

EDUCATION ISSUES IN FOSTER CARE CHILDREN

by

Gabrielle L. Sewester

An Abstract

of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative research project examined how schools assisted children in the foster care system with educational issues. Six semi-structured interviews were completed with school social workers who work with foster care students. Several common themes emerged after data analysis, including behavioral differences, intellectual differences, special education differences, notification of a foster child needing assistance and transferring a foster child to a new school, and social workers providing assistance with a foster child's educational pursuit and resources available to foster children with educational differences. The local school district social workers were able to identify ways they assist children in the foster care system with the different educational pursuits.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Every day there are more than half a million children in the foster care system in the United States (Bruskas, 2008; Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002) and that number continues to rise (Woods, Farineau, & McWey, 2011). These foster care children are the most educationally vulnerable population within the school system (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). Their vulnerability comes from frequent truancy, discipline referrals, below average grades, often the need to repeat grades, and special education involvement (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). Providing additional services for children in the foster care system can decrease their educational vulnerability. Over the years, several child welfare agencies have added an emphasis on the importance of education for the United States foster youth by training social workers on educational needs for children (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). In addition, the start of residential education placements for foster youths have allowed foster children to have a stable placement and a focus on their educational pursuit (Gaskins & Mastropieri, 2010).

Abused and neglected children in foster care have a greater need for assistance in three areas: education, health, and social behaviors (Bruskas, 2008). Amongst those three areas education can greatly impact a child's future. According to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006) children in foster care are one of the most educationally vulnerable children. Research suggests these educational issues are not created from entering the foster care system, but the foster care system provides minimal assistance with these problems (Berger, Bruch, Johnson, James & Rubin, 2009; Roberts, 1993). Previous research has provided evidence that the foster care system creates additional problems for the children. Some of those problems include frequent moves, lack of learning supports, and unmet emotional and other needs (Zetlin et al., 2006). Several of

these problems are unavoidable, but there are potential resources available to provide assistance to these children when problems occur.

One potential resource is the simple addition of adding a school liaison in the child welfare offices. The school liaison can assist with the educational issues the children are facing. The school liaison is able to advocate for the child to remain in the same school as before they were removed from their biological family and placed in foster care. The school liaison has the opportunity to provide support to the child throughout their education and make sure they are able to obtain everything they need to succeed at school in that environment. This addition of a school liaison will increase the contacts between the school and the child welfare offices. This easy fix of adding a school liaison increased the children test scores in both math and reading, which typically are amongst the subjects that have a downward trajectory for foster care children (Zetlin et al., 2006).

Some of the problems foster care children face every day are far different than those of non-foster care children (Lips, 2007). Because of this difference there was a group in Baltimore who proposed a public charter school focusing on foster care children (Lips, 2007). According to Lips (2007) this school would be able to provide training to teachers and other staff to be able to assist children who have been maltreated. Since these children have a different background than non-foster care children this school would be able to adapt to focus on the issues the children have and help with their education at the same time, which would deliver services to meet the specific needs of each child (Lips, 2007). Since math and reading are a constant known struggle for foster care children (Zetlin et al., 2006), this school could have resources to better focus on the lack of math and reading skills needed to advance to the next subject (Jones, 2012).

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Providing assistance to foster care children with their educational problems could impact their future. With some help these children would be able to have the same opportunity as non-foster care children. Since the majority of foster care children drop out before they turn 16 (Bruskas, 2008), increasing their educational opportunity would give them the chance to continue their education past high school.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will examine the foster care system to gain understanding to where the problems first occur. Leading into the research on the educational components to obtain a better understanding of the resources available. Two possible solutions found in the research to assist foster children with educational issues will be discussed.

Foster Care

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stated there are over half a million children in the foster care system in the United States (Bruskas, 2008; Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002). The children receiving assistance from child welfare agencies are considered to be a defenseless population (Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002). These children have poor development, mental, and educational outcomes due to the maltreatment from their biological parents. Research conducted by Lightfoot, Hill, and LaLiberte (2011) indicated that the rate of maltreatment in children with disabilities are 3.4 times greater than the other children. The maltreatment can consist of abuse or neglect. According to Bruskas (2008) neglect is the most common form of maltreatment; therefore, one of the most common reasons children are in the foster care system. Bruskas (2008) examined the damages of maltreatment and the removal from parents as traumatic events, that can affect the immediate and future development as well as the mental health of children. Instability, persistent low expectations, poor adult advocacy on their behalf, inadequate life-skills training, special education needs, and cultural sensitivity are some of the difficulties children face once in the foster care system (Lips, 2007); in addition to, behavioral problems, poor academic accomplishment, and school failure (Zima, Bussing, Freeman, Yang, Belin, & Forness, 2000). These problems are generally expected due to the children's history of traumatic psychosocial stressors, such as abuse or neglect from their

primary caretakers (Zima, Bussing, Freeman, Yang, Belin, & Forness, 2000). Compared to children previously in the foster care system, Gordon, Ganger, and Gist (2002) noted the high possibility of younger children currently in the foster care system experience developmental complications. The rates of developmental delays ranging from 13% to 62 %, compared to previous rates of developmental delay ranging from 4% to 10% (Gordon, Ganger, & Gist, 2002). Once in the foster care system, studies suggest a higher need to understand the experiences of children and the need for early comprehensive developmental and mental health assessments (Bruskas, 2008). Understanding the experiences children face prior to entering foster care, can begin to explain some of the complications children face after they enter care. One of those complications is the educational system and the obstacles that come with the education.

Educational Obstacles

Children in foster care face many educational obstacles. Some of these obstacles are related to the frequent moves that occur (Bruskas, 2008). When a child comes into foster care, the child welfare agencies attempt to place children close to the location the child was removed from. Child welfare agencies have been unable to place children close to the area where they were removed because of the shortage of short-term foster homes (Roberts, 1993). Even prior to children being removed, education was never a high priority due to the vulnerable lifestyle. So, these children typically have lower attendance, and if they do attend they are often late. The child may experience difficulty adjusting to a new school if they are continuously absent.

Another obstacle these children face is obtaining their school records. According to Bruskas (2008) less than 20% of student records were available and 75% of those school records had incorrect data entered. The more frequently the child moves, the less likely child welfare workers, foster parents, and school personnel will be able to obtain all the child's records.

Without having the records, the school is unable to determine what the child has previously learned, or the appropriate grade level currently, which leads to many students having to repeat classes and grade levels (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). Some of these obstacles are the reasons why foster care children are six times more likely to get their General Education Degree (GED) compared to the children not in foster care (Bruskas, 2008). In addition to the increased probability of dropping out of school, foster children are also at risk of having below average academic success in reading, vocabulary, and math skills (Zima, Bussing, Freeman, Yang, Belin, & Forness, 2000). These poor educational outcomes of children in foster care increase their vulnerability and can impact their future (Bruskas, 2008).

Another obstacle foster children face is the need for special education services. Research completed by Lightfoot, Hill, and LaLiberte (2011) indicated that 24% of maltreated children were enrolled in special education services, compared to the 14% of children who were not maltreated receiving special education services. Mental health services have been linked to special education services provided within a school system. Youth in the foster care system had the following mental health diagnoses: post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and depression (Lightfoot, Hill, and LaLiberte, 2011). In addition to those disorders, it was noted that 61% of teens were diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder (Lightfoot, Hill, and LaLiberte, 2011).

Solutions

The Education Initiative Project was a collaborative effort among a child welfare agency, an educational agency, and a law office to assist foster children and other low-income people with disabilities (Zetlin et al., 2006). The major change this initiative had on the foster system was the addition of an education liaison in child welfare offices to assist with educational

problems for the foster care children. Some of the problems the school liaison would assist with included: the inability to get school records, refusal of a school district to enroll the child in school, lacking special education eligibility, failing to provide special education assistance, and unexplained suspension or expulsion of a child (Zetlin et al., 2006).

Throughout the study the school liaison assisted with 250 cases for one year. The authors studied showed that 50% of the cases were resolved with the school liaison making one or two contacts, 33% of the cases took between three and ten contacts, and 17% involved problems so intense they needed more than ten contacts (Zetlin et al., 2006). Overall the data showed that the educational liaison was helpful to both the child welfare office and the schools. It appears this assisted with the educational issues the foster care children were having.

Another study completed by Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2005) researched the effectiveness of the Educational Initiative Project. The findings from their research indicated that child welfare agencies who received training and had access to an education liaison increased their knowledge about the school system and were more likely to gather current educational data and comment on schooling needs in the case files (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2005).

Educational facilities are established to assist foster care children who have significant educational issues. These facilities are able to stress the importance of education. According to Jones (2012) the residential education facility is able to provide assistance with education and social development instead of the traditional treatment focus. The expectation of the residential education facility is that the children will be able to remain in the facility until they have reached graduation, which will help the children be able to graduate from high school and improve their education (Jones, 2012). Similar to Jones, Gaskins and Mastropieri (2008) used a residential

education facility with the focus on education along with a family-style of living and counseling, to provide assistance to the children in the school program.

The programs were able to assist foster care children with educational issues improve their grades and advance to continue their high school education. “Sixty-nine percent of students were successful, meaning they either graduated, continued attending school, reunified with their parents, or went to a lower level of care” (Jones, 2012, p. 107). Some of the foster care children in these facilities have the opportunity to focus on their education, which is something that foster care children are not able to do prior to entering care. These students achieving educational success are impacted by the smaller class sizes, focus solely on education, the family-style living arrangements, and the additional support through counseling (Gaskins & Mastropieri, 2008). Attending the education focused residential facilities could benefit the foster care children overtime by allowing them to complete their education and continue to move towards their independence.

Research demonstrates there are, in fact, educational issues for children in the foster care system. Unfortunately, with the limited research on solutions for educational issues for children in the foster care system, it is difficult to figure out ways to fill the gap. The gap happens for various reasons, but there are two solutions available to assist these children. The Educational Liaison Model and the residential education facility were just two examples of ways the educational problems for foster care children can be resolved.

This research project examined how schools assist children in the foster care system with educational issues. Six school social workers who work with foster care students were interviewed. The interviews focused on how foster children have behavioral, intellectual, and special education difference, how the school provides assistance to foster care children with their

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differences, the transfer process for a foster child to a new school, and what resources foster children have in the school. The research project was completed through the lens of the human ecological theory, looking at the impact the family and school system have on the child.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

A constructionism case study provided a deeper look into the relationship between the school and the children in the foster care system. This focus allowed the researcher to interview school social workers to gain a better understanding of the schools' role when working with foster care children. The constructionism approach focuses on, "how social realities are produced, assembled, and maintained" (Silverman, 2013 p. 107). The case study focused on how the foster care children's educational issues are created and potential solutions to the issues the children face.

Interviews were conducted with six school social workers from one school district to investigate how the school districts assist children in the foster care system with their educational needs. A case study was an appropriate approach to answer the research question as it focuses on multiple cases wanting to answer a "how" question (Silverman, 2013). In addition, a case study identifies themes and make claims about your research (Silverman, 2013).

Research Questions

The research question for the case study was, How do schools assist children in the foster care system with educational issues? The research identified three areas where the issues occur, which are behavioral problems, intellectual problems and special education issues (Bruskas, 2008; Roberts, 1993; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). The interview question focused on finding insight on the three issues of concern for foster care children.

Sampling Strategy

A case study is an in-depth look at multiple cases. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the school social workers. The researcher looked exclusively at the variations within the school district and determine themes developed within the schools. The

researcher contacted the local superintendent to obtain permission to contact the school social workers. The researcher received permission from one local school district. Participants were then contacted through email to schedule an interview. All the interviews were conducted at the location the school social worker is employed at.

Interview Design

The constructionism case study consisted of interviewing six social workers from local rural school districts. These social workers have worked with foster care children within their school district and have first-hand information on ways to assist the children in the foster care system with educational issues. Social workers have a different approach because they are not working with the student on an educational level, but rather offering assistance and support with the overall issues that occur within the school. They each went through an initial interview.

The initial interviews were semi-structured interviews. The researcher followed an interview guide on the following topics: the role of the school social worker, children within the foster care system, behavioral differences, intellectual differences, special education differences, different school subjects affected by the foster care system, notification of a foster care child, foster care children's educational pursuit, assistance available to foster care children, and resources foster care children need. The school social workers had the opportunity to provide additional information at the end of the interview to provide them an opportunity to add important information the researcher may not have asked. The interviews took place at the schools where each of the social workers worked and included the school social worker and the researcher. The researcher refrained from adding information throughout the interviews to serve as a research tool. The interviews were recorded, with consent from each school social worker.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted with each school social worker. Once the interviews were recorded the researcher kept the recordings in a locked cabinet to ensure safety. The identity of the school social workers was kept anonymous and identified by a number. The researcher then transcribed the interviews and used password protection to ensure they cannot be accessed.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher worked with their advisor to determine common themes throughout the interviews. The researcher focused on themes that were directly related to the overarching research question, which means they wanted to find themes that impact educational issues with foster care children. The researcher and their advisor read through the interviews and coded them separately. Then the researcher and their advisor went through the coded interviews together to establish validity, so they both agreed that each theme is important. Themes that continuously appeared throughout the interviews were considered substantially significant.

This qualitative approach served as a guide to assisting children in the foster care system. The case study method allowed the researcher to identify themes and make claims about the connections between the foster care children and the educational system. The researcher determined the following were biases for this project: the prior research completed on the subject, the current employment of the researcher, personal connections to the participants, and the prior knowledge of the foster care system. The researcher had the thesis committee assist with determining themes and codes, which assisted with the biases that already exist. The researcher also had another student assist with reviewing the interviews to ensure no biases were added to the data.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

For this qualitative research project several themes emerged while investigating the research question, How do schools assist children in the foster care system with educational issues? Themes that emerged after data analysis were the following: behavioral differences, intellectual differences, special education differences, notification of a foster child needing assistance and transferring a foster child to a new school, and social workers providing assistance with a foster child's educational pursuit and resources available to foster children with educational differences.

Foster children in the school system

The participants had varying views on the foster children in the school system. Many shared the various and extra needs foster care children have within the school system. Tammy disclosed, "They need the extra support, they need the extra relationships, they need the extra bonding. In a sense that you don't know where they have been or what they have gone through, so they bring extra baggage." This participant explained some of the extra support and needs children in the foster care system need.

Four of the six participants stated they have noticed an increase in the foster care children in the school system. Sarah explained, "It is definitely increased last year...and it was a challenge to keep up with when kids were coming and leaving." The increase of foster children comes with the continuous high demand of foster homes for the children. One participant identified the lack of quality foster homes in their community. Participant Daniel revealed,

I think there is never enough good foster homes for one and...if you are limited on the foster home and the personality match doesn't happen for whatever reason

in that home and there aren't a whole lot of options within the county for the child.

Each foster child is different within the school system, but the majority of the participants discussed the extra needs that come with the foster children that need to be addressed.

The participants discussed the difficulty getting those extra needs filled due to the lack of foster homes available to fill those needs.

Behavioral Differences

Foster care children in the school system may exhibit behavioral differences. The participants discussed the following as causes for behavioral differences: security, relationships, trust, aggression, resiliency, and trauma, but they added that the behavioral differences depend on the child involved.

Security. Another participant discussed security as a behavioral difference observed. Caroline expressed, "Security or lack of security is the most obvious." Personal relationships and trusting others was shared by one participant in regard to the behavioral differences of foster care children.

Relationships. A participant found relationships could lead to behavioral issues with the foster youth. Daniel explained, "You can see some kids that are angry rebellious, if they feel that you were the reason for them possibly being removed then sometimes there could be a break in the relationship."

Trust. One participant identified trust as an issue when children come into their school. Tammy stated, "we have some that we have never noticed they came into the building, then we have others who just have a hard time making those personal relationships with teachers and trusting."

Aggression. Aggression was seen by one participant as a way for foster youth to have behavioral difference. Sarah voiced, “Typically, what I see if that pent-up aggression it doesn’t always display itself the same way, but usually we see some behavioral issues.” Not every child displays their behavioral differences the same way.

Trauma. As one participant pointed out it is difficult to lump all of the situations into one answer because of the children coming from traumatic situations. Sarah addressed, “It is just hard to put it all on one situation because working in the school we have a lot of kids that come from trauma and so some of those kids are more needy...”

Resiliency. Some of the behavioral differences are situational for each of the children in the foster care system. Sarah noted,

It is dependent from kid to kid, in some of our kids they are incredibly resilient and some of our kids aren’t. It is hard for me to speak about that because the kids are so different, and situations are so different. Some of the kids have been in the system a long time and others haven’t. I am working with one student this year and she has had a really hard time and she has never been in the system and it has been really hard for her.

The behavioral differences observed in foster care children in the school system vary from child to child. Although some children have negative behaviors, some of the children exhibit no behavioral differences.

Intellectual Differences

Intellectual differences impact the overall schooling of the children in the foster care system. Depending on the level of intellectual difference the foster care child might be prone to not completing the required appropriate amount of credits to graduate. Megan stated,

I think for my age group what I see is a struggle to graduate because a lot of them have been bounced between districts so they lose credits whenever they move, and they don't have a steady foster care placement and they are bounced around I see a high risk of them dropping out of school.

Despite the efforts made by the foster care system, the biological parents influence in the children's view on their education and the importance of attending school. Several participants have found that the prior education impacts the intellectual differences of the children. Daniel commented,

If it was an attendance related issue or kids that if education was not stressed in the home, then there could be gaps in learning from missed day in schools and due to whatever they were exposed to in the home.

Two participants noticed it was not the intellectual issues that were effecting the children, but the lack of schooling that appears to impact their education. Tammy explained, "I would not say it was an intellectual as so much a lack of education and that is not the foster care system but the system before." Jessica noted, "They are usually pretty significantly behind, I'm not talking just a year behind. So, they are normally struggling." Intellectual differences are dependent on the importance of education prior to the foster care system. Children in the foster care system struggle with intellectual differences if they have missed school regularly.

Special Education Differences

The participants discussed children with previous involvement in special education programs in the school system. For the participants there were no differences because the children were able to obtain special education services through the school system. Caroline voiced, "I don't think I have typically noticed any difference. The majority of the time when I

have had a foster child in special education then they have already been in special education and have been identified.” One participant was able to identify mental health related issues bringing foster care children into the education program at school. Sarah expressed,

Some of them have come through the system to where they maybe deal with some ADHD or some undiagnosed disorder that we have picked up on in the educational sense, so they have an IEP for other health impaired, but with my mental health background, I feel like they are just displaying some stress like behavior PTSD from whatever they may have experienced.

One participant could see that foster care children do need additional special education services compared to traditional students. Jessica stated, “I would say more generally speaking they receive more special education services.” The majority of the participants discussed the special education differences being eliminated because of the access to the special education resources. The children in the foster care system need special education services to assist with their educational pursuit.

Notification and transferring a foster child to a new school

Typically, these participants were notified from within the school itself. Megan stated, “I would be notified the same way as any student needing assistance, through the teacher through an academic counselor or that from a special education coordinator.” A few participants had contact with Children’s Division or the foster family when a foster child needed assistance. Caroline stated, “We get a fax from Children’s Division stating they were placed in foster care with this person.” One participant received no notification that the foster child needed assistance. Tammy expressed, “We kind of find out on our own by just meeting the new kids.” The participants were all notified in different ways, but one participant was never notified at all. The

social workers in the school district can assist children in the foster care system if they are notified.

The participants indicated when a foster child transfers to a new school then their school will send the records and contact another individual at that school. Daniel shared,

Usually we will get a request for records and will send that all over and typically myself or one of the counselors we will make immediate contact with their intake people or counselors and make sure they are aware of some of those things and even if you send those records there isn't that personal piece of the child.

One participant went the extra mile to talk directly to the new school, so they could receive additional background information on the foster care child transferring to their school. Caroline stated,

It will be like everyone else that is transferred. We will send the records and the paperwork. I will likely take the extra step to contact the school and say hey they are in foster care they have been here for like five months and give them a low down of the child.

The participants sent the records to the new school, just like they would do for any student that is transferring, but then they would go the extra mile to ensure the new school gets the background information for the students.

Social workers' assistance and resources

The participants treat the foster children and traditional students similarly when it comes to assistance with their educational pursuit. One way the participants expressed they assist the foster children is with transportation. Daniel stated, "I set up a number of kids who will need

tutoring to stay after and work on different things and I will work on getting them home as long as the foster family is okay with that.” A second way foster children need assistance is with special education. Megan explained,

Basically we have a special education processor and they will get the IEP from the other school and we will start our own testing that will happen with that student and there is a sixty-day period we have to get that all rolling.

Children interpret information differently, so one participant was able to use different instructions to help the foster care students. Tammy justified, “We try to make sure there are different instructions and to make sure every kid is getting the information in the level they need.” The social workers assist children in the foster care system with their educational issues that arise through their schooling. The children need additional support that the social workers can give them through tutoring, special education testing, and providing direct information at their level.

Schools provide assistance with children in the foster care system who have behavioral differences with counseling services and disciplinary actions. Caroline stated,

Referrals for counseling might be given and if they are having issues in the classroom then they are accepted the same process as other children such as sitting in the safe spot and from the safe spot to the focus room and if they are acting out a lot physically and things like that then they might have to go to the safe room, but that is the same as any other student.

One participant pointed out the importance of the reason behind the behaviors. Tammy explained,

We try to look at the area they have having the behavior in and figure out why that is a behavior. Am I having the behavior because I don't know and it is embarrassing or truly because I cannot sit still. We try to evaluate what is going on and what is causing the behavior.

Locating the reason behind the behaviors and treating that reason, could help eliminate future behaviors from occurring. The participants will use tutoring to assist with intellectual concerns for foster care children. Caroline noted, "Those children might be pulled out and added in extra tutoring or for example I use volunteers to add extra interventions with the students to give extra support." Daniel stated, "We can boost that child every day and we how that child is getting at least thirty minutes of tutoring each and every day." The participants were able to assist children with educational issues in the school system by providing tutoring and following disciplinary actions. One participant determined the reason behind the behavioral differences to help the foster care child.

The participants wanted to take actions to make sure the foster children are taken care of and then notified the foster family or Children's Division. Daniel explained,

We try to handle as much as we can here in house and it is just situation or is it something they got upset about and talking to someone they have a connection with then they can deescalate the situation and we can work them back into the classroom. When that happens, not all the time depending on the situation, a lot of times we will call and let the foster family know...in case they come home and are a little bit off.

Similarly, this participant contacted the foster parents to notify them of the issues that arose during the school day. Caroline expressed, "They would have to be held accountable to the rules

and things like every student and we would call the foster parent.” The participants were able to notify the foster family to ensure they were aware of the issues that happened throughout the day.

Foster children are capable of accessing resources like every other child, but it depends on whether the foster family has knowledge of the resources and how to access them. Caroline explained, “I think there are a lot of resources for foster families and foster children, but I don’t think they have access to all of them.” One participant found that the foster care child has access to resources depending on the level of commitment the foster family is providing. Tammy discussed,

I think some families go above and beyond and they know the resources and they use them. I think there are other families it’s not they aren’t loved or taken care of but they are just not going the extra mile with the kids.

Communication was found to be a way to eliminate issues for foster care children in the school system. Sarah stated,

I think communication early on would prevent a lot of issues that arise if we took a great look at what are the behaviors of the way they are maybe we could give the support they need so other issues don’t arrive along the road.

Providing resources to the foster families would allow the children to get support outside of the educational system.

The participants were able to determine several ways that they assist foster care system with behavioral, intellectual, and special education issues in their school district. There continues to be issues with the resources available, communication, and available foster homes. The participants were able to identify resources that are available and

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assess whether the foster families can locate the resources for the children.

Communication of the foster youth coming to their school, when issues arise with that youth, and the extra communication if a child transfers; were identified as impacting the foster child in the educational system. Lacking foster homes adds to the additional stress involved with placing a child in their community to continue with the educational pursuit they have started at their school district.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Themes that emerged after data analysis were the following: behavioral differences, intellectual differences, special education differences, notification process of a foster child needing assistance and transferring a foster child to a new school, and social workers providing assistance with a foster child's educational pursuit and resources available to foster children with educational differences

Behavioral differences. The behavioral issues related to the children being placed in foster care can relate to those found by the participants. The research discusses the traumatic events causing mental health and behavioral issues (Bruskas, 2008), which is similar to the participants who found that the behavioral concerns consist of security, relationships, trust, aggression, resiliency, and trauma. One participant noted that behavioral problems has always been an issue for these children because of the life they are stuck in. The children continuously are stuck in a life forcing them to deal with the lack of security they have.

Intellectual differences. Similarly, to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Luderer (2004), the participants noticed a difference in the intellectual issues relating to the children being behind due to the lack of involvement of the parents in the children's educational pursuit. The participants are able to send records and communicate the school the children are transferring to, which is different than the research where most of the records aren't sent or fully sent to the next school (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). According to the research the intellectual differences in foster children can result in a lower rate of high school graduates (Barnow, Buck, O'Brien, Pecora, Ellis, & Steiner, 2013), which is what one of the participants noticed in her age group that the foster students are struggling to graduate because of the continuous school transfers. The intellectual issues related to children in the foster care system could be related to

lack of importance on education prior to entering the foster care system, but the lack of research on the children prior to entering care does not support the participants noting that the issues could be related to the lack of education of the children prior to entering the system (Goddard, 2000).

Special education differences. Similar to the research conducted by Smucker, Kauffman, and Ball (1996), two participants noted that the foster care children have additional special education needs when compared to traditional students. The remainder of the participants noted there was no difference for the special education foster children in their school district because they are already receiving the special education services they need, but this validates the researching indicating that there are in fact foster children who need special education services. The research added that special education services are needed because of the emotional and behavioral disorders the foster care children have (Smucker, Kauffman, & Ball, 1996). One participant added that the mental health disorders that foster care children have can be addressed by the special education programs in the school. Another participant discussed the testing process for special education impacting the children who need special education services. The participant went on to discuss the school having 60 days to complete the special education testing, which impacts the foster student obtaining assistance if they are in a temporary placement for less than 60 days.

Notification and transferring a foster child to a new school. The participants had mixed answers for how they are notified of a foster care child needing assistance. Typically, the participants noted they were told by a teacher or someone within the school, but a few were notified by the child welfare office. The researcher or the research located had no information regarding the traditional approach used to notify the schools of a foster child needing assistance.

According to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006), the Educational Initiative Project could establish an individual who would notify the schools of the foster children needing assistance within the school. Having a smooth process of notification can be beneficial for working through the educational issues the foster children have such as, frequent moves, lack of learning supports, and unmet emotional and other needs (Zetlin et al., 2006).

Records were a main way the participants discussed for information to be transferred to the new school that the foster children will attend. All of the participants indicated the schools were sent the records, but the research by Bruska (2008) stated that an average 20% of the records are available at the new school, which is different than the participants reported. The research had a common theme of a lack of school records, but all the participants discussed records being sent and even going the extra mile to contact the school liaison to ensure they know background information for the student being transferred. The researchers found that the children have frequent moves once being placed in the foster care system (Bruska, 2008), and the participants noticed the lack of foster homes in the community. The lack of foster homes creates issues when there is an increase in foster care children in the community. Even prior to children being removed, education was never a high priority for these children.

Social workers' assistance and resources. The participants listed the following as ways they are providing assistance with foster care children: protecting the children's rights, planning for the future, and building relationships. The research indicates a need for assistance with foster care children in the school system, and addition of the school liaison in the child welfare offices will allow for the school social workers to work with the school liaison to ensure the foster children are receiving the assistance they need (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). The

research does not elaborate on the addition of the school liaison worker in the child welfare offices in Missouri.

The research does not discuss the resources available within the school districts that the school social workers can provide for the foster care students, but there are two alternative solutions discussed in the research. The solutions are the Educational Initiative Project and residential education placement, which would address the following issues discussed by the participants: lack of foster homes, children with intellectual and behavioral issues, and communication about the foster children attending their school district.

The educational system appears to be forgotten when children are placed in foster care, and the child welfare agencies begin to focus on the placement of the child and the permanency plan (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). The participants noticed a lack of foster homes in their community, which makes placing a foster care child in their community difficult. One participant noted that the child welfare agencies are out of a different community and the frustrations that come with the children from their community placed in cities several miles away. The residential educational placements, could address both the lack of foster homes and the demands of the educational system to ensure the children are getting a quality education (Jones, 2012).

Limitations

One limitation of the research project is the small sample sized obtained. The six school social workers were employed at one school district, which only provides a small example of the work schools do to assist children in the foster care system with educational issues. Due to the case study approach and the limited timeframes to complete the thesis, a small sample was obtained. Unfortunately, this research project with not be able to be generalized due to the

sample size, but this research project could be replicated in the future to find additional information.

A second limitation is my employment. Since I work for the Children's Division in Missouri, I had additional knowledge prior to completing the qualitative case study. The research completed prior to the semi-structured interviews, adds bias to the interviewer. The literature review I completed before conducting the interviews adds additional biases to the interview process. I worked closely with my adviser, who had no prior foster care knowledge, to eliminate some of the biases when locating the themes in the research.

Future Research

Future research studies should explore the educational issues with foster care children to determine if there are generalizable information about foster care children's education. There could be a focus on the process for transferring foster children to new schools and the policies involved through the child welfare offices. In addition, a focus on the residential educational facilities for foster care children is a further avenue to investigate. These facilities could assist with the minor behavioral issues, intellectual issues, and special education delay, as well as the lack of foster homes. The Educational Initiative Project provided training for the social workers to better address the educational issues for foster children, so future research could be completed on the trainings provided to social workers and finding resources to adapt the trainings to assist with the foster care children's educational issues. This same research project could be implement in other school districts in Missouri, to determine what other educational issues are affecting the foster children's education and to see if a residential facility would assist with their educational issues.

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APPENDIX
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Expedited Review

2/21/2018

Protocol Number: 998

Dear Gabrielle Sewester:

Your research project, 'Educational Concerns with Foster Care Children', was approved by the University of Central Missouri Human Subjects Review Committee on 2/16/2018. You may collect data for this project until **2/16/2019**. Your informed consent is also approved until **2/16/2019**.

If an adverse event (such as harm to a research participant) occurs during your project, you must IMMEDIATELY stop the research unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participant. If an adverse event occurs during your project, notify the committee IMMEDIATELY at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

The following will help to guide you. Please refer to this letter often during your project.

- If you wish to make changes to your study, submit an “Amendment” through Blackboard under the “Amendment and Renewals” tab. **You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the UCM Human Subjects Review Committee.**
- If the nature or status of the risks of participating in this research project change, submit an “Amendment” through Blackboard under the “Amendment and Renewals” tab. **You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the UCM Human Subjects Review Committee.**
- If you are nearing the expiration date for collecting data for this project (2/16/2019) and you have not finished collecting data:
 1. submit your project application via Blackboard under the “Amendment and Renewals” tab (include any revisions and/or amendments approved since you submitted your application initially)
 - AND
 2. submit a “Renewal Report” through Blackboard under the “Final/Renewal Report” tab.
- **When you have completed your collection of data, please submit the “Final Report” found on Blackboard under the “Final/Renewal Report” tab.**

If your protocol contained a consent form and the consent form was approved, you will receive an additional e-mail. The e-mail will contain a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp in the top right corner. Do not begin data collection until you receive a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp. Note: One year after your protocol's approval date, a request for renewal OR a final project report is required.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

Sincerely,



Kathy Schnakenberg
Program Administrator/Research Compliance Officer
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity
University of Central Missouri
cc: Hartenstein@ucmo.edu