraplay® project for looked after children. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 33(3) 1–15. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2017.1324405
- Furlong, A., Cartmel, F., Biggart, A., Sweeting, H. & West, P. (2003). *Reconceptualising youth transitions: Patterns of vulnerability and processes of social inclusion*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- Gabriel, J. (2015). *Young people's experiences of moving out of being 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET): an exploration of significant factors*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Birmingham.
- Gagné, M. & Deci, E.L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. doi: 10.1002/job.322
- HCPC (2012). *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics*. London: Author.
- HM Government (2000). *The Children (Leaving Care) Act*. The Stationery Office. Retrieved [date?] from www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/pdfs/ukpga_20000035_en.pdf
- HM Government (2013). *Care leaver strategy: A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care*. London: HM Government.
- HM Government (2016). *Keeping on caring, supporting young people from care to independence*. London: HM Government.
- HM Government (2017). *The Children and Social Work Act*. Norwich: The Stationery Office. Retrieved [date?] from www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga_20170016_en.pdf
- Knight, A., Chase, E. & Aggleton, P. (2006). Teenage pregnancy among young people in and leaving care: Messages and implications for foster care. *Adoption & Fostering*, 30(1), 58–69. doi: 10.1177/030857590603000108
- La Guardia, J.G., Ryan, R.M., Couchman, C.E. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Within-person variation in security of attachment: A self-determination theory perspective on attachment, need fulfillment, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(3), 367. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.79/3367
- Lightfoot, L. (2013). *The role of practitioner educational psychologists in supporting a residential setting to meet the needs of looked after children*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Manchester.
- Mann, F.J. (2012). *Investigating the distinct contribution of educational psychology to provide children in care with an enhanced education*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Exeter.
- Matthews, S. & Sykes, S. (2012). Exploring health priorities for young people leaving care. *Child Care in Practice*, 18(4), 393–407. doi: 10.1080/13575279.2012.717913
- McParlin, P. (1996). Children 'looked after' (in care)-implications for educational psychologists: Relentless decades of prejudice, disadvantage and appalling educational outcomes. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 12(2), 112–117. doi: 10.1080/0266736960120209
- Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morris, R. & Atkinson, C. (2018). The role of educational psychologists in supporting post-16 transition: findings from the literature. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 34(2), 131–149. doi:10.1080/02667363.2017.1411788
- Munro, E.R., Lushey, C., Ward, H. & National Care Advisory Service. (2011). *Evaluation of the Right2B-Cared4 Pilots: Final report*. London: DfE.
- Munro, E.R., Pinkerton, J., Mendes, P., Hyde-Dryden, G., Herczog, M. & Benbenishty, R. (2011). The contribution of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child to understanding and promoting the interests of young people making the transition from care to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(12), 2417–2423. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.08.025
- Niemiec, C.P. & Ryan, R.M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom. Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 133–144. doi: 10.1177/1477878509104318
- Norwich, B., Richards, A. & Nash, T. (2010). Educational psychologists and children in care: Practices and issues. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26(4), 375–390. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2010.521310
- Ntoumanis, N. (2001). A self-determination approach to the understanding of motivation in physical education. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71(2), 225–242. doi: 10.1348/000709901158497
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2012). *After care: Young people's views on leaving care: reported by the Children's Rights Director for England*. London: DfE.
- PfA (2013). *Delivering support and aspiration for disabled young people*. Bath: PfA
- Propp, J., Ortega, D. & NewHeart, F. (2003). Independence or interdependence: Rethinking the transition from ward of the court to adulthood. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 84(2), 259–266. doi:10.1606/1044-3894.102
- Rogers, R. (2011). 'I remember thinking, why isn't there someone to help me? Why isn't there someone who can help me make sense of what I'm going through?' 'Instant adulthood' and the transition of young people out of state care. *Journal of Sociology*, 47(4), 411–426. doi: 10.1177/1440783311420793

- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Stein, M. (2004). *What works for young people leaving care?* Ilford, Essex: Barnardo's.
- Stein, M. (2008). Resilience and young people leaving care. *Child Care in Practice*, 14(1), 35-44. doi: 10.1080/13575270701733682
- The Centre for Social Justice (2014). *Survival of the fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers.* London: CFSJ.
- The Centre for Social Justice (2015). *Finding their feet: Equipping care leavers to reach their potential.* London: CFSJ.
- The Centre for Social Justice (2016). *A submission from the centre for social justice to the Children's Commissioner for England – Delivering a Care Leavers' Strategy for Traineeships and Apprenticeships.* London: CFSJ.
- UNCRC (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).* Geneva: United Nations.
- UNCRC (2009). *Guidance for the Alternative Care of Children.* Geneva: UNCRC.
- Wilding, L. (2015). The application of self-determination theory to support students experiencing disaffection. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(2), 137-149. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2014.995154
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (2nd edn.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.