

“Children learn what they live”: Foster Parents' Experiences and the Emotional Curriculum

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Abstract

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Foster parents play an important role in the lives of foster children. This study elicited the perceptions of six foster parents about their roles as caregivers to foster children. The value of foster parents cannot be overexpressed, as they have a huge potential to be positive influences in their caregiving roles for foster children. This study was guided by two questions: 1) How do foster parents understand their roles as caregivers for their foster children? and 2) How do foster parents understand their roles in providing a learning environment for their foster children? These questions morphed into one central inquiry exploring how the role of a caregiver is intricately connected to providing a learning environment. The data was analyzed through the lens of curriculum studies using open coding, resulting in emergent themes about foster parents' perceptions about their roles and responsibilities as caregivers as well as challenges that foster parents and foster children experience. Curriculum theorists such as Parker Palmer and John Dewey afford vital insight into the importance of the data, opening up the discussion to notions of emotional curriculum and the need for trauma-informed practices. This study provides rich descriptions of insights from foster parent on the foster care system. Findings suggest that raising awareness of the need to attend to foster children's emotions and history of trauma may be one way forward to providing the best care for children living in foster care

Keywords: foster care, foster parents, caregivers, emotional curriculum

*For J and R.
And for M.*

I will spend my life working to make it better for you.

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Personal Statement

This study originated from my own personal experience of working with foster children in different contexts. In some of my past work, I have witnessed and experienced some painful moments. These moments have caused me to walk away from what Parker Palmer (2007) described as living out my inner life, as I have often turned down the opportunity to be vulnerable about some of my experiences and have not let learning occur. As I work towards being true to my inner life and being an advocate for foster children, I hope this thesis can also help push this area of research and the foster care system towards that direction. I acknowledge that I do not have any solid solutions to the multitude of challenges that foster parents and foster children face, but I want this thesis to mean something. Thus, I hope to start here, and spend my life moving forward to improve the lives of children living in foster care.

In my previous work as a child caregiver, I built relationships with some amazing children. These children experienced intense traumatic experiences in their home environments and most of them were living within the foster care system. These children taught me so much about what friendship, healing, and resilience look like. Many of them had been through several placements and had transitioned in and out of many school environments. I saw them struggle with adapting to new classrooms and making new friends. Furthermore, I saw their teachers struggle with how to educate these children, who they deemed as emotionally stunted, behaviourally challenging, and impossible students to teach. The lesson these children learned in their school environments was that they were not worthy of being educated. I believe they learned this lesson because of the way their teachers and the education system as a whole treated them.

Additionally, the lessons they learned outside of school were similar. I experienced children struggle to accept love from me. They put up thick walls to block out any genuine human interactions, likely because the adults they trusted in their past betrayed and hurt them. The lessons they learned from those adults, their life circumstances, and the foster care system were that no matter how much adults told them they were loved, they believed they were unlovable, unwanted, and unworthy of consistent care. Working with these children gave me a glimpse into the pain they experienced and a greater understanding for the need to alter the way we work with, treat, and support foster children. I do not propose to have the answers for solving the levels of abuse and mistreatment foster children experience, but my goal in this thesis was to gather expertise from invested adults in the system to improve the system so that we can give children like those I worked with a better chance in life. I want to be able to say that the lessons they learn in both school and life can be positive, uplifting, and can create healthy resilience.

I struggle to talk about my experiences with children in foster care because it is challenging and scary, and there are many times I have felt like I have failed the children I so desperately wanted to help. As an educator and a caregiver, whether in the classroom or beyond, connecting with students can bring meaning to learning. The education system currently in place, or at least the one I observed and experienced as a caregiver when working with foster children, does not support these meaningful connections. Particularly, the classroom is not a place designed to support and empower vulnerable children. How, indeed, can we help them? In my journey of supporting and loving different foster children I have met I have learned more and more about myself. This self-awareness links to Palmer's (2007) notion of listening to our inner voices and our heart. Listening to and knowing ourselves provides practice for leading more holistic lives as teacher figures. I do not live with my inner heart when I let the fear of talking

about my own pain and my experiences of working with foster children keep me from being genuine and honest. When I am reminded of my own pain, as well as the pain that foster children face, I want to protect myself from experiencing more pain. This resulted in walls that I put up, which made it impossible for me to reach the child in front of me or for the child to reach me, and important connections were not made. I want to learn to move beyond those walls and promote ways to live with my inner heart, alongside other adults and children within the foster care system. This thesis opened up opportunities for sharing with and learning from other caregivers involved in the foster care system.

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Literature Review

My goals for this study developed from my work with foster children. This study is a starting ground for my work in advocating for the rights and successes of all foster children. This thesis can shed light on how children in foster care receive education, not only in the formal education system, but also in life, particularly from foster parents. Specifically, this thesis has provided the chance to elucidate the perceptions of foster parents about their role as caregivers and their role in providing a learning environment to foster children.

This literature review will explore this goal through two separate lenses: foster care and curriculum studies. In the first section, I will present research on children living in foster care and their educational experiences. Then I will explore what the research literature presents on the role of adults as caregivers working with foster children, specifically foster parents, social workers, and teachers. These three roles embody the main caregivers that foster children encounter, and all are important to understand. However, this particular study will be focusing on the role of foster parents. This focus is important because foster parents are “key stakeholders in the foster care system” (Miller et al., 2019, p. 210). Foster parents are a central influence in the lives of foster children as they spend a large amount of time with the children and provide a living environment for them. The second section will examine the curriculum theories of Parker Palmer and John Dewey and their views on the roles of caregivers and the work of education. Finally, the literature review will present the current study and discuss my proposed methodology.

Foster Care Lens

Thousands of children live in foster care all over the world (Parker, 2017). Foster children are wards of the government, placed in care due to safety concerns in their natural homes. This removal is a legal process, under the mandate of the government, and is held until the safety concerns of the child's welfare are remedied (Lewis, 2011). Foster children experience maltreatment and neglect, and typically display an array of emotional, developmental, and behavioural problems (Brown & Calder, 1999). Often, foster children are not given opportunities to form healthy, necessary attachments with the adults in their lives, resulting in externalizing problems, such as mental disorders, aggression, and hyperactivity (Beam, 2013). Children living in foster care are a vulnerable population and often feel stigmatization where they are seen as "wild, unlovable foster kids" (Beam, 2013, p. 134; Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018). They become accustomed to negative expectations and stereotypes from society and the welfare system (Berg, 2010).

Foster care exists to provide safe out-of-home care to children who have experienced abuse. Foster homes are meant to be familial-like environments for foster children to live in when they cannot safely reside in their original homes (Lietz et al., 2016). Their placement provides foster children opportunities to attend school and continue to receive education (Day et al., 2015).

Trauma-informed care. Within the foster care system, there is an immense need for trauma-informed care. Trauma-informed care is a method that takes into account the clients' history of trauma and approaches their situations with that knowledge as a foundational framework (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018; Katz, 2019). Trauma-informed care is meant to be a systemic approach to addressing the needs of every individual in the system (Katz, 2019). It is widely known that foster children are often exposed to multiple forms of trauma, which is known

as complex trauma (Katz, 2019; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017; Whiting, 2018), making trauma-informed care imperative for this population.

Trauma is defined by an experience in which an individual feels or perceives a threat to their life and/or safety, and they do not have resources to cope with the threat (Katz, 2019). Trauma also refers to an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that an individual experiences that is physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, and that has lasting adverse effects (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018). The impact of trauma on individuals is very complex and varies from person to person (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). According to Katz (2019), “the experience of trauma actually alters the development and function of the brain” (p. 52). Behavioural responses to trauma can often be seen as inappropriate; these behaviours come out of a state of hyperarousal or acute stress responses (Katz, 2019). This state of arousal and high stress produces what is known as “fight, flight, or freeze” responses. These actions come as responses to trauma triggers. Some examples of these “fight” behaviours are yelling, swearing, posturing, and aggressive behaviour. Examples of flight responses are running away, refusing to talk, avoidance, and substance use. Finally, examples of freeze responses are spacing out, which can be seen as appearing numb, disconnected, confused, or unresponsive (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018).

Trauma affects every area of a child’s life, including their educational experiences. Children who have experienced trauma often have struggles maintaining meaningful connections with peers and successfully navigating the academic and social demands of a classroom (Whiting, 2018). Further, experiencing trauma can affect a child’s ability to regulate emotions, articulate feelings, and demonstrate appropriate behaviour (Whiting, 2018). Some further examples of behaviours in a classroom that come out of a trauma response are difficulty paying

attention and learning, increased isolation, school absences, more suspensions or expulsions, poor test scores and an increased risk of failing grades (The Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014).

According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), “trauma and our responses to it cannot be understood outside the context of human relationships” (p. 259). A key to trauma-informed care is working to understand what is driving the misbehaviour of a child and addressing that within a relationship, rather than reacting to behaviour and punishing the child (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017; Whiting, 2018). Having a healthy community with supportive interpersonal relationships are significant factors in trauma-informed care (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). Perry and Szalavitz (2017) state that healthy boundaries, modelling empathy and the importance of relationships, and providing space to play are important factors that can help decrease the negative effects of trauma. These characteristics can occur within a foster home, when foster parents are trained and aware of the effects of trauma and what factors can mitigate it. Providing regular routines and predictable environments are further aspects of trauma-informed care (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

Trauma-informed care is becoming better known and has gained more focus within the foster care system (Katz, 2019). However, there is still a need for further education on the prevalence and effects of trauma and what can be done to mitigate the negative consequences that result from trauma and misunderstood behaviour.

How foster children experience education. The educational experiences of foster children are devastatingly problematic. It is a well-known fact that children living in foster care struggle academically (Menmuir, 1994; Zetlin et al., 2006). Foster children fall behind their peers in school due to multiple changes in school placements, lack of familial and social support,

combined with behavioural, mental, and developmental difficulties (Berg, 2010; Clemens et al., 2018; Tyre, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009; Zetlin et al., 2012).

Foster children experience tumultuous life circumstances outside of school, and, unfortunately, educational environments often contribute to the distress of foster children's lives (Berg, 2010). Foster children have reported feeling unable to fit in, experience insecurity in social and academic settings, and disappointment in school placements that do not work out due to multiple home placement changes (Berg, 2010; Tyre, 2012; Zetlin et al., 2012).

A study by Clemens et al. (2018) examined how multiple placements during foster care can impact academic performance through educational instability. Their findings derive from 7500 students in a statewide data collection throughout Colorado, tracking the placements, moves, and academic achievement of thousands of foster children. The results underline the importance of ensuring stability throughout educational trajectories, encouraging more communication between welfare systems and school systems. Additionally, Clemens and colleagues note the importance of utilizing supports that extend beyond the classroom and beyond the duration of time in formal foster care. Zetlin and colleagues (2006) conducted a study involving several focus groups consisting of foster youths, child welfare employees, foster parents, and education representatives. The study explored participants' views on educational problems faced by foster children and how those issues might be remedied. The findings suggest that foster children struggle in school due to placement instability, effects of abuse and neglect, lack of support, placement outside of their communities, and lack of oversight in their education.

The urgency of addressing the needs of students living in foster care "can hardly be overemphasized" (Zetlin et al., 2012, p. 12). Providing educational supports and information on how to better structure foster children's lives to help them learn better is significant (Beam,

2013; Clemens et al., 2018). Foster children need to be given chances to construct their identity in positive and healthy ways, both within formal education situations and in life outside of school (Berg, 2010). Education is a crucial factor to success and enjoyment in life and foster children deserve equal right to positive educational trajectories (Aldgate et al., 1993; Berg, 2010). The connection between school success and strong self-image is undeniable, and foster children, as a vulnerable population, deserve constructive opportunities to develop their sense of self (Berg, 2010; Zetlin et al., 2012). Additionally, positive school and learning experiences can be protective factors in remedial work against trauma and abuse (Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018).

There have been some studies done to explore intervention models that assist foster children in academic contexts. Tyre (2012) studied outcomes for foster youth in middle school when using an educational support program. The program involved individualized support from teachers and tutors and the findings demonstrated significant improvement in reading skills. A study by Pirttimaa and Väливаara (2018) reported on an intervention program that included psychological and educational assessments and individualized support with a team of several adults to help foster children achieve higher goals in education. This study was exploratory, as the program used was adapted from another program and was the first of its kind in Finland. Pirttimaa and Väливаara's study contributes to the literature in a meaningful way by demonstrating the value of an expert team of adults involved and invested in foster children's lives and educational success. Creating collaborative cultures for the professionals working in the lives of foster children is a key intervention strategy; this topic will be explored later on in this paper.

Other useful tools and methods of intervention cited in research are trust, healthy sense of humour and understanding, individualized plans, personal and positive relationships between

teachers and foster children, and finally and most often mentioned: consistent school placements (Altshuler, 2003; Daniels, 2006; Hardin, 2016; Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018; Tyre, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009).

The role of adults as caregivers of foster children. Adults at home, in schools, in agencies, and in communities have significant impact on foster children. They have the power to determine a wide range of outcomes in the lives of foster children (Berg, 2010). Throughout this literature review, foster parents, social workers, and teachers will be referred to as “caregivers”. This term encompasses the role of invested adults in the lives of foster children as adults who give and show care to foster children. A caregiver can also be seen as a teacher-figure and an educator, who walks alongside children in their educational journey, beyond the classroom and in the home.

When children who are living in foster care do not receive adequate support, they often lack trustworthy relationships and do not experience a sense of belonging (Berg, 2010). The entire culture of foster care is one that attempts to provide the best care and safety to children, but obstacles and attitudes prevent collaboration and support (Beam, 2013). An important issue to consider is how the roles of these adults might empower and build up foster children.

The following section will focus on three separate adult roles in the lives of foster children: foster parents, social workers, and teachers. Each of these adults plays a part in the development and life outcomes of foster children, so it is crucial to explore how they see their roles, responsibilities, and impacts on how foster children learn in school and in life. Foster parents are caregivers for foster children, guiding them in their journey, and teaching and learning valuable life lessons with them. This literature review focuses mostly on foster parents, but the roles of social workers and teachers inevitably arise in exploring how foster parents and

foster children interact in all spheres of life. This section will end with an exploration of the issue of collaboration among the adults involved in the lives of foster children.

Foster parents. Foster parents are primary caregivers to children in foster care and are typically the adults that spend the most time with foster children. However, foster parents are often seen as interchangeable aspects within the foster care system (Beam, 2013). This attitude needs to shift. Good, stable foster parents play a crucial role in the healthy development of foster children (Kelly & Salmon, 2014). Stable and secure placements with suitable foster parents are a massive help to foster children (Pirttimaa & Väliavaara, 2018). Rethinking and shifting the culture surrounding foster parents is a necessary step in providing better care for children (Beam, 2013).

Foster parents have a unique ability to assess and understand foster children's behaviours (Nelson & Horstman, 2017). Understanding how foster parents conceptualize and think about the behaviour of the foster children they care for is a new target of intervention. This can be an insightful and useful tool for understanding foster children and the challenges they face (Kelly & Salmon, 2014). A study by Luke and Banerjee (2012) explored foster parents' perceptions of foster children's challenges in social situations to understand how to better support foster children in developing healthy social skills. Foster carers who have strong relationships with their foster children are readily able to identify and explain their foster children's social experiences and difficulties (Luke & Banerjee, 2012). How foster parents perceive their foster children can influence how foster children see themselves and affect the outcomes for foster children (Kelly & Salmon, 2014).

Furthermore, adaptability and resilience increase when foster children have healthy relationships with their foster parents (Nelson & Horstman, 2017). The quantity of time that foster parents spend with their foster children can lead to strong bonds (Hardin, 2016). However,

developing this strong bond requires a lot of character from foster parents. Caregivers of foster children need to have patience, empathy, and compassion when it comes to understanding what foster children have experienced (Brown et al., 2014; Geiger et al., 2016; Kelly & Salmon, 2014). Foster parents who are able to be flexible, consistent, forgiving, organized, and communicative with others involved in the child's life have seen better results in foster parenting practices and in the healthy development of foster children (Geiger et al., 2016; Kelly & Salmon, 2014). Ultimately, foster parenting is a role that "by definition, means personal sacrifice" (Beam, 2013, p. 94).

There are many challenges that foster parents face. Studies have noted that difficulties with communication and navigation within the child welfare system, a lack in support, high levels of stress, and feeling undervalued are some of the top struggles that foster parents experience (Beam, 2013; Brown, 2008; Geiger et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2011). Many foster carers find that, coupled with the lack of adequate training, these obstacles make their endeavours as foster parents unsustainable (Kelly & Salmon, 2014; Murray et al., 2011). Another major struggle that caregivers of foster children face is the wide range of behavioural and developmental challenges that the children experience, due to poor previous care, and the amount of work it takes to begin to remedy those negative behaviours (Beam, 2013; Kelly & Salmon, 2014).

Foster parents have to address the cultural preferences of biological families, and fight against subtle prejudices toward families that function outside the cultural norm (Nelson & Horstman, 2017). The majority of foster parents want to be as close to ordinary parents as possible (Aldgate et al., 1993; Beam, 2013). Creating a sense of family and a healthy identity in children is a priority for foster parents (Brown et al., 2014). Indeed, it is the foster parents who

spend time parenting and taking care of foster children, not the legal court or even the school system (Lewis, 2011; Lietz et al., 2016).

The presence and influence of foster parents needs to be seen and valued. Foster parents can offer an important insight into the day-to-day lives of foster children (Luke & Banerjee, 2012; Murray et al., 2011). In a study by Aldgate and colleagues (1993), foster parents believed they were most capable of making decisions and plans for their foster children's lives and education due to their deeper knowledge of their children. In Hardin's (2016) exploration of foster parents' involvement in the care and education of foster children, creating consistency and communication across social workers, teachers and foster parents contributed to the success of foster children. Foster parents who were engaged in school life and committed to the educational success of their foster children were predictive factors in higher school engagement and higher educational achievements of foster children (Goemans et al., 2018; Menmuir, 1994). It is important to encourage foster parents to be more involved in education and prioritize positive expectations and educational experiences with foster children, in order to create more successful trajectories of foster children (Goemans et al., 2018).

Social workers. Social workers are central to the foster care system and to every case that involves foster children (Lewis, 2011). However, social workers are often overworked and have a reputation of not being adequately prepared to fulfill all the roles outlined for them (Parker, 2017). Due to the overextension of most social workers, educational successes have not always been prioritized by the foster care system (Aldgate et al., 1993). The most effective interventions come from work being put in beyond the limits of school and home; this is where the potential of social workers being positive influences for foster children can be realized. It would be valuable if social workers were able to be more involved in educational proceedings concerning foster

children (Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018). Unfortunately, social workers do not often attend school meetings or are not able to put in more time after their work hours (Day et al., 2015).

Teachers. Teachers have the potential to be positive, influential role models in the lives of foster children (Zetlin et al., 2012). In a study by Watson-Davis (2010), teachers' perceptions of their experiences working with foster children were examined. Teachers completed a survey and the findings showed that over 90% of teachers desired more help for foster children in the classrooms, including training on how to better support children in foster care. Teachers can give opportunities for inclusion in the classroom and contribute to a caring school environment (Goemans et al., 2018; Zetlin et al., 2012). A study by Tyre (2012) explored the use of educational plans that enabled stable adult mentors to work with foster children. Tyre found that this extra level of support resulted in better academic achievements. Indeed, a teacher's work is incredibly meaningful to all students, and when they are better supported in their classroom, such as through school principals and other adults, teacher impacts can transfer onto foster children, too (Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018). Furthermore, teachers can act as advocates in educational spheres for children in the school communities and in social situations (Tyre, 2012; Zetlin et al., 2006).

Based on experiences with foster children as well as through research, teachers can gather insight and knowledge about how foster children behave in the classroom and with peers (Berg, 2010). However, new teachers who have exposure to children in foster care report not having enough support or training to adequately support them (Zetlin et al., 2012). Teachers, through their assessment of abilities, typically rate the performance of foster children as lower than average (Aldgate et al., 1993). Indeed, teachers have the most prominent information regarding educational performance in the classroom due to their relationships with students (Goemans et

al., 2018). Goemans and colleagues (2018) found that an important predictor of school engagement in foster children was the awareness that teachers have of the needs of foster children within the classroom. These needs can be communicated to teachers through foster parents and foster care systems to holistically address the educational and personal development goals of foster children.

Collaboration between foster parents, social workers, and teachers. Several studies address the lack of communication between foster care agencies, foster parents, and education systems, and note that there needs to be higher levels of collaboration to spark effective change (Beam, 2013; Daniels, 2006; Lewis, 2011). A study by Day and colleagues (2015) examined specifically the attitudes of school employees on the collaboration between schools and foster care agencies, and the findings clearly presented a lack of communication between communities, specialists, schools, and agencies.

Bringing several stakeholders together to work for the good of the system is challenging. There are many obstacles that make collaboration difficult, such as disparate goals, financial resource funding, identification of appropriate clientele, coordination of services, and evaluative components of programs (Altshuler, 2003). Often, there are several adults within multiple agencies and organizations that need to work together to support foster children (Berg, 2010). There are diverse views on issues and solutions in the child welfare system that result in competing opinions (Kelly & Salmon, 2014). A study by Altshuler (2003) explored the inter-agency communication between educators, social workers, and foster children. Different focus groups were conducted with the three separate populations. Altshuler found that both educators and students felt that being in foster care resulted in negative perceptions from others and the self, and this led to more difficulty in communication. Between educators and social workers,

difficulties in communication are further exacerbated by necessary confidentiality rules, leading to information being withheld and creating more obstacles to adequately support the student.

Acceptance of the social worker's role in the school, trust of the teachers, and more involvement from foster parents were all factors in successful relationships and collaborations. In another study, by Brown and Calder (1999), foster parents' perspectives were elicited from phone interviews concerning the issues they faced as foster parents. A major issue that arose from the participants in Brown and Calder's study was the lack of inclusion in the decision-making for the children in their care and the roles of each adult not being clearly communicated and supported.

Collaboration can have an immense, direct, and positive influence on the lives and educational experiences of foster children (Hardin, 2016). Understanding the relationships between professionals and caregivers involved in the lives of foster children can lead to more success with placements, educational trajectories, and ultimately, provide more wholesome care (Berg, 2010; Daniels, 2006; Tyre, 2012). A culture of collaboration can be encouraged between foster parents and social workers to create relationships of support and inclusion and to provide models of cooperation to foster children (Daniels, 2006; Murray et al., 2011; Tyre, 2012).

Schools, child welfare agencies, and foster parents can work together to form a team of caregivers (Altshuler, 2003; Kelly & Salmon, 2014). A study by Parker (2017) examining the use of personalized education plans to accommodate the needs of vulnerable children showed success when school systems and welfare systems worked together to create links to improve the overall education of foster children. Parker's study explored the key actors that can change and improve the educational trajectories of foster children, and found that teachers, foster parents, and social workers have immense potential to be positive influences in education. Unfortunately, schools often lack the resources to set up support systems that involve teams of helpful

professionals and contact with the foster system is not yet prevalent enough (Pirttimaa & Väliavaara, 2018). This study aims to explore how foster parents understand foster children's experiences, leading to a richer understanding of the lives of adults involved in the lives of foster children.

Curriculum Studies Lens

Curriculum's place in foster care. Links between the education system and the social services system are lacking (Altshuler, 2003). These systems have the potential to positively impact vulnerable children, such as foster children, and this potential grows when there is a strong communicative link between the systems (Daniels, 2006). Communities of adults who have the best interests of foster children in mind have the opportunity to step up and act as transformative agents for foster children (Beam, 2013). Each active member of the community has the potential to impact the lives of foster children in positive ways (Berg, 2010; Brown et al., 2014). Interventions are needed in education and welfare systems (Altshuler, 2003; Daniels, 2006), and the best interventions can be utilized when the population involved is given opportunities to share and understand the experiences of how foster children learn and how the adults in their lives might best support them. The responsibility of the educational success of foster children lies within the school systems, but also in the culture beyond the classroom (Daniels, 2006). Indeed, the education system as a whole is "supposed to educate, care for, and support the development of children" (Berg, 2010, p. 165).

Curriculum theories. In curriculum studies, when examining education, there is a child, a classroom, and a teacher. I want to expand those three areas into the lens of foster care, where there is a foster child, an environment where learning takes place that can extend beyond the classroom, and caregivers, who are adults involved in the lives and educational journeys of foster

children. Foster parents can be seen as teacher figures and caregivers, as adults who are invested in the educational journeys of foster children and are a major part of their environments. The term “caregiver” ultimately lends to the idea that one is giving care. According to curriculum theorist, Nel Noddings (2013), caring is defined as “a decent, respectful way of meeting and treating one another that is maintained by inclination, not by rules” (p.119). Being a caregiver requires asking those who are receiving care what they are going through and how the relationship might continue in a way so that they feel supported (Noddings, 2013). When a caring relation is built, children can rely on safety and trust that the carer will genuinely provide care for them.

The following section of this paper will explore curriculum theories of Parker Palmer and John Dewey, and how their theories might be applied to understand and better support children living in foster care.

Parker Palmer and the inner life of the caregiver. Palmer is a strong supporter of the impact of education. Palmer (2007) asserts that learning and teaching are “critical to the quality of our lives” (p. 3). Teaching and learning embody the work of education, as an “inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world” (p. 6). Palmer’s curriculum theories often incorporate the classroom and the role of the traditional teacher, but he also states that students learn so much beyond the classroom. The space in which learning occurs is open to the diversity of the students and discovery can take place anywhere (Aylor, 2008). There are adults in every sphere of life that have the potential to act as caregivers in the lives of children. These caregivers, when they act with courage and help students discover and explore the worlds around them, are immense blessings and can be transformative agents in the lives of children (Palmer,

2007). Foster parents can be these caregivers to foster children, embodying the teacher figure role that Palmer addresses.

Palmer's main theory concerning teachers addresses the inner life of teachers. There are factors that disconnect teachers from their students and from themselves, but there are also ways to combat that (Palmer, 2007). Understanding that intellect, emotions, and spirit work together to make a whole opens up the space for education to be its best, because it weaves together the essence of being human (Palmer, 2007). This is done through being and living, as teacher figures stay true to their selves. Additionally, engaging in a community of like-minded caregivers creates room to learn more about others and the self. Learning more about the self gives learning opportunities to the teacher figure to develop richer techniques that result in good teaching (Palmer, 2007).

Teachers and caregivers have great power in children's lives. Teaching can create moments where student and teacher alike can enter together into a community of both learning and living (Palmer, 2007). Being vulnerable, open and genuine are core characteristics of Palmer's notion of teaching with awareness of the inner self and a courageous heart. This kind of teaching finds adults in a place of love, able to look past themselves to the "best interests of the child" (Palmer, 2007, p. 88).

The inner and outer conditions that surround teachers, as well as foster parents, affect the work that they do (Palmer, 2007). Unfortunately, the current culture does not create ideal conditions to participate in vulnerable, open teaching practices. The world of education separates the head from the heart and does not easily give space to engage the heart (Aylor, 2008). This results in most caregivers hiding their true selves from their students and, in this study, to foster children so as not to reveal any vulnerability that may be seen as weaknesses (Aylor, 2008).

Palmer (2007) asserts that even in the midst of this challenging terrain, talking to each other about inner life and being open and vulnerable is necessary for good teaching. There are not a lot of helpful methods in place to support one another in the midst of being vulnerable, but this culture can shift. Palmer (2007) says, “by addressing [these challenges] openly and honestly, alone and together, we can serve our students more faithfully, enhance our own well-being, make common cause with colleagues, and help education bring more light and life to the world” (p. 8).

Vulnerable students, such as foster children, often view education as a fearful endeavor (Palmer, 2007). Children who enter into the classroom with learning challenges, due to several circumstances, such as living in foster care, are immediately painted with stereotypes of being difficult students. These stereotypes create a distance between children and teachers, and teachers hold these children at arm’s length, continuing the cycle of fear (Palmer, 2007). Typically, foster children come into any environment with a diminished sense of self, but teachers and caregivers have the ability to see the children’s capacity for goodness and success (Beam, 2013; Powell, personal communication, 2001).

In light of my study, the way that Palmer frames teachers’ roles fits well with the role of foster parents as teacher figures and caregivers. Teachers have an important role to play in impacting students’ lives for the better, and so do foster parents (Powell, personal communication, 2001). The avenue of creating space and ideal environments for learning and growing as a teacher blends well with the roles of foster parents in connecting with foster children (Powell, personal communication, 2001). Foster homes, just like classrooms, can “function as communities of trust” when openness, acceptance, and love are present (Badley, 2012, p. 272). Caregivers in the lives of foster children have boundless potential to make them

feel like they matter, and this ultimately facilitates learning (Powell, personal communication, 2001).

John Dewey. Education's main purpose, for Dewey, is for children to realize their potential and use their skills for the good of society, to incite social change (Dewey, 1902; Talebi, 2015). Further, education creates opportunities for engaging and enriching conversations between learners and educators (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). The goal of curriculum within education is supporting learners by developing their interests and creating engaging communities in which they can delve deeper into knowledge and wisdom (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). Education can become a place not only to gain knowledge but also be "a place to learn how to live" (Talebi, 2015, p. 4). A foster home can be that kind of place, where foster parents engage with their foster children meaningfully, teaching lessons of knowledge and of life. Nguyen & Slavik's study (2017) utilized the image of a poem to convey the living, empty space that curriculum offers to conversation and learning. Similarly, the space of a home and of a relationship with foster parents can create healthy learning opportunities for foster children. Indeed, these learning opportunities occur through communication, and particularly through learning how to listen (Waks, 2011). According to Waks (2011), Dewey states that empathy and understanding develop through conversations and healthy communicating. Learning and growing together becomes a reality when this place of understanding the other is reached.

True learning occurs when the learner is interested in the subject and the learner can incorporate their experience, abilities, and desires into education (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). For foster children, this means understanding where they have come from and what they have been through, while still addressing them as typical students who have their own interests and a desire to learn. Dewey believed that incorporating activities, such as games, drama, and construction,

makes school more enjoyable and accessible for children. Including dynamic activities that integrate the desires of the students enhances the experience of learning for all students (Skilbeck, 2017), including foster children. This enhancement is furthered when there is a positive interaction between the educator and learner, based on mutual responsibility, respect, and trust (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). This relationship aids in the bringing about of a safe place for the student and the teacher to learn and explore their inner selves (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017), which relates to the concepts that I addressed earlier concerning Palmer's inner heart of a teacher (2007). Dewey and Palmer both agree that when teachers and learners engage together, the purpose of education is fulfilled and renewal occurs, both individually and culturally (Beckett, 2018).

According to Dewey, teaching is an art and a vocational gift (Dewey, 1902; Skilbeck, 2017). Teachers possess the qualities to respond to the movements of the minds of students (Dewey, 1902; Talebi, 2015). Dewey described these qualities as including "a natural love for working with young children, a natural propensity to inquire about the subjects, methods and other social issues... and a desire to share this acquired knowledge with others" (Talebi, 2015, p. 7). These are all qualities that caregivers as teacher figures, including foster parents, possess as well. The teacher figure and caregiver play a significant role in guiding learners on their journeys (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). When aware of the history and experiences of the child, they can design the surrounding environment to allow children to adapt and adjust optimally (Dewey, 1902). It is the responsibility of the caregiver to create this kind of welcoming context for all children, especially vulnerable children. This task of caregivers is challenging, but it is also full of rewards (Skilbeck, 2017). Understanding how caregivers embody this role as teacher figures

and guides on foster children's journeys is unclear (Skilbeck, 2017), resulting in the need for my exploratory study.

It is necessary to understand perspectives about curriculum as an open space for conversation and engagement between learners and caregivers, since not all approach education this way (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017). Dewey's ideas need to be developed in new contexts (Skilbeck, 2017). This can be done through my study of exploring the perceptions of caregivers on their participation in creating learning environments for foster children and analyzing their responses through the lens of curriculum theories from Dewey and Palmer. There is great possibility in exploring avenues beyond the classroom and diversifying the way education is approached (Frank, 2017). A community that encompasses traditional teachers as well as teacher figures and caregivers can help education extend its goals and potentials (Frank, 2017). According to Dewey, moving beyond individuality into realms of working together and embracing community is where education should be heading (Frank, 2017). However, just as Palmer mentions, the fear of being vulnerable becomes an obstacle, increasing isolation and preventing education and learning from improving society (Frank, 2017). Frank (2017) asserts that what can be done is to continue to learn from excellent teachers and caregivers and create a "shared wisdom of teaching" (p. 2). Understanding how best to reach a foster child within a community, as well as how best to be caregivers of foster children can be challenging, but it is important and necessary work (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017).

Current Study

Several studies have demonstrated the struggles that foster children experience in education (Berg, 2010; Tyre, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009; Zetlin et al., 2012); however, there have been no studies, to my knowledge, that focus on how foster parents understand their roles

as caregivers of their foster children and how they might play a role in providing a learning environment for foster children. This current study aims to explore the perceptions of foster parents concerning how they care for foster children and how they involve themselves with the learning environments that foster children are exposed to, both in school and in life. Foster parents, as caregivers to the foster children in their lives, have unique insight into the lives of foster children. They can provide valuable information about what might support foster children to have better educational trajectories as well as positive life experiences.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two central questions: 1) *How do foster parents understand their roles as caregivers for their foster children?* and 2) *How do foster parents understand their roles in providing a learning environment for their foster children?* This study explored what foster parents believe about themselves as foster parents, what their roles and responsibilities are in being foster parents, and how they involve themselves with how foster children learn. The roles of foster parents were interpreted as caregivers or teacher figures, adults invested in the lives of foster children, and concerned about their foster children's education in schools and in life.

Methodology

Research Design

The goal of this study is to elicit the perceptions of foster parents about their roles as caregivers. Foster parents offer unique perspectives on the lives of foster children; listening to them will aid in discovering how best to support foster children (Luke & Banerjee, 2012).

This study adopted a qualitative research framework, using semi-structured, individual interviews and inductive data analysis to learn how participants felt about a particular topic

(Saldaña, 2016). This type of qualitative research gives priority to the participants' particular feelings, language, and framework for understanding the topic at hand (Kitzinger, 1994). While qualitative data does not result in quantitatively significant findings, the intensive data gathered from interviews will shed light on *how* foster parents perceive their roles with foster children (Pirttimaa & Väливаara, 2018).

Participants

There were six participants in this study. They were recruited through word-of-mouth. Five of the six participants were associated with Batshaw Family and Youth Centres, in Montreal, Quebec, while the sixth participant was a foster parent in the child welfare system in Ontario. The participants in this study were all English-speaking foster parents. Four of the participants were actively serving in the foster care system at the time of the interviews and two were former foster parents.

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to elicit the views of foster parents. The participants were interviewed individually and were asked the same set of questions. The interviews took place at meeting spots that were convenient for the participants, including public cafes and the homes of participants. The researcher audio-recorded the interviews.

In this exploratory study, the interviews were guided by several open-ended questions, led by the researcher. The researcher established a warm and friendly environment and welcomed all ideas from participants, using effective listening skills and directing the discussion. The elicitation questions used in the interviews included:

- Can you tell me about your experiences as a foster parent?
- What inspired you to become a foster parent?

- What are some of the challenges you face in being a foster parent?
- What are some of the rewards or benefits you experience as a foster parent?
- Can you tell me about your foster child's learning experiences in school?
- What do you like and not like about their learning experiences?
- How do you approach homework with your foster child?
- What kinds of messages and lessons do you see your foster child learning at school?
- How do you address those messages in your home?
- What do you hope to model for your foster child? What do you want your foster child to learn from you and from living in your home?

For two of the participants who were former foster parents, they were also asked the following questions: Why did you discontinue your work as a foster parent? Is there anything you would want to say to current foster parents?

All information concerning participants and all data was kept confidential and securely stored on the researcher's computer.

Data Analysis

Each of the interviews was transcribed to prepare for inductive coding. A rigorous and systematic method of coding the data was used to understand the participants' language and perceptions (Hardin, 2016). The coding process utilized an open coding method, highlighting texts concerning emerging themes after several readings of the transcripts. Then, second-level coding was used to continue to group the themes into a smaller number (Saldaña, 2016), in light of research on the role of adults as caregivers working with foster children and Palmer and Dewey's curriculum theories. The information gathered may not be applicable to an entire population, but this exploratory study leads to further understanding about how foster parents

understand their role as caregivers and how they involve themselves in the education of foster children.

Findings and Results

Part I. Demographical and General Information About Participants

Table 1

Part I. Demographical and General Information

Demographical information	Stella Winnie Audrey Leo Harper Gloria
Types of care	Multiple children Younger children Older children Preferences for age groups Short-term care Long-term care
Reasons for being a foster parent	Personal fulfillment Family connection Vocation Community engagement Time to volunteer
Experience in foster care agency	Experience Engagement with agency Lack of engagement with agency

Demographical information. Demographical information was provided through a questionnaire that the participants completed before each interview. At the time of the study, all of the six participants in the present study were within the ages of 45-64. Five of the six participants were white, and one was from the Caribbean. There is a range of education and employment statuses. Further, two of the participants were former foster parents, while four of them were current foster parents. All of the participants, except Stella, were associated with Batshaw Youth and Family Centres in Montreal, Quebec.

Stella is a former foster carer who participated in the foster care system in southwestern Ontario for 13 years. She is white, married, 55-64 years of age, and her highest degree is her high school diploma. Her primary employment is as a self-employed farmer. Stella had more than five foster children during her time as a foster parent, with some of those children staying longer than five years at a time. During her time as a foster parent, Stella had three biological children and one adopted child living in her home. Her reason for being a foster parent was “to give back and participate in a community to offer stability and love to kids who needed it.”

Winnie is a woman with Caribbean heritage, who has been a foster parent for six years with Batshaw. She is 45-54 years of age, married, and has some high school education. She is self-employed as a full-time foster parent, and during the time of data collection, she had four foster children living in her home, as well as one biological child. She has been a foster parent for six years. Winnie’s reason for being a foster parent is because she “really love children an [sic] only have one child of [her] own. There are to [sic] many children who need to be love an [sic] care [sic] for.”

Audrey is a former foster carer who became involved in the foster care system because of her desire “to help one child who [she] wanted to foster or adopt.” Audrey is 55-64 years old, married, and white. She has a CEGEP/college degree and is employed full-time as a bakery manager. Audrey cared for three foster children during the six months she was a foster parent. She also had three biological children living in her house at that time.

Leo is white, aged 55-64, and divorced. He is employed full-time as a minister and has a master’s degree. During the time of data collection, Leo had one foster child living in his home. He has been a foster carer for 17 years and he described the reason for becoming a foster parent as “vocation”.

Harper has spent the last 20 years serving in the foster care system as a respite foster parent. At the time of data collection, she was caring for one foster child one weekend a month. Harper is single, white, and aged 55-64. She has a bachelor's degree and is employed full-time as a radio sales rep. When asked why she is a respite foster parent, she explained that it "started as a volunteer big sister with Batshaw for an eight-year-old boy in a system's group home. After six months, [she] offered respite in [her] home every second weekend for six years. [She] became a certified foster home during that time."

Gloria is a full-time foster parent, and is aged 55-64, married, and white. She has a bachelor's degree. Gloria has been a foster parent with Batshaw for 25 years. At the time of data collection, she had three foster children in her care. When describing why she is a foster parent, Gloria said, "It's like the peace core [*sic*]; it's the toughest job you'll ever love." Gloria also added that in the 25 years of being a foster parent, she has cared for about 150 foster children.

Types of care. This section describes the participants' experiences in foster care, including the amount and range of ages of the children they had in their home, their preferences for care, and the typical length of the care they offered. Participant quotes are taken from individual interviews and line numbers are indicated. Please see Appendix A for coding and line indications.

Gloria, Leo, and Stella discussed having multiple children in their care over the course of their time as foster carers. Gloria discussed having many children in her care, and states that she wouldn't "not have one of them" (line 376). In the course of his time as a foster parent, Leo had seven boys in his care (lines 43, 45, 46). Stella was not able to recall exactly how many children she and her husband cared for, stating it was 20 or 30 different kids (line 17).

The participants cared for all ages of children. The participants stated they had different preferences for age groups. Stella stated that they “always wanted kids younger than our kids” (line 97) and often took care of younger children, that is, under five years old (line 159). Harper and Gloria had also taken care of young children. When Gloria began as a foster parent, she also wanted to take care of young children so that they would be younger than her biological children (line 60). The rest of the participants cared for older children. Leo’s foster children were between the ages of nine and 15 (line 46), and Gloria stated that her first foster child was 16 years old (line 62). Audrey and Winnie have both cared for pre-adolescents (line 47, Winnie), whereas Harper has cared for children during their teenage years (line 419).

The duration of foster care that the participants provided was differentiated by short-term care (such as transitory and emergency placements) and long-term care (typically over several years). Stella and Audrey acted as short-term foster parents. However, in one particular case, Stella had a child in her home for a year and a half, and they didn’t want to give him to someone else, so they ended up adopting that child (line 140). Winnie took care of children for both short and long periods of time. Gloria and Leo often had foster children with them for longer than a year at a time.

Reasons for being a foster parent. The following section explores the different reasons that the participants described for becoming foster parents. They were asked what inspired them to become foster carers, and their answers included personal fulfillment, having a family connection, fulfilling a sense of vocation, a desire to engage in the community, and having time to volunteer.

In terms of personal fulfillment, Gloria described her journey to becoming a foster parent as a fulfilment to have more children. Gloria explained that she was told by her doctor that she

was not able to have biological children, but then after a surprise and miracle pregnancy, she decided with her husband that they wanted to pursue foster care and adoption to be able to have more children (line 9, 13, 27). Winnie had a biological son, but did not want to have more children. Her son wanted to have a brother, so she decided to become a foster parent to fulfill that need in her and her son's life (line 10). Family connection was another factor in taking on the role of a foster parent. One of Audrey's biological children was involved in a young boy's life, and after that boy was placed in foster care, Audrey sought custody for the boy in the form of foster care (line 9, 13, 18).

Leo described his reason for becoming a foster parent as vocation (line 34). He stated that he believes he could not have resisted the calling to become involved in the foster care system (line 39). Community engagement was a reason for Stella to pursue foster care. When Stella moved to a new community with her husband and young family, they decided they wanted to "be a part of [their] community and to, you know, help where there was a need" (line 131). They were living on a farm and had space to take in kids, so they felt that becoming foster parents would be a good way to help the community (line 133, 177). Harper found her role as a respite foster parent by having time to volunteer. Harper was introduced to foster care through volunteering as a big sister. Her neighbour, who was employed by Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, discussed the need for volunteers with her and she felt she had time and resources to take on that role (line 39).

Experience with foster care agency. This section explores the different levels of experience and practice that the participants have as foster parents as well as their level of engagement within the foster care agency. The foster care agency is represented as part of the

larger system of child welfare. References to the foster care agency include foster parents, foster children, social workers, and the role of the government that provides oversight of foster care.

Many of the participants have several years of experience with their foster care agency. Gloria and Stella were involved as foster parents for over 20 years, and Leo has been a foster parent for 17 years. Harper has also been involved in the agency for over 20 years as a respite foster parent. When describing the process of being engaged in foster care, continually taking care of children and then having them leave your home, Gloria noted, “I can say it gets easier, but I don't think it gets easier, but I think you just get used to it” (line 206).

Several participants discussed their engagement with their foster care agency. Leo spoke often about being actively engaged in the agency, working to attain the best care for his foster children. For one of his children, Leo enrolled him in a private school because he was an Anglophone from out-of-province, but the system enrolled him in a French school (line 106). Leo paid the private school bill out his own pocket (line 114). Another example of engaging with the agency that Leo discussed was going beyond what the government-sponsored health system was providing, and finding a doctor, such as a neurologist, without waiting on the foster care agency to get the foster child set up with an appointment (line 138). In this case, Leo said, “You don't go through a free whatever. You find what you need. Any of us would do that” (line 138). Leo spoke about the need to go the extra mile, so that the child wouldn't lose out on necessities, such as adequate schooling and healthcare (line 198). Harper referred to herself as an “honorary social worker” (line 49), due to her extensive engagement in her foster child's life. Audrey wanted to put her foster children in a different school because she felt it would be beneficial to them, so they wouldn't be in a place where they are “already labelled” (line 383).

Audrey demonstrated a lack of engagement with the agency. Participating in the agency was a challenge for Audrey because she had five biological children already who demanded much of her time. The motivation to involve herself with the foster care system and its complexities was lessened due to the fact that she did not feel a connection to her foster children because she had not known them since they were babies (line 503).

Part II. Foster Parents' Perceptions of Their Roles and Responsibilities

Table 2

Part II. Foster Parents' Perceptions of their Roles and Responsibilities

Roles in providing a home life	Learning in the home Familial values Routine Stability Example of parent Boundaries/rules Gaining trust Exposure to "normalcy" Commitment Willingness to help Encouragement Understanding Protection
Roles in socialization	Teaching responsibility Empathy Love Pride in self Fun

This next section will describe the participants' perceptions of their roles as foster parents in providing a home life for their foster children and the socialization aspects they contributed to their foster children.

Roles in providing a home life. These aspects of providing a home life for their foster children. include engaging in learning at home, providing familial values, creating a routine and stability, being an example of a parent, setting boundaries and rules, gaining the trust of their

foster children, and exposing them to “normalcy”. Further values explored in this section include being committed, willing to help, encouraging, and understanding.

Winnie spoke about how what children experience through learning in the home is what they learn is acceptable and that “children learn what they live” (line 73). Stella spoke about teaching her foster children how to make good choices as a priority for her (line 368). Stella spent a lot of time with her foster children, playing games, building puzzles, and reading together, as an effort to educate them (line 268). Additionally, Stella spoke about the chores and work at home that her children engaged in, and how learning how to work was part of the at-home education she was proud of (line 330, 333). Leo hoped to convey to his foster children through learning at home “how to live in relationship to others” (line 466). Audrey wanted to show her foster children that “there is a whole other array of possibilities besides what they have already experienced” (line 533). Audrey wanted her children to learn through living in her home that as long as you work for it, “anything is possible” (line 519).

Creating an environment with familial values was important to Leo, where his foster children had an experience of justice and equality (line 162). Stella made an effort to include her foster children with her biological children, so that her foster children felt like they could “just jump in with and be a part of” the family (line 93). Gloria spoke about the importance of showing her foster children that they are her priority and that she would choose her foster children’s well-being over anything else (line 100).

Stella shared how providing a routine and a daily schedule where things were “the same every day” (line 351) was important in her care for her foster children. Gloria felt the same, and always had a snack ready after school and then helped them with homework (line 623). Stability was a value that came up for both the foster parents themselves and for their foster children. Leo

had a social worker that he was able to work with for 15 years, and he was grateful for the continuity that gave him during his time involved in the system (line 438). However, Leo was very aware that many times foster children do not get that stability and they often have to deal with constant changes (line 432). Because of this, Leo felt it was important to stay consistent for his foster children and to always provide a place they could return (line 511). Leo admitted that, at times, you don't get to see many positive things in the life of a foster child, so you "kind of have to hope that the fact of the stability is maybe the one thing, that relationship, is what they might come back to" (line 532). In the beginning years of Harper's time as a respite foster parent, she met with her foster child every week. She kept coming back every week and provided stability in his life (line 78). Stella also expressed that she wanted to model stability and structure for her foster children when they lived in her home (line 350).

Providing an example of a parent was a very important part of Harper's story. She spoke about how showing her foster children the behaviour of a responsible adult was so helpful for her child (line 362). Harper prepared her foster children "for the world in a different way, but without really talking about it", and she did this by taking her foster children with her in her everyday life (line 519). Gloria described this value as modelling what a parent can look like (line 697).

In terms of boundaries/rules, all of the participants spoke about the necessity of setting boundaries and maintaining rules in their home. Stella spoke about the dynamics between her biological children and her foster children. Her goal was to treat all her children fairly and equally; her foster children had to follow the rules just like her biological children (line 329). Winnie discussed using age-appropriate discipline with her foster children. She explained how she can be "very strict" (line 56) with her foster children. She addressed their needs but still set

boundaries with them (line 91). Audrey felt strongly that her foster children were spoiled, and that they acted like “anything goes” (line 494). She admitted that they need “special care” (line 491), but that they were also in need of a reality check. She wanted to see her foster children receive more discipline and react better to her rules.

Leo spoke about the importance of being upfront about his role and always making his boundaries with his foster children “very clear” (line 156). He knew that he was the parent, and his foster children could then be the children in his home (line 153). His approach included forming a relationship with the children, and not being solely rule-based with them, while also addressing that “rules are part of it” (line 467). Leo worked hard to ensure that his foster children knew what was expected of them, and that they had to be trustworthy and respect the rules in order to continue to live with him (line 76). Harper’s boundaries were similar to Leo’s, in being in charge of her foster children and being clear about her role. Harper expressed that in her decision to be a reliable and consistent adult for the child, she tried to alleviate some of the stress that her foster children experienced (line 63). Finally, Gloria set up rules in her house, such as doing homework right when her foster children came home from school (line 609). If her children were not able to follow the rules they were no longer allowed to stay at her house; this is where Gloria set firm boundaries and rules (line 123). Gaining the trust of her foster children was important to Winnie. She wanted to be able to tell her foster children the truth, to respect their truth, and create relationships with them (line 84). Providing an exposure to “normalcy” can be an important part of life for a foster child. This was an aspect of care that was really significant to Harper. She would take her foster children with her wherever she went, including going to her friends’ houses and grocery shopping. In Harper’s words: “I think the education is taking her to your friend's house that have kids, showing her what ‘regular’ families do” (line 660).

Another factor that was important to Harper was demonstrating commitment to her foster children and the role she played in their lives. She found it difficult to talk about any challenges in her respite care due to the fact that she was committed and “there was nothing to whine about” (line 190) because it was all about the child. Harper felt that her commitment to her foster children made an immense difference for them. “It was the fact that, unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to everyone else, that he, if you spend six months of steady time, the behaviour, the jitters stop” (line 288). She expressed that if you spend enough time with them, then you can be an influential and good example for them (line 371). Gloria also remained committed to her foster children by contributing much of her time and effort to them (line 319).

Showcasing a willingness to help their foster children was important to several of the participants. Stella stated that she and her husband were always willing to help their foster children with any homework they had. She called it a “kitchen table kind of situation” where you sit down together and get the work done (line 315). Winnie and Audrey both explained how they were willing to help their foster children with homework and learning milestones by working together, but not by doing the work for their foster children (line 46, Winnie; line 476, Audrey). Gloria noted that she was willing to help her foster children with anything, if they asked her (line 609). For example, she played a game called Simon Says to help one of her foster children figure out fractions, and for another, she put sticky notes all over her house to help him learn to read (lines 628-630).

In her relationship with her foster children, Winnie viewed the chance to show encouragement to them as a reward (line 21). Leo felt it was meaningful to encourage his foster children at the end of a school day and tell them they did a great job by enduring the challenges of a day in the life of a foster child, and he would take them out to the park to play (line 346).

Harper believed encouraging them about their experience as a foster child and helping them to feel proud of themselves could really help them (line 490). Giving them self-worth and showing them they have options to go beyond what their lives were was something that Harper always worked hard to do with her foster children (lines 509, 518).

An essential value that Leo wanted to show to his foster children was being understanding with them. He always wanted to “go towards grace rather than judgment” (line 468). In Leo’s endeavours to continue to build relationships with his foster children, he learned to listen to what they went through, to show them empathy, and to demonstrate understanding for their struggles (line 492). Gloria shared how she wanted to model protection for her foster children in every way she could, while still allowing them to breathe on their own (line 439).

Roles in socialization. Each of the participants discussed different positive characteristics that they attempted to show to their foster children. These characteristics included: teaching responsibility to their foster children, modelling empathy and love for their foster children, having pride in one’s self, and having fun.

Gloria reported teaching responsibility to her foster children by encouraging them to find something they loved and to “figure out how to get paid for it” (line 698). She wanted them to build self-efficacy in their skills, and develop responsibility in getting a job that they might enjoy (line 701). Audrey tried to encourage her foster children to be successful and responsible for their lives and their choices (lines 475, 521).

Stella modelled empathy to her foster children by understanding the “mess” (line 143) they had to go through in moving from placement to placement. She felt that talking with her foster children about the world they experienced helped her develop more empathy for them; she also felt she was able to demonstrate more empathy towards their families and the situations that

other families go through (line 214). Winnie and Leo both described how seeing their foster children struggle was difficult for them, and they modelled empathy for their children in working to understand and support them (line 41, Winnie; line 170, Leo). Harper’s message to her foster children was: “no matter what you have been through, not everyone is as fortunate as you in some other ways, so always be kind to people” (line 685).

Showing love to their foster children was important to the participants. Stella remembered thinking how she might not love a foster child as much as her own biological children, but then, she said, “you have them in your house and you realize, yes, they are different kids, but you don’t love them differently” (line 155). Stella was changed through the process of fostering children, to the point of adopting one of her foster children. She spoke about modelling love and stability for her foster children, and loving them through “games, playing stuff together” (line 360). Winnie worked hard to teach her children how to love and respect one another (line 71), and Gloria wanted them to be happy, and to become themselves (line 704).

Pride in self was an important characteristic for Gloria as she wanted to show her foster children that they can learn to be “proud of who they are” (line 719). She wanted them to be able to know themselves, to look themselves in the mirror, and to be happy with whom they were becoming (line 727). Another value that Gloria wanted to instil in her foster children was to have fun (line 726). She often said to her foster children: “The world is your oyster. Have so much fun. Party like a rock star” (line 724).

Part III. Perceptions of Personal Knowledge and Values

Table 3

Part III. Perceptions of Personal Knowledge and Values

General Knowledge	Gained knowledge Self-awareness Awareness of the child’s needs
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	Awareness of emotions Trauma awareness
Values	External support Advocacy Long-term support of the child
Knowledge of foster children	Positive experience with foster children Negative experience with foster children Characterization of foster children
Knowledge of the agency's organization and complexities	Training Support from agency Heavy documentation Rules from agency Awareness of complexity of foster care system Group home knowledge
Knowledge of children's learning and educational processes	Learning process Specialized education Necessity of calmness in learning Necessity of support in learning

This section will explore the different areas of knowledge and values that the participants believed they gathered and possessed throughout their experiences as foster parents. It will also address the perceptions of the participants concerning their knowledge of foster children, of the foster care agency, and of the educational and learning processes of their foster children.

General knowledge. The participants in this study discussed several topics for which they felt they had specialized knowledge and awareness. Stella felt that she had gained much knowledge through her 20 years of experience as a foster parent, and during her interview she realized that many of the issues she spoke about looked different to her now, compared to when she was an active foster parent (line 211). She felt, at the time of the interview, she had a more holistic understanding of her experience, and that, through reflection, she learned a lot about her time as a foster parent. She also felt that she gained a lot of knowledge of how different families functioned when she was working as foster parent (line 212).

Gloria and Leo both considered the importance of having self-awareness within their role as a foster parent. Leo felt it was part of his job to have a “clear sense of who one is” (line 152)

in order to be able to advocate for his foster children to the best of his ability. Gloria explained how she used self-awareness to manage her anger: when she might be feeling angry, she identifies what is making her angry, she tells her foster children that it is not them while acknowledging that she does feel angry, and gives herself “time-outs” (line 733) in order to work on calming down. Gloria believed that this enhanced self-awareness and self-care made her a better foster parent by being able to be more present and genuine with her foster children.

The participants also discussed their awareness of the children’s needs living in their home. Winnie mentioned this when she spoke about one her foster children needing extra resources in school to support his learning. She noticed that he was having challenges, and she asked the child’s social worker for help for that child, demonstrating an awareness of his needs (line 33). Leo began his work as a foster parent because he knew that there is a great need for adults to become involved in the foster care system (line 26). He was conscious of the fact that it is difficult to live in foster care (line 192). Building a relationship with a child takes time and effort, but it creates opportunities to understand the child’s needs, and Leo always made that a priority with his foster children (line 492). Gloria also spent time getting to know her foster children, and was able to understand her children’s needs, such as after they worked hard on homework for an hour, they might need a break, so she would play a board game with them (line 572).

Harper and Gloria both mentioned their awareness of emotions within learning and living with foster children. Harper was adamant that learning should have “an emotional quotient to it” (line 317). She was aware of how difficult it is for a child to admit that their biological parents are not capable of caring for them, and she walked through those emotions with her foster children (line 363). Gloria stated how she is purposeful in showing her foster children that she

has emotions, and she has bad days, just like them (line 731). She wanted to be able to show her children that it is okay “to be angry, to be happy, it’s okay to be sad. It’s okay to be all of them all at once” (line 735).

In terms of trauma awareness, Leo was the only participant who said the word “trauma” in his interview. He understood that the inconsistency of placements could create trauma and add to the trauma that a foster child would have likely already experienced (line 260). Leo saw these traumatic experiences coming through in the behaviour and aggressiveness of many of his foster children (line 264). Gloria and Leo both discussed specific instances of traumatic experiences that their foster children had experienced, including witnessing a murder (line 427, Gloria) and being sexually abused (line 575, Leo).

Values. The following section will explore different values that the participants expressed as important aspects of their work as foster parents. These values include having external support, engaging in advocacy, and providing long-term support for their foster children.

Having a community of external support to help in the work of a foster parent was an important factor for Leo. He shared how his work environment as a minister was very supportive. His work’s health insurance program was willing to place his foster children on his insurance, which is not a normal occurrence (line 132). Additionally, Leo had a co-parent that worked with him to support his foster children (line 218). He also worked closely with teachers that were willing to give more of their time to engage in extra academic support for his foster children (line 365).

A very important value that was discussed by Leo and Gloria was engaging in advocacy on behalf of their foster children. Leo described advocacy as a “key role” (line 85). His job was

to “stand up to the system” (line 89) and to make sure that his foster children get the best medical treatment and education opportunities (line 90). Leo cared for his foster children by being their defense against mistreatment, especially for those children who were not always capable of defending themselves (line 142). Gloria advocated for more shared understanding between foster parents and biological parents. She described being involved in groups with biological parents, stating that often “foster parents are having the same problems as the parents” (line 359). She advocated for the rights of her foster children by working to find a way for parents and foster parents to work together to find what works best for the children (line 360).

In terms of long-term support of the children, Harper and Gloria both spoke about the relationships that they still shared with their foster children that do not live with them anymore. They provided long-term support to their former foster children by staying in touch and maintaining the relationships (line 68, Gloria; line 229, Harper). They also did what they could to continue to help them succeed, such as paying for a driver’s license to support them in getting a job (line 147, Harper).

Knowledge of foster children. The experiences that the participants had with their foster children were varied. In Leo’s words, his experiences “go from bad to worse to wonderful” (line 43). Stella had some positive experiences with her foster children. She spoke about her experiences with her foster children as being “good” (line 106), recalling a positive memory of one of her foster children saying that she had so much fun at Stella’s house. This child’s statement made Stella feel good about her involvement with that child. Some of the participants expressed having negative experiences with their foster children. Audrey stated that it was “disaster from day one” (line 90) when her foster children came to live in her home. Gloria recalled how the first foster child she had was “an absolute nightmare” (line 59). Leo also

discussed how his first foster child was really difficult to parent, and it was the hardest experience for him, leaving him feeling negative about that child (line 46).

The participants described their foster children with several different characterizations. Harper was aware that her foster children had much to deal with and they had “a lot more to chew on” (line 41). Harper also discussed how some of her foster children were “not socialized enough” (line 55) due to challenges in care. Leo addressed some of the issues that foster children face such as not often having a choice or control over important matters in their lives (line 270). Further, according to Leo, children in care don’t have “the same status” as other children (line 275).

Negative characterizations were prevalent. Stella made several comments about some of her foster children being lazy or “not into doing stuff” (line 290). Audrey felt that her foster children “don’t have to follow any rules” (line 350) and “they don’t have to behave” (line 321) just because they were in foster care and had social workers that would give them what they wanted (line 352). Gloria described one of her foster children as being “limited” (line 89) and that he often couldn’t “understand sexual boundaries and stuff” (line 93). Leo described one of his foster children as being “broken” (line 49). Audrey stated that her foster children would be “off the wall” (line 55). Winnie discussed how some of her foster children were “rebellious, they talk back, they steal” (line 14) and that sometimes they “run away” (line 17). Winnie also addressed one of her foster children’s “language challenges” and another child’s “attention issues” (line 32). However, positive characterizations were also present. Stella also said that some foster children she had were “smart just because they know what they had to do to get through” (line 308). Harper also described her foster child as being “a smart kid” (line 142), “bright” (line 350) and “sharp as a tack” (line 90). Audrey stated that one of her foster children

was “very social” (line 356) and that she could tell that “she needed to be hugged” (line 358). Harper wanted her foster child to know that there was “nothing wrong with his brain” (line 90). Audrey realized that her foster children “just [want] to be taken care of” (line 253).

Knowledge of the agency’s organization and complexities. This section will address the training that the participants received when becoming foster parents, the support they receive from the foster care agency, and the rules that the agency sets out, including documentation requirements. Further, this section will discuss the participants’ awareness of the complexity of the system as well as their understanding of group homes.

Some of the participants described the training they received from the agency when becoming licensed foster parents. According to Audrey, they put her through “the whole nine yards” including gathering information about her and asking for references to qualify as a foster parent (line 84). While Harper’s role is termed as a respite foster parent, she went through the same training sequence that foster parents received at the time of her certification. She had a “six hour interview” where the social worker’s job was to “find out who you are”, and “then they go inside your house and check the plugs and [...] check for fire extinguishers” (lines 1-5). Stella mentioned that she and her husband took a course during a winter season and became licenced in the spring (line 29). Stella also stated, “the training that the social workers were able to give us... really helped” (line 69). Furthermore, Stella always felt support from the agency. This came in the form of both social workers and the group of foster parents that she knew in her community (lines 71, 436). Winnie also felt supported by the system; she said, “if you cannot cope, you call the agency and the system deals with it, not you” (line 16). For example, Winnie took note of one her foster children’s learning challenges, and after calling her social worker, the child was

set up with a tutor and a speech therapist (lines 33, 34). According to Harper, she always felt supported and that “everyone was there, ready” (line 158) to give her advice or help.

However, sometimes the participants did not feel support from the foster care agency. Managing the rules from the agency was a particular challenge that Audrey had to contend with. She felt that the social workers were not looking for a good parent, they were instead “looking for someone who [was] going to follow their rules” (line 101). Audrey struggled to raise her foster children under the rules that the agency insisted on, such as taking her children to medical professionals that were located very far from her home (line 117). According to Audrey, she was not “supposed to put any of [her] values into it” (line 332) and she was expected to act as an “institutional gatekeeper” (line 329). Indeed, Stella also addressed this issue by stating, “it is really hard for foster parents today because... now they want them to nurture them, and yet there is [*sic*] so many limits to what they can do” (line 423). Included in these limits that Stella spoke of was the heavy documentation required of foster parents. Stella explained that foster parents were given a binder where they had to document “itty bitty things” (line 62). For example, when a “kid falls on the sidewalk outside you gotta write down what time they fell, how they fell, who was with them when they fell. You know, like all that stuff” (line 58). In Stella’s words, “there is so much documenting that has to happen” (line 401) and she found that difficult.

Another aspect that is part of the organization of the agency is the knowledge of group homes. Much of Harper’s work as a foster parent involved visiting group homes. Her foster son was in a group home because “he was breaking into things and stealing money” (line 119). Gloria also had an experience like this, when one of her foster children could no longer live in a foster home due to the fact that he was abusing the animals living in her home and had to be placed into a group home (line 98). When Harper first went to a group home, her foster child

gave her a tour and every door was locked, and she wondered what kind of place it was (line 93). According to Harper, “it’s a real respite from the world when you go [to a group home]. It’s like being dunked in, uh, certainly not goodness. It’s being dunked in, uh, a dose of reality, that people don’t, if you never grew up with that, well, I had no idea this kind of stuff existed! And the damage it does” (lines 184-187). Another experience in a group home that impacted Harper was learning about the types of lessons that children living in group homes experienced. “After dinner they have their chore, and they either go up and have rest time and then they do art. Not like art-art, but like, they have to learn how to [behave like the people pictured] on the wall. There are rules. Like, when you get angry, what do you do. You know, like normally you hope you learn that from your parent just by osmosis. But, wow I would just always marvel at this, oh, it was just, like, they have had to learn differently” (lines 269-274).

Gloria and Leo expressed their awareness of the complexity of the foster care system. According to Gloria, when asked about how she understood the role of the school and the foster care system, which includes the agency, in the lives of her foster children, she said, “so you have the two spectrums, just as in life. So I can’t put the whole thing down, but I can’t build the whole thing up” (lines 681-682). Further, Leo spoke about the challenges that both foster children and their biological parents face. Leo has seen the imbalances that can come from working two jobs and working to care for a child, and how children might end up in foster care, not because the parents are mistreating them, but because they don’t have enough support to work and be parents. He stated how it’s often “no reflection on love or commitment, it’s just the reflection of screwy timetables, or working at night and who is going to care for the child” (line 336) and those kinds of situations can place a child into foster care. There are several working parts in a child’s life, particular when you are working with a child living in foster care. It becomes a “fine

balance between the individual, the kid, a foster parent, a school. And then you have social services” (line 402). Another complex issue that Leo addressed was how the foster care agency provides financial assistance for foster parents to care for a foster child. According to Leo, with this issue “you have to be very careful” (line 443). Leo stated, “if I was relying on [money from being a foster parent], maybe I would be more cautious about rocking the boat or challenging the system” (line 456).

Knowledge of children’s learning and educational processes. This section addresses the participants’ knowledge of how their foster children learn, the education they receive, and the importance of calmness and support in their learning.

In terms of foster children’s learning process, Harper said that one of the most important elements about their learning is that “there is an emotional quotient to it” (line 317). Further, when “talking about education, about p's and q's and how much they can learn about history or whatever, it doesn't go in until there's a reason for it to go in” (line 367). Indeed, according to Harper, “before they can learn, there are so many other things” that have to be addressed in the lives of foster children (line 349). It is “not about school accomplishments... it is not about learning content... it is trying to fill them with some self-worth. And these things are not on the curriculum of maybe anything” (lines 459, 487, 509, 510). According to Gloria, she believes that her foster children were not learning the things they needed to know. About her foster son, she stated, “he needs to learn how to do the kitchen, he needs to learn how to do basic things. That’s what he needs. He doesn't need to know the 12 times tables” (lines 260, 262). Furthermore, when working with teachers and other medical professionals involved in the lives of foster children and their learning it is important to “collaborate with how [the foster parent] is going to continue

it at the home, so that [everyone is] working on the same things at the same time” (lines 334-335).

Harper mentioned how some foster children receive specialized education. For example, one of her foster children was at “a school for special kids” (line 88), where there were four children in the class. However, she stated that she did not know what specific needs this classroom attended to, as it was a special school for “I don’t know what kind of kids” (line 295). Harper addressed the importance of providing certain needed factors in the learning process of foster children. For example, there is a necessity of calmness in learning. After a period of time of spending quality time with her foster child, she began to notice positive changes in him, and she realized that “you can actually calm someone down so that they can learn” (line 290). Additionally, there is a necessity of support in learning. Winnie showcased this by showing support of her foster child’s learning experiences and he became excited to share what he was learning at school with her (line 40). Harper saw first-hand how one of her foster children liked the school where she was and that “she pays more attention in her structured environment” (line 419). Harper spoke of the importance of having the support of a parent or caregiver in learning, because “how can you learn when you don’t have a mother?” (line 446). In Harper’s words, the way to address this issue of a child not having a parent invested in their learning journeys is “not by changing curriculum” but by having “people being interested and involved, that aren’t paid for it” and that this process “takes a village” (lines 448-457).

Part IV. Perceptions of Challenges in Foster Care

Table 4

Part IV. Perceptions of Challenges in Foster Care

Challenges for foster parents in their role	External ignorance Lack of status as a foster parent Stressful experience
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusing experience Frustration Behavioural issues Interactions with birth family Judgements of the birth family life
Challenges for foster parents in the foster care agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive experience with the agency Negative experience with the agency Obstacles with the agency Lack of training Lack of support from agency Lack of consequences for foster children from agency Limited information given
Challenges for children in foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistency in placements Challenges in environment Challenges in social life in care Incarceration
Challenges in the school system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive experience with the school system Negative experience with the school system Communication with teachers and schools Lack of consequences for foster children from school Learning challenges Struggles in school Inconsistency in school placements Lack of education

This section will address the participants' perceptions of the different challenges that are present in foster care for both foster parents and foster children. Specifically, challenges of a foster parent in their role and within the foster care agency will be discussed, as well as the challenges that foster children face within the agency. Further, challenges within the school system will also be addressed, for both foster parents and foster children.

Challenges in the role as foster parents. Foster parents face multiple challenges including interacting with others who are ignorant about the needs and problems present within the foster care agency, experiencing a lack of status as a foster parent, and how being a foster parent felt like a confusing and stressful experience. Further challenges discussed include the

behavioural challenges of foster children and interacting with birth families and the life that their foster children experienced with their birth families.

In terms of external ignorance, Harper experienced this regularly when interacting with people who assumed that foster children were “too damaged” (line 219). Harper met people who were potentially interested in being foster parents, but they wanted to fill their own needs, and didn’t seem to care about the needs of a foster child (line 305). Further, Gloria experienced external ignorance with a teacher at her foster son’s school. Her son was instructed, along with his class, to bring something from his childhood, but he did not have anything from his childhood. Gloria explained the situation to the teacher, but the teacher did not care and did not give any attention to the needs of Gloria’s foster child (lines 415-422).

Leo spoke about the challenge of having a lack of status as a foster parent. As a foster parent, Leo was not able to sign anything for his foster children related to school (line 403). However, if his foster child got into trouble or was sick at school, Leo would receive the call, even though he was not able to legally sign any permission forms (line 408). Leo also discussed how some new changes in the agency would make it more difficult for foster parents to be supported and have status within the agency (line 442).

Foster parenting can be a stressful experience. Gloria admitted that at one point, she quit fostering because it was very stressful for her (lines 132, 140). Being a foster parent can also be a confusing experience. Audrey felt confused because the training they received did not seem to matter when they were trying to raise their foster children (lines 92, 94). Audrey stated that the social workers and the agency in general did not seem to want them to integrate the foster children into her family; rather, they wanted her to follow the rules set out by the agency (line 741).

Frustration was a common emotion amongst the participants. Audrey was frustrated that the social workers did not seem to want her to parent her foster children (line 194). She felt that “it was really stupid, their system” (line 197). Her frustration became so apparent that Audrey quit fostering. She said to her social workers “obviously we aren’t doing it the way you want us to be doing it so maybe we shouldn’t be doing it anymore” (line 565). Leo was frustrated with the fact that his foster children were receiving inadequate medical care, so he put his foster children on his private insurance policy and took them to a reputable dentist (line 126). Harper was frustrated by assumptions from others about foster children being damaged and not considering getting involved in foster care because they believed that having biological children was the only way to have “their own kid” (lines 219-220).

There were various behavioural issues that the participants had to cope with when living with their foster children. Stella described one of her foster children as being “bossy and defiant” (line 262). There were some issues present and Stella felt that they were not being addressed adequately by the social worker, because the foster child “didn’t want to do a whole lot” (line 264). Winnie said she experienced a lot of behavioural problems with her foster children, such as lying and stealing (line 76). Audrey spoke about one of her foster children being a “real troublemaker” (line 341) and that he would fight and swear at everyone (line 344). Leo had a foster son that ran away from his home, which was a major issue (line 57). At one point, Leo had to call the police and his foster son was hospitalized due to the fact that he was “acting out” (line 210). A foster child that Harper cared for also got into trouble by “breaking into things and stealing money” (line 119). One of Harper’s foster children would behave aggressively by lunging at every person that came into his room (line 460). Gloria described some of her foster children portraying significantly negative behaviours (line 85). For instance, Gloria gave an

example of one of her foster children being a “prostitute, and a drug addict, and an alcoholic” (line 120).

Stella and Leo both expressed that many of the interactions with birth families presented challenges. Incorporating parental visits into a foster child’s life is important and Stella saw the value of the visits, but she discussed how it was one of the biggest challenges (line 186). The challenge came in the change of routine and the sharp contrast between foster parents and biological parents (line 190). Stella and her family celebrated “when parents could figure stuff out and get things together and the kids could go home” (line 225), but she also dealt with biological parents who were never going to be able to get their children back and that was devastating (line 229). Leo felt that many of the biological parents of his foster children did not want to go to the meetings and pay for their child’s education, as they “didn’t want to carry that” (line 414). Interfacing with the biological parents when they were present in the child’s life was challenging for Leo (line 91).

Many of the participants made judgments of the birth family home life of their foster children. Winnie understood that when foster children get removed from their homes, they are not sure of whom to trust, and the situation “impacts them hugely” (line 76). Stella described one of her foster children’s home life as “pretty rough” (line 306) where the oldest girl had to act as a parent to her mom (line 307). Harper also discussed how some of her foster children were left in charge by their parents (line 62). With one of her foster children, Harper explained how his mother died when he was young and that he had no idea who his father was (line 150). Audrey had a lot to say about the biological parents she interacted with. A mother was described as “a drug addict and the whole nine yards. She was an absentee mom” (lines 14-15) and the father was “just a bum” (line 47).

Challenges for foster parents in the foster care agency. This section will provide an overview of the participants' experiences in foster care and will address challenges they faced. Overall, "foster care can be a wonderful thing, a caring thing, but it also can not be so great" (line 195, Leo). When Gloria was asked to describe her time as a foster parent, her answer was that her experiences have been "good, bad, ugly, horrible" (line 57). Some of the participants remarked that they had positive experiences with the agency. Both Stella and Harper talked about having really good social workers (line 202, Stella; line 87, Harper). Stella also remarked that she received a lot of support from the agency and that was "very valuable" (line 435) for Stella and her family. Leo discussed having experiences with social workers or administrators in the agency who would step up and work with him to find a solution, and he recalled those experiences fondly (lines 299, 304). Further, Harper described her entire experience of being a respite foster parent for the last 20 years as being a "piece of heaven" (line 240).

Unfortunately, the participants also discussed having negative experiences with the agency. Stella recalled how there were limits to what can be done within the agency (line 423). Winnie expressed similar sentiments, saying that "the [agency] is strict, there are things you cannot do to a foster child. There are limits to what you can do" (lines 14, 15). Leo stated that the biggest challenge he experienced as a foster parent was from the agency itself and it's "institutional mentality" (line 95). According to Leo, the agency was often inflexible and did not appear to care about the wellbeing of a foster child or of a parent (line 329).

Audrey had a particularly negative experience with the agency. She felt that her parenting style was not supported by the social workers she interacted with (line 325). Audrey wanted to provide more discipline and structure for her foster children, but she expressed that the social workers made it easy for the children to get out of work and responsibilities. Audrey stated that

she did not like way the entire foster care system seemed to work (line 287). When asked if she had any advice for future foster parents, Audrey stated that the only thing she could honestly say would to not become a foster parent; her experience was so detrimental to her and her family that she would not want anyone else to have to go through that (lines 668, 672). Even though Harper expressed having a good experience for herself, she did address the fact that the agency and the whole foster care system can be a mess and that the lives of foster children who are caught within it can have very sad and difficult (lines 256, 257).

In terms of encountering specific obstacles with the agency, Leo felt that the agency itself was an issue, where it was “preventing the people who need to talk to each other and who could be supportive of each other” (line 613). The “system is too slow”, and it doesn’t work when you have foster children in crisis (line 249). Furthermore, Leo said that due to changes in the foster care agency at a governmental level “kids are gunna get more screwed than ever. There is less time [and] energy, there is less freshness” (lines 433-434). An obstacle that Audrey faced was not being able to communicate well with the social workers, as she said they would never get back to her with information she needed (line 154). Audrey believed that the social workers “did not want us to help these kids” (line 577). Harper herself did not report experiencing obstacles in the system, but she knew that social workers often did, and she was “complaining more for them than for [her]” (line 226). She often saw that social workers were “always kind of trapped, either by budget or by rules” (line 235). Gloria often struggled with the constant change of social workers that dealt with her foster children’s cases, because “one has a certain vision on what's going to happen, and the other worker comes in and has a different vision” (line 229) and everything was difficult to navigate within the change.

Harper felt that a challenge with the agency was a lack of training, as foster parents are not “trained to be a parent for a child who’s had trouble” (line 159). Also, a lack of support from the agency was a massive challenge for many of the participants. Audrey often felt “completely blocked” (line 201) in her efforts to help her foster children, and that if she did ask for support, they would not give her a sufficient answer (line 202). Leo and Audrey both felt that the social workers would not provide adequate resources for them and that they did not seem willing to help (line 453, Audrey; line 354, Leo). Leo experienced a lack of support from the agency by not allowing connections to other foster parents in his community. According to Leo, “we were never allowed, as a foster parent, to know another foster parent who could be within streets of our house, with confidentiality of the system... So, what that means is, foster parents couldn't have support of other foster parents... So, I wanna raise that as a very problematic thing” (lines 602, 606, 609). A lack of consequences for the child from the agency was a challenge for Gloria (lines 97). She often felt that “there was no support, there was no nothing, no consequences for [her foster child]” (line 106).

Leo also felt that there was limited information given concerning the history of his foster children. It is really challenging when a child enters your home, and “you don’t know the real needs” (line 617). Leo felt that it was imperative to be aware of their history, such as if they have fetal alcohol syndrome or have a disposition towards violent, angry outbursts, in order to properly care for that child (lines 620-622).

Challenges for children in foster care. The participants explored several different issues and challenges that foster children have to deal with while living in care. These issues include inconsistency in placements, different behavioural issues, challenges in the environment they

experienced in their childhoods, struggles with social life and maintaining friendships, and facing the reality of incarceration due to criminal activity.

In terms of the inconsistency in placements that foster children face, they often have many changes. Leo explained that the children constantly get moved around, forcing them to contend with instability in foster homes and foster parents (line 432). Stella spoke about having the same two foster children on and off, as they would move back to their biological parents and then back into foster care (line 257).

Many foster children experience challenges in their environment. Leo addressed this factor when attempting to explain why children might struggle in school and at home, understanding that the reason for any delays they might have may be due to environmental issues (line 249). Children living in foster care also face immense challenges in social life. Leo spoke in-depth about this issue. When asked what he saw children learning in school, Leo said he saw them “learning that they are not socially adept” (line 381) and that “they cannot fit into a normalcy” (line 382). Leo addressed that many children living in care often struggle for years to find a friend that they can continue to develop a relationship with, due to changes in placements and changes in schools (line 203). Moving schools and placements causes you to “lose your connections, your friends” (line 259), which is a major issue for foster children.

Finally, another challenge that foster children face is incarceration. Harper spoke about the harsh reality that when you do not have adequate support and resources, like many children living in care, you often end up jail (line 121). One of Leo’s foster children got into trouble with the law when he ran away from his foster home and ended up spending two years in prison (line 57).

Challenges in the school system. The formal education system entails the relationship with teachers and administrators in particular schools, as well as the perceptions that the participants had about the school system as a whole and their foster children's experiences within school. This section will address the overall experiences the participants had with the school system and the challenges of both foster parents and foster children within it.

Some of the participants discussed having positive experiences with the school system. Leo, Gloria, and Stella all reported having affirming interactions with schools. Gloria discussed how some teachers were very helpful and caring (line 624). In fact, some teachers that Gloria interacted with showed they would “do absolutely anything” (line 667) to support her foster children in their educational journeys. Leo described how one school gave his foster son a chance to attend the school and it was a great opportunity (line 280). Furthermore, another school turned out to be a “wonderful match” (line 231) for his son. That school provided a needed bridge between the academic standards of grade six and high school, continually giving the student chances to succeed (lines 234-236).

The participants also reported having negative experiences with school. Stella spoke about being frustrated with a public school that let one of her foster children get away with too many things (line 281). Winnie echoed similar sentiments, stating that she believed there was “not enough discipline at the school” (line 53). Additionally, Winnie felt that the schools often did not get involved in discipline or going the extra mile to support a child because the schools “are afraid of getting sued” (line 54). Audrey and Leo both described their experiences with their foster children's schools as “horrible” (line 338, Audrey; line 207, Leo). Audrey talked about receiving daily phone calls from a principal due to her foster child acting out in school and getting in trouble, but she felt that they did not adequately address the issues, thus causing her to

state that she “was not impressed with [her foster children’s] school at all” (line 415).

Alternatively, Leo and Harper both got the impression that their foster children were not learning while at school, because the teachers were “just trying to manage behaviour” (line 298, Harper) and it was “just about control” (line 209, Leo). According to Gloria, schools often did not understand what foster children went through and did not give them space to heal and learn to function within a classroom (lines 419, 431). Another challenge that Gloria experienced with schools was the constant change in school placements that her foster children experienced. Due to issues like the location of the school being too far away or a school not being the right fit for a child, foster children often have to change schools, especially when they move to a different foster home placement or have serious behavioural challenges. These changes in schools made it difficult for Gloria’s foster children to maintain friendships (line 255). Finally, some of the professionals that Gloria interacted with in the school system contributed to a negative experience. Gloria dealt with some teachers who “are burnt out, and they want nothing” (line 642), some who “do the basic necessities, and others do zero, nothing” (line 668). She also had situations with “guidance counsellors, that if [she] hadn’t intervened, the kids would never have gotten out of high school, because they didn’t tell them what they needed to have enough credits” (line 643).

In terms of communication with teachers and schools, some participants felt that communication with their foster children’s teachers did occur. For instance, Winnie communicated with her foster son’s teacher about his behaviour (line 57), Stella had lots of “talk back and forth with the teachers” (line 115), and had “some good, um, rapport with the school that [her foster children] were in” (line 265). However, there were instances for Gloria where she experienced a lack of communication with teachers. For example, one of her foster children’s

situation, according to the school, was described as “everything is perfect, everything is fine, wonderful, this and that, yet he is suspended” (line 239). Another situation arose when one of her foster children received a detention that Gloria felt was unfair, but the teachers and school would not take the time to communicate with her about how to resolve the issue (line 542). Stella sometimes felt that there was a lack of consequences for foster children from school. She was frustrated when the school would let her foster children get away with things (line 291), and she believed that “just because he is a foster kid doesn’t mean you have to give him an excuse to not do that” (line 295). Audrey felt, similarly, that her foster children’s teachers were not “teaching him anything except that he can get away with everything” (line 433).

When asked to talk about her foster children’s learning experiences in school, Audrey said they were “horrible” (line 339). Her foster children were “failing everything” (line 341). One of her foster children had learning disabilities, and never learned how to read (line 361). Audrey’s foster children experienced many struggles with learning; it wasn’t because the foster child was “behaving badly and stuff, it was just learning” (line 417). “The challenges [were] pretty evident linguistically, academically” for Leo’s foster children (line 244). Leo saw his foster children learning that “they gotta have a small class ‘cause they are dumb, um, they need all that extra that other kids seem to be not needing” (lines 383, 384). Harper saw the struggle that her foster children experienced in trying to learn in schools while dealing with everything they have been through, and she believed that, “you can’t learn if you are all fucked up like that. You just can’t. It’s hard enough when you are not fucked up” (lines 318, 321). In fact, Harper expressed her despair in working to address the challenges foster children experience in schools, because they “need to go to school, but... I guess I don’t know where to start” (line 461). Foster children often experience struggles in school, particularly if they are in a small class, and they do

not get a chance to become “socialized at all” (line 94). Further, according to Harper, foster children are faced with the reality of a lack of education, where, instead of teaching, some schools merely observe them and do not seem to work to educate them (line 285).

Finally, in terms of inconsistency in school placements, foster children experience “a lot of changes” (line 244, Leo). When foster children have to move schools, what happens is “[they] might have to move out of [their] school that [they] were in, so [they] are losing [their] connections, [their] friends” (line 259, Leo). Harper could not even recall how many times her foster child changed schools (line 416). Another example of inconsistency in schools is from Stella, where they had three foster children come live with them, and “they, um, had never been in the same school, gone to the same school in September that they finished in in June” (line 255).

Discussion and Implications

The goal of this study was to listen to and understand the perspectives of foster parents. Learning more about the foster parent experience can provide opportunities to learn about and improve the foster care system. Furthermore, this study offers a unique perspective of exploring the role of foster parents as caregivers through the lens of curriculum studies. Curriculum studies allow the role of foster parents to be meaningfully understood as teacher figures and caregivers.

The participants addressed several aspects of their experiences as foster parents, encompassing the substantial role that they play and the fact that there are many different moving parts involved in being a foster parent. These parts include interacting with social workers and the foster care system as a whole, working with teachers and other professionals involved in the foster child’s life, balancing the dynamics that come from interactions with birth families, and, most importantly, interacting with their foster children. Each of these interactions

create a complex reality for foster parents. When working to understand the roles that foster parents are expected to fill, it is imperative to take into account the pressures and problems that arise from this interconnected web of individuals and systems. Within this study, the roles of foster parents are understood as “caregivers”, which encompasses their reality as adults who care for foster children, through living and learning with them in their educational journey in every circumstance.

Many of the findings in this study reflect the current literature. For example, this study discussed several challenges that foster parents face in their work caring for foster children, such as the educational experiences and challenges that most foster children face. Many foster children display several behavioural problems and struggle to cope in every area of their lives (Brown & Calder, 1999). The findings reflected this based on the behavioural issues of the foster children that the participants spoke about. Further, the literature clearly states that the educational experiences of foster children are rife with challenges, as they fall behind their peers due to inconsistency in school placements and home placements, experience a lack of support, and face challenges in social life in care (Berg, 2010; Clemens et al., 2018; Tyre, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009; Zetlin et al., 2012).

The participants also discussed the challenges that they, as foster parents, experienced within their roles as well as the values and lessons they worked to provide for their foster children. These values and characteristics that the participants demonstrated are supported by the literature. For example, according to the literature on foster parents’ roles, being a consistent caregiver for foster children requires understanding, empathy, adaptability, stability, and strong communication efforts (Brown et al., 2014; Geiger et al., 2016; Kelly & Salmon, 2014). The literature also supports the participants’ discussions of the challenges they deal with in the foster

care agency. These challenges included lack of support, being aware of the complexity of the agency, stressful situations, having a lack of status as foster parents, the behavioural challenges of their foster children, lack of education, and challenges in communicating with the agency as well as teachers and schools (Beam, 2013; Brown, 2008; Brown & Calder, 1999; Geiger et al., 2016; Kelly & Salmon, 2014; Murray et al., 2011).

This study adds to the current literature on foster care by providing rich descriptions of foster parent experiences. The participants gave in-depth responses to questions exploring their experiences as adults caring for children living in the foster care system, offering their perceptions and understandings of many different complexities within the foster care system. These descriptions can be useful in gaining insight into the lives of foster parents, providing information for how to improve the plight of those involved with the entire foster care system (Kelly & Salmon, 2014).

Perceptions of What Foster Care and School Systems Teach Foster Children

The participants expressed in several ways how they felt the surrounding systems were affecting the lessons that their foster children learned. Concerning the foster care system, Harper stated that, for the children without mothers, whether biological or foster, it could be very difficult for them to learn. Specifically, she asked the question: “If you are talking about how they learn, it is like, how can you learn when you don’t have a mother?” (Harper, line 446). The context of this quote comes from Harper talking about the challenges of a young boy living in a group home whose mother had recently died. She expressed her concern about the child’s ability to learn within a system and situation that did not provide him the support that a mother would ideally be able to provide. This demonstrates that there is an immense need for support in learning and according to Harper, this support should specifically come from a mother-figure.

However, the ultimate lesson of this situation is that support is required in all aspects of learning. For children living in foster care and who may not have steady caregivers, they do not receive that support. This causes their academic learning to diminish, and greatly effects the emotional lessons that they learn.

Audrey and Gloria expressed sentiments about how the system as a whole is a detriment for foster children's learning experiences. Audrey stated that one of her foster children, who was around 12 years old, did not know how to read ("She had learning disabilities up the, like, just crazy. I don't think she ever learned how to read" Audrey, line 361). Both the school system and the child welfare system failed that child. Furthermore, Gloria explained that when there was an issue or a challenge, it was not because of the child, but it is "because of the system. And because of the worker, and because of the father, you know? And the judge" (line 192). According to Gloria, the adults involved in foster children's lives, who are working on behalf of the system as well as against the system, are not working together to really meet the needs of foster children.

In terms of what the participants saw their foster children learning from the school system and their official academic experiences, they were devastating. Children were being failed, kicked out of class, placed into special programs due to behavioural challenges, and not given the same status as other children. Children living in foster care do not have high hopes in succeeding in academic curriculums, but they also do not appear to be succeeding in emotional arenas either, due to the challenges that they face while living in the foster care system.

Perceptions of the Limits and Challenges that Foster Parents Face

There were several challenges that the participants discussed. One of these challenges was the confidentiality of information of both the background of foster children as well as the

proximity of other foster families that was required by the agency. Many foster parents are not allowed to know what has occurred in their foster child's life, making it challenging to adequately address their needs. Further, there is a rule of confidentiality in the agency, disallowing foster parents to be in communal support with one another. However, connecting foster families could be a massive benefit because it would take off some of the burden on the child welfare agency to support foster parents.

The lack of communication between foster parents, schools, and the foster care agency poses a problem. An important intervention strategy that can benefit foster children is creating a collaborative culture among the professionals involved in the lives of foster children (Beam, 2013; Daniels, 2006; Lewis, 2011). This lack of communication is not new; it is an on-going issue that is documented in the literature (Day et al., 2015). What this study provides is the insight into the experiences of foster parents as they deal with the fallout of miscommunications and lack of support. Audrey's experience is that she "didn't feel listened to or supported in [her] ability to parent [her foster] child" (line 269). Gloria recalled how some experiences with her foster children have been "absolutely horrible, with no support from [the agency] at all" because the social workers "don't get it" (line 82). Moreover, Leo stated that his "biggest challenge would be from the system itself. ...Institutional mentality... I would say, that inflexibility at times, it's not about fostering, it's just about institutionalism. And it's full of shit. It's not about the well-being of the child, or a parent" (lines 92, 95, 327, 329).

Another major theme that arose is that there seems to be a limit to what foster parents can do. The participants felt that they often did not have any authority or status in the agency to make a positive change for their foster children. Additionally, while they witnessed the negative lessons that they saw their foster children learning from the systems surrounding them, they did

not feel empowered or capable of changing those lessons in a meaningful enough way for their foster children. This demonstrates the importance of understanding that every space a child inhabits is a learning environment and the significance of creating positive and nurturing spaces for them to learn and grow. The notion of curriculum needs to be expanded into understanding an emotional curriculum, rather than merely accepting an academic curriculum. Further, there also needs to be an expanded understanding of how emotional curriculum occurs within the systems as a whole and the effects that it has on foster children and foster parents.

Emotional Curriculum

The research questions posed were twofold: 1) *how do foster parents understand their roles as caregivers for their foster children?*, and 2) *how do foster parents understand their roles in providing a learning environment for their foster children?* The answers to these two questions proved to be very similar. Indeed, the results showed that the way that the participants perceived their roles as caregivers was intricately connected to how they provided a learning environment for their foster children. Based on Palmer's (2007) idea of curriculum extending beyond the classroom and Dewey's notion that caregivers are deeply involved in the educational journeys of children (Nguyen & Slavik, 2017), the role of a caregiver demands providing a learning environment. Further, this learning environment that the participants worked to provide did not necessarily capture an academic curriculum, but an emotional curriculum. The data revealed the participants' perceptions of a curriculum that was attuned to the needs of the children and of values and ideals to provide a home life full of learning. Thus, the two original research questions are linked through the notion of an emotional curriculum.

This concept of emotional curriculum can be understood as what children are learning based on how their emotional needs are being met in every learning environment. Specifically, it

is a two-fold idea. Emotional curriculum encompasses a recognition of the emotional needs of children and their history of experiences and how any potential trauma may have affected them. Furthermore, a fulfillment of an emotional curriculum requires the provision of emotional support. This occurs through listening and through community, and eventually can result in a deep understanding of one another where true learning can occur (Waks, 2011).

The results showcase that caregiving – that is, emotional care – is crucial for providing a learning environment. Part two of the results explored the participants' perceptions of their roles as caregivers for foster children. What this encompasses is so much larger than merely feeding and housing foster children; being a caregiver in the foster care system is intertwined with providing a learning environment and creating the space for meaningful lessons to be learned. This learning environment must exist in the spaces beyond the classroom, such as a foster home, and it must also incorporate emotional awareness and valuation. As Harper stated, "what is important about the learning is that there is an emotional quotient to it" (line 317). This was reflected in many of the participants' statements.

Part three of the results explored the perceptions of the personal knowledge and values of the participants. These results revealed the participants' awareness of the system and its complexities and different aspects included in their foster children's learning experiences. The participants demonstrated that they were aware of the spaces beyond a traditional classroom that play a role in the education of foster children. This supports Palmer's (2007) notion of how children learn many important lessons beyond the classroom. This is significant to understand for the role of a caregiver as they have the opportunity to do this work in learning with foster children and creating spaces within the system to support the work of education. Furthermore, Palmer (2007) talks about the challenge for educators and caregivers when confronted by the

desire to disconnect from the difficult situations in life. Palmer notes that combating that desire and acting as a whole person provides the chance to truly engage in the work of learning. This overcoming happens within community, within work that is meaningful, and within learning about the self, which are all values and reasons that the participants expressed. Foster homes can exist as trustworthy learning spaces when there is love, commitment, and empathy conveyed (Badley, 2012). As caregivers, foster parents can provide this space to facilitate learning. This is done through the work of engaging the inner life and creating community within the meaningful work of being a foster parent.

Winnie stated that “children learn what they live” (line 73) which is supported by Talebi’s (2015) notion of education being a place where living is learning. This occurred within the participants’ homes with their foster children through the values that they showed. Foster parents can provide spaces for children to learn and grow, simultaneously being educators and caregivers to foster children. This nurtures education and learning in a holistic manner, making connections between foster parents and foster children more meaningful and impactful (Beckett, 2018; Dewey, 1902).

The participants appeared to be quite removed from the formal educational spheres of the children. However, they did put effort into being involved in homework and wanting their foster children to attend and participate in school. Beyond the external visions of being involved in the educational lives of their foster children, the participants engaged themselves thoroughly in the emotional curriculum of their children by establishing a home life that was shared amongst all living in their home. This included setting up boundaries and rules, creating a routine, and giving protection, understanding, encouragement, and help. Further, the participants were committed to their children, and took their role of socializing and providing a home life for them seriously.

However, it is clear from the data that the foster parents could only do so much in terms of creating a home life, because of the limitations placed on them. It is important to understand that building caring relationships takes committed effort and time (Noddings, 2013).

Trauma-Informed Care

Children in foster care experience high rates of trauma (Miranda et al., 2019; Zetlin et al., 2006). There is a necessity to having a trauma-informed lens within the foster care system, including foster care agencies. This furthers the need of developing an understanding of emotional curriculums within the system. The emotional curriculum of the foster care system must include seeing children through a trauma-informed lens. As discussed in the literature review, foster children experience a high rate of trauma and have to navigate the negative effects of trauma on the brain and behaviour (Katz, 2019; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). Therefore, adopting a perspective that incorporates the knowledge of trauma and its effects is vital to the proper care of foster children, as well as foster parents. Incorporating a trauma-informed lens within the foster care system as well as the school system is of utmost importance (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018; The Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014). Understanding how traumatic experiences can alter the development of the brain, especially in the early years of life, is imperative to working with children in foster care.

It is important to note that only one participant used the word “trauma” during his interview. This instance occurred when discussing inconsistency in placements and how that might “add to the trauma” (Leo, line 260). Other participants briefly mentioned abuse that their foster children may have experienced; however, the participants did not explore how abuse can be traumatic for the child and what that might mean for their development and how it might influence their behaviour. The instances when negative behaviour of foster children was

discussed could be reframed within a trauma-informed practice. Situations that were coded as behavioural issues, such as being “a real trouble maker” (Winnie, line 341) and acting “bossy and defiant” (Stella, line 262) are applicable to the understanding of trauma and how it might affect a child’s behaviour, but it was not understood in that way. The participants did not appear to have any training in how experiencing trauma might affect their foster children and did not discuss their foster children’s challenges or realities within the light of a trauma-informed lens. This is problematic (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

Bruce Perry, an expert in how trauma affects the development of a child, has stated that education is one of the most significant elements in the journey of healing from trauma (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). When those involved in the educational lives of foster children, including foster parents, work to understand the trauma history of foster children, they are able to have a positive impact on mitigating the consequences of trauma. A challenge that has been reported by caregivers is communicating with schools on how educators can continue to help their children regulate themselves within a classroom (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), placing children who have experienced trauma and who exude behaviour problems in a “specialized” program in schools can be detrimental for their development and healing. Grouping children who have histories of trauma together can increase the likelihood of more negative behaviours and places a burden on the teacher to focus on the symptoms of the trauma, rather than focus on the root causes and actually teach the children. Further, taking children out of normative classroom experiences isolates them from their peers, which can slow their healing. Adopting a trauma-aware perspective within a caregiving environment, including schools and foster homes, is a necessary step to better support children who have experienced trauma and who respond to perceived threats in a classroom with trauma-behaviours. Building

caring communities is key to the well-being of children and provides space for true learning and growth to occur (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017; Noddings, 2013).

Understanding the effects of trauma can have major implications for children living in foster care. Furthermore, understanding how trauma-informed care is intricately connected to an understanding of emotional curriculum is equally as important. Many of the participants expressed knowledge of their foster children's emotional needs, and deserved validation for this awareness. Providing emotional support is at the core of trauma-informed practices and emotional curriculum. Working towards a holistic welcoming of an emotional curriculum within the foster care system, including schools and foster homes, can be a way forward for providing the best care for children living in foster care.

Limitations of Study

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample size was small, and generalizations are not possible. Further, the sample was also limited in its diversity and exposure to different foster care agencies, as it was conducted from one location, which could result in biased and unbalanced findings. The ethics process and recruitment stage were time-consuming, which resulted in difficulty in data collection. Recruitment occurred through word of mouth due to confidentiality that is required concerning information with vulnerable participants. Further, foster parents have limited time to participate in a research study, so repeated interviews to follow up with the participants to gather more information was not feasible.

Implications for Further Research

Future research can focus on expanding the participant pool, including interviewing foster children, teachers, and social workers. Focus groups could be a useful methodology for this type of research so participants can speak with, learn from, and support each other.

Additionally, there is a need to include more focus on trauma-informed practices in foster care. Future research could focus on the training that foster parents receive, incorporating a more holistic and thorough understanding of trauma-informed practices within foster homes, and how that could include an emotional curriculum.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that foster children experience immense struggles in education and in life (Berg, 2010; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017; Tyre, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009; Zetlin et al., 2012). This study explored what foster parents believe about their roles as foster parents, what they see their foster children learning, and some main challenges that foster parents and foster children face. This study explored the experiences of six different foster parent participants. These experiences were analyzed through a curriculum studies lens and provided rich information concerning the roles of foster parents as caregivers.

It can be concluded that foster parents live within a complex reality. They are doing important work that is filled with challenges. Foster parents experience obstacles and limitations in fulfilling their designated role as caregivers. Additionally, challenges in communicating with the foster care agencies and school systems, as well as issues that the participants' foster children experienced were discussed. This study indicates the importance for understanding the reality of foster parents so that the care for foster children can be improved. Providing an emotional curriculum and understanding of the emotional needs, including trauma-informed care, for foster children is vital to the success of children living within the foster care system.

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Appendix A

Coding of Individual Interviews

Table A1: Coding from Stella's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
17	we had, you know, 20 different foster kids, or 30, I don't really know, in our care	multiple children
29	we would have taken a course that winter, so we probably wouldn't have started until the spring	training (one course)
55	It got a little bit tougher at the end because there were so many more things that you had to document	heavy documentation
58	like kid falls on the sidewalk outside you gotta write down what time they fell how they fell who was with them when they fell. You know, like all that stuff?	heavy documentation
62	You know, you had to write them, you had this binder that, you know, it was much nicer to have your own kids where you didn't have to worry about those itty bitty things.	heavy documentation
67	on the most part, um, partnering with social workers was a positive experience	positive experience with system
68	I think that the kids, um, benefitted from the knowledge and the training that the social workers were able to give us	positive experience with system
69	the training that the social workers were able to give us, and that really helped	positive experience with system, training
71	You never felt like you were out in left field by yourself and you didnt know what you were gunna do	support from system
73	There was a little bit of respite that we did once and a while for another foster family that we knew that was, um, with a high needs child	engagement in system
81	they would never leave unless he felt that you were prepared and ready	support from system
82	in that way I always felt that I had good backup, that we were never expected to deal with something that we couldn't.	support from system
86	They stood with you and by you, and um, yeah, it was good. It was nice.	support from system
91	On the whole, um, we did not have a lot of behavioural um problems	lack of behavioural issues
93	i don't know if that's, you know, because of the kids we had or because there were already kids in the house so they could just jump in with and be a part of	familial values
95	we never had kids for years and years	short term care
97	we always wanted kids younger than our kids	preferences for care
98	the one time we had a teenager who was, who had been in a foster family that we knew and that had gone to the same church and school that our kids did, and so when they moved out of the province, he moved in with us	community values, adaptability
106	It wasn't bad, and that was a good experience as well	positive experience with child
107	He had connections with his birth mom, yep, very good	interactions with birth families
108	positive role within the school system as well	positive experience with school
109	You know, like, having him back and forth with the teachers,	communication (with teachers)
115	Very positive, lots of talk back and forth, you know, how can we help this kid, yeah.	communication (with teachers), positive experience with school
118	most of the other kids that we had weren't school aged kids,	young children
119-121	and if there were school aged kids they would have only been there for you know, two to four weeks, where they might not have gone to school, because they were going to be moving, or going back to mom, or you know	short term care
131	we wanted to be a part of our community and to you know, help where there was a need.	community values
140	So now he had been here with us for a year and a half and we are supposed to give him to someone else? You know?	adoption journey, long term care
143	and so, that was really hard, you know, to think that this has been a mess for this poor kid back and forth and back and forth	empathy
145	in the end, finally, the social worker said "there is a possibility that you could just keep him"	adoption journey
146	and I am going "Oh no we weren't thinking about that!" (laughs)	adoption journey
147	but you know, in his interest, thinking, this poor guy has been to how many houses already.	empathy
150	then you know how much you love a kid that isn't yours, right?	love
153	I am sure you have those, you know, there are always those people who say I would never be able to love a child as much as my own.	love, empathy
155	And I guess you have those thoughts, and then yeah, you have them in your house and you realize, yes, they are different kids, but you don't love them differently.	love, empathy
159	A lot of the kids that we had were under 5 though	young children
160	You know, if we had them for a year, or five months, or whatever, so there wasn't a lot of schooling. I mean, there was a lot of learning	learning at home
163	but not a lot of formal education kind of stuff.	learning at home
165	And how did you end up hearing about foster parenting in general? you said this is a way you want	

	to help and you were like "lets be foster parents", where did that come from?	
169-172	I am just going to guess, I mean, you know what, I know in Stratford, thinking later on, I know that they advertised in the newspaper and in the community, you know, that there is a need for foster parents and things like that. I am not sure if that's what peaked our interest.	community values
186	Um, uh challenges I guess, the biggest challenges would have been um, sometimes dealing with parental visits.	interactions with birth families
188	That was always a little bit of a, well it is something that is important to happen	interactions with birth families
189	and yet lots of times, you know, you bring a kid away for a day and they come back and its like totally a disaster. You know?	interactions with birth families
194	Screaming, crying, whatever, they are just out of routine, its different.	routine, interactions with birth families
195	So, I think, I might have thought that was a bigger problem then than I do now, because I understand more now,	interactions with birth families, empathy
198	in realizing those things, but I think at that time it probably was "oh man, here, she has to go for her visit today, so that means tomorrow, well I have to deal with that", you know?	interactions with birth families
202	I don't, well, we have always had really good social workers	positive experience with system
205	I feel like for many people that makes or breaks it, in that case. E: Yeah it does! I think so. Yeah.	engagement in system
211	I am going to say that, this is so different looking at it now.	gained knowledge, experienced
212	At that time in my life, Im thinking, one of the things we really liked is that is taught us and our kids about different families and different ways that, you know, they functioned	gained knowledge, empathy
214	so you know, it made you more open to the needs and it helped you to respect how other people were raised or, how they saw things.	empathy
218	It's a very interesting, um, you know, journey, when I think about it.	adoption journey
219	The benefits are that we realized how important these kids are and how easy it was to love them, no matter who	empathy, love
221	Which enabled us to go beyond fostering to adoption.	adoption journey
223	That was definitely a plus for us.	positive experience with child
225	I mean, it was rewarding to be, especially when parents could figure stuff out and get things together and the kids could go home. That was pretty neat.	interactions with birth families
229	we also had kids, who right from the start were taken from their mom and were never ever gonna see her, you know	interactions with birth families
231	um, I think one, she was adopted by a family, she was adopted by a family	adoption journey
232	I think we had her for about 4 months, and she was adopted by a couple who couldn't have children, and they had experienced, you know infertility and tried drugs, and um, whatever they could	adoption journey
235	yeah, then we got to meet them. And that was like WOW. It was so neat cause you know, they said "Thank you so much for taking care of her for these months" and you know, its like really?	adoption journey
246	yeah, I think, unfortunately, a lot of the situations are that these kids are behind or struggling in different areas, you know?	struggle in school
249	Not always because of learning disabilities, but maybe just, the environmental issues that have come and made them behind, or whatever	challenges in environment
251-255	When we had one set of kids, 3 sisters, who came once. ... They, um, had never been in the same school, gone to the same school in September that they finished in in June.	inconsistency in school placements
257	yet those girls were with us for, I don't know, 3 months ... two of them we have seen on and off	short term care, inconsistency in placements
260	they are just the nicest kids and they say "We had so much fun at your house!" and whatever, so that was pretty positive	positive experience with child
262	the one had a little bit of a behaviour challenge, you know, she was quite, um, yeah, she was a bit bossy and defiant	behavioural issues
264	she didn't want to do a whole lot and there was some issues	behavioural issues
265	but there was some good um, rapport with the school that they were in.	communication (with teachers/school)
267	that worked okay	communication (with teachers/school)
268	I think as far as educational wise, I loved having the little ones. You know, like puzzles and books were huge.	learning at home
271	You know, so, for the first, most of the years that we fostered, we never even had a TV	learning at home
272	so, it was a lot of games and lots of books and lots of puzzles.	learning at home
278	we never had any conflicts as to deciding on a punishment, or things like that, especially for the one girl	communication (with teachers/school), positive experience with school
281	that young boy that we had that was in the public school. I sometimes was frustrated because they let him get away with stuff	negative experience with school
282	like didn't make him do some of the things. and he was a little bit lazy.	negative experience with school, lack of consequences for the child from school
288	if he could go play hockey, then he would like to go play hockey, but you know, as far as any work that he had to do, he didn't put a lot of effort into it	characterization of the child
290	He didn't want to work in the barn, you know, he was just not into doing anything	characterization of the child

291	So that made me frustrated sometimes, you know, "don't let him get away with that! He can do that. There is no reason he can't do that!" You know?	negative experience with school, lack of consequences for the child from school
295	Just because he is a foster kid doesn't mean you have to give him an excuse to not do that.	lack of consequences for the child from school
298	And I was all over, you know, if you want, I can write it for him	willingness to help
299	there is no reason he can't do an essay on something that he needs to do an essay on	negative experience with school
300	You know, I can help him with it, whatever, but	willingness to help
301	So sometimes I felt that they gave those kids a little bit of a way out.	negative experience with school
303	the girls, as far other than having had starting at different schools every year,	inconsistency in school placements
304	I was surprised at how smart they were	characterization of the child
306	When I think they had a pretty rough home life	characterization of birth home life
307	I think the oldest girl was kind of like a parent to the mom	characterization of birth home life
308	They were smart just because they knew what they had to do to get through.	characterization of the child
310	So totally different than having a little one, right?	older children
314	the same situation, I wouldn't let them get away with much	boundaries/rules
315	It was a kitchen table kind of situation, you know. Pull it out, let's get it done.	willingness to help
317	And let's see what we can do	willingness to help
317	We were always willing to help.	willingness to help
322	We didn't let him get away with it! haha	boundaries/rules
325	our kids aren't going to get away with that, so you're not going to either!	boundaries/rules
326	because as soon as you start that, well our kids are going to go "well why should I do that?" right?	boundaries/rules
329	no, you do it and you do it just like everyone else	boundaries/rules
333	It was part of the education, I would say, you know?	boundaries/rules, learning at home
335	You teach them how to work.	learning at home
350	stability. That would have been a big thing	stability
351	in that same vein, I think schedule.	routine
351	I think, where things are the same every day	routine
352	A lot of caring	love
352	loving through, you know, games, playing stuff together.	love
355	something some of them never had, like "games, what is that?"	characterization of birth home life
359	so I think those are the big things	learning at home
360	Because those children just, all they need is some love and stability	love, stability
361	you just hope that you are gonna impart that in some way, shape or form.	learning at home
363	To offer them hope	love, learning at home
363	There is good stuff in this world	love, empathy
364	and we can figure it out and you can get there.	love, willingness to help
367	i think that would be a big thing, that um, there are ways to make life better	love, willingness to help
368	I am always thinking of these older kids, you know, teach them how to make choices that are good	empathy, learning at home
371	I think in some of those cases, that there are things we worked on with the social worker.	positive experience with system
372	You know, positive identities	learning at home
373	and safe home practices	learning at home
374	Things like that, that we would do together, depending on the situation depending that the kid came out of	positive experience with system, learning at home
396	yeah because we wanted to concentrate on the kids that we had in the house.	multiple children
400	I know that, like today it is SO much harder to foster parent	gained knowledge, empathy
401	There is sooo much documenting that has to happen, and that is kind of hard I find	heavy documentation
402	Just, yeah, it makes it so tough	heavy documentation
403	I think, discipline is more difficult now	rules from system
423	I think it is really hard for foster parents today because they have a lot less of the, now they want them to nurture them, and yet there is so many limits to what they can do.	rules from system, negative experience with system
430	I think one of the things that was a benefit to us was things that the agency would do for a foster family	positive experience with system
433	so there was a lot of support.	support from system
435	and I think that is very valuable	support from system, positive experience with system
436	like you never felt like you know, if you thought "You know what, I am going crazy" then they would find a place for some kids for a night or two, right?	support from system
439	And so you'd meet these families that were doing the same things you were doing	support from system, engagement in system
442	and I think that was really a big bonus for us. Just to know that there were other people going through the same kinds of things	support from system, positive experience with system
444	yeah, it was just good, I think it is a good community kind of thing to do.	support from system, community values
445	Because it builds your confidence, I guess, and gives you better resources to know how to proceed with your raising of these kids.	support from system

Table A2: Coding from Winnie's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
5	There are many "different children with different backgrounds".	multiple children
5	The child "could be very sad, or happy. Rebellious."	characterization of the child
6	With the babies, it is unknown because their personalities are not yet showing.	younger children
10	"My son."	multiple children
10	When I had my son I knew I did not want any more children after that, but my son wanted a brother	personal fulfillment
11	so I decide to do foster care	engagement in system
11	And now, "my son is happy".	multiple children
14	Some children are "rebellious, they talk back, they steal"	characterization of the child
14	"The system is strict, there are things that you cannot do to a foster child.	negative experience with system
15	There is a limit to what you can do	negative experience with system
16	If you cannot cope, you call the agency and the system deals with it, not you."	support from system
17	Sometimes children run away	characterization of the child
17	if they run away I give them one more chance but if it happens again then they cannot stay in my home	boundaries/rules
21	For the child, I talk with them and encourage them, and that is a reward.	love, encouragement
22	For me, "it makes me see life at a different level"	empathy
23	There are different races, colours, ways, tastes, doing things differently	empathy, gained knowledge
24	You "learn to cope with their [the foster child's] differences".	empathy, gained knowledge
25	You have to respect what they eat, things like that.	empathy
26	There is a wide range of differences and you have to be "open to knowledge and to their needs".	empathy, characterization of the child, awareness of needs
29	The "majority of them have challenges, like with French and English"	struggle in school
30	There are struggles with language.	struggle in school
32	One child I have is very bright but has attention issues	characterization of the child
32	Another child, he has language challenges	characterization of the child
33	I say, "I am gonna go ask for help" with him because I took note of his challenges	support from system, awareness of needs
34	so I called the social worker and now he has a tutor and a speech therapist	support from system
35	You have to be aware of what is going on	awareness of needs
35	be aware of their reactions to different things"	awareness of needs
36	you take note of their challenges and get them help.	support from system
39	"[One child] is willing to learn anything and I like that about him"	characterization of the child
39	I like that he is open to learning	characterization of the child
40	wants to share with me what he learned at school.	characterization of the child
41	I don't like it "when I see them struggling. It's hard."	empathy
41	I try to make it easier. We "work together."	willingness to help
45	I help them with it	willingness to help
46	I "see what they have to do and get everything ready"	willingness to help, awareness of needs
46	"I don't write for them but I assist them	willingness to help
47	but I think that he should have at least a small book to practice reading	negative experience with school
48	But that is just the way the school he goes to does things.	acceptance of how things are
53	There is "not enough discipline at the school."	negative experience with school
54	"They get away with everything."	negative experience with school
54	"Because of the system in place, they are afraid of getting sued."	negative experience with school
56	"But in my home, I am very strict,	boundaries/rules
56	and I discipline here, with age appropriate discipline."	boundaries/rules
57	One example is a young boy I have, who is new to my home, his teacher asked how he is at home because at school he is disruptive and does not listen,	communication (with teachers/school)
58	but here in my home there are no issues.	boundaries/rules
60	Just last night everyone was downstairs and everyone was hyper, and I came down and they saw me and they knew right away that they needed to be quiet	boundaries/rules
61	So we go up and we have a time out,	boundaries/rules
62	and then they go back downstairs and they were listening and were calm."	boundaries/rules, characterization of the child
66	"I want them to be good citizens of this land."	encouragement
66	I want them to "go to school, get an education to the highest degree, and go for it."	encouragement
67	We all "have to learn to love and to trust and that's what I want for them."	love, empathy
71	"Love."	love
71	I want them to learn to "love and respect one another. That goes a long way."	love, empathy
72	"I don't want them to go out and bully others so I need to stop the bullying at home first."	learning at home, empathy

73	"Children learn what they live."	learning at home
76	There are "a lot of behavioural problems."	behavioural issues
76	It happens because children get removed from their homes	characterization of birth home life
77	and "they don't know who to trust, not even the system.	characterization of birth home life
77	It impacts them hugely."	characterization of the child, characterization of birth home life
80	"For me, I try to say less to him [my foster child], and listen to what he has to say.	love, empathy
81	I don't think that children should carry that burden of being an adult."	empathy
81	I don't want the children to get mixed messages, so I try to communicate with the social worker and build trust	positive experience with system
83	If I tell my foster child something that is not true, he will not trust me,	gain trust
84	so I only tell him when I know it is happening.	gain trust
84	As you build relationship, the children "open up and talk to you.	gain trust, love
85	That should be confidential, as long as they are not hurting others. This builds trust."	gain trust, learning at home
87	"The first day they come into the home is very hard.	empathy
87	They don't know you and what will happen to them."	empathy
90	"I try to reassure them that everything's going to be okay.	love, empathy
90	And at the same time, I set boundaries."	boundaries/rules
91	If they are afraid, I say it is okay to be afraid but I still set boundaries.	boundaries/rules
93	"It's heartbreaking and it is also very hard for parents	empathy, characterization of birth home life
93	I try my best to make the kids comfortable."	love
96	"In this work, you take care of yourself first	awareness of needs
96	I wake up at 5 am and I take care of me, and I make my bed	awareness of needs
97	then I go into the kitchen and make the children breakfast and lunches and then I start waking them up."	awareness of needs
99	I teach them to make their bed	boundaries/rules, learning at home
99	I give them "age appropriate" responsibilities	boundaries/rules
100	I tell them when they are an adult they won't have mommy or daddy with them and they won't have me	boundaries/rules, learning at home
101	and so I teach them that they "have to do these things".	boundaries/rules, learning at home
102	I try to "make them independent and responsible."	learning at home

Table A3: Coding from Audrey's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
13	he basically lived with us, for years, because she took care of him,	family connection
14	his mom was a drug addict and the whole nine yards.	characterization of birth home life
15	She was an absentee mom	characterization of birth home life
16	So he stayed with us and we got really really attached to this kid.	love
18	So finally foster care, they took all the kids from her, and so we wanted him	love
19	They wouldn't give us him	obstacles with system
20	They tried to give me his sibling, they tried all kinds of things.	negative experience with system
27	I am not really quite sure, because when we went to court, because we couldn't be involved in, because its for family only	obstacles with system
29	we were outside of the courtroom waiting	obstacles with system
30	But it was never presented to the judge as an alternative	obstacles with system
31	None of them wanted the kids, obviously, they had been absent their whole lives, so they didnt want them.	characterization of birth home life
36	anyway, they ended up giving this child to his biological father	characterization of birth home life
38	Who didn't want him. really did not want him	characterization of birth home life
46	anyway, blah blah blah blah blah, he is a drug addict, well he is addicted to drugs too	characterization of birth home life
47	he wasn't working, he was, whatever, just a bum	characterization of birth home life
48	So, all this to say, for 2-3 years we tried to get him.	obstacles with system
50	Yeah but they didn't want to know nothing about it.	obstacles with system, negative experience with the system
50	He has to go to a family member, and you are not family	obstacles with system
51	But then they tried to get me to take his siblings.	negative experience with system
52	And it's like, why would I take his siblings when I cant have him?	negative experience with system
53	Anyways, they put this sibling in my home	lack of engagement in system
55	I think he was there for like a month, and it was like, this sibling is really off the wall	characterization of the child
58	There's 6 of them, or 7, and they were all just unsupervised, or whatever	characterization of birth home life
60	it was weird, like why would I want this other kid when I really want him	lack of engagement in system
63	They wouldn't give us him. You know, he is with his father, nah nah nah	negative experience with system
64	then we thought, okay, well, maybe we will become foster parents. and so we did.	adaptability

67	We filed all the papers, and whatever, hoping we could get him	training
68	Didn't work out.	lack of engagement in system
74	anyways, they gave me these 3 kids	multiple children
81	we said "okay, we'll try."	adaptability
84	all the crap they put you through, the information they want from you, the references, the whole nine yards	training
85	So I figured, okay, we will try. If I can't help him, maybe we will help another kid	adaptability
87	So we ended up, well we were ready to take one, maybe two of the siblings, and we ended up with 3 complete strange kids	multiple children, lack of engagement in system
90	And it was like, disaster from day one	negative experience with child
92	It was just so bizarre. I found it bizarre	confusing experience
92	after all the papers and the crap that you've asked from us, to see if we are good people	confusing experience
94	capable of raising kids, none of it actually even counted	confusing experience, obstacles from system
94	It was like, they were giving us guidelines of what we should be doing	rules from system
99	its almost like, they want you to qualify you to be a good parent, but thats not really what they are looking for	rules from system
101	They are looking for someone who is going to follow their rules.	rules from system, obstacles from system
108	And if you don't want me to do it, then maybe you should do it.	rules from system, frustration
111	Everyone. The whooole nine yards.	negative experience with system
113	from day one, they were saying, they were explaining the rules	rules from system
117	I live in the west island, I dont wanna run into town every time the kid has a cold, or needs a vaccine	rules from system
120	There are peditricians across the street. Like, why would I run to Batshaw?	rules from system, frustration
123	and they said they prefer it because they already have their files and blah blah blah, and so I am like, okay	rules from system, frustration, lack of engagement in system
134	But they had told us, you have to take them to take them to the Batshaw dentists	rules from system
137	its just crazy. They gave us shit for that.	rules from system, frustration
149	I had asked them from the beginning, so you're going to give me phone numbers and the doctors names and whatever	obstacles with system, frustration, lack of support
154	It was always like, well, we will ask the social worker and she will get back to you and she never did then I'd see the social worker and the would say "oh well, yeah, I dont know, Im gunna have to get back to you. I have to look	obstacles with system
156	And so it was just bullshit.	obstacles with system
158	It was bullshit. Its like, do you want me to do it?	frustration
160	Its so easy for me to book an appointment with a peditrician or frickin dentist that's here	obstacles with system, frustration
162	but you are telling me I have to do it your way, and yet you aren't giving me the information.	obstacles with system, rules from system
188	maybe you should let me do it?	frustration
191	That's how I ended up feeling. It's not a group home here	obstacles with system
192	I am not a social worker, I am a parent.	lack of support
194	So do you want me to parent them? Or do you want me to be a social worker? Cause I am not that.	frustration, obstacles with system
197	That's how I felt. I felt that it was really stupid, their system.	obstacles with system, frustration, lack of support
201	Blocked. Completely blocked	lack of support
201	Once they got you there, it was like, I don't know, could you give me some support?	lack of support
202	I would call them and I would say, well what do I do with this? They don't tell you why. Just, that's the court order	lack of support
207	He is not allowed to, unsupervised. and eventually it came out that he was going to his fathers, like, what do you want me to do for that?	frustration, lack of support
218	I had asked to switch their schools to here, and they said no, we don't want to do that	lack of engagement, obstacles with system
219	Because he might be going back to his family.	interactions with birth family
220	Okay, so what, I am gunna go sit outside his school and supervise him?	frustration
227	But if you want someone to take care of the kid, let them take care of them	frustration, lack of support
250	I almost felt actually like they were creating a problem.	frustration
253	the kid just wants to be taken care of	characterization of the child
254	You are making them think like they have rights and all kinds of expectations that come with this package of being a foster kid	frustration, lack of engagement in system
269	Totally, and you didn't feel listened to or supported in your ability to parent this child. Yeah! Yeah.	lack of support
287	I just didn't like the whole system. I didn't like it.	negative experience with system
291	You know, when they first first came, I thought, it's really going to work out cause the kids were, like so happy to be there	characterization of the child
297	if they would have just butted out and left it alone, they would have really learned to fit in.	frustration, obstacles with system
314	But, see, that system, the way it is, they don't have to work for anything	frustration, negative experience with system
319	You want us to raise them then they are not part of the family because you are just giving them what	obstacles with system

	they want and they don't have to tow the line	
321	They don't have to produce anything, they don't have to behave, they don't have to nothing	characterization of the child
325	I just find it so stupid, cause that is not parenting.	frustration, negative experience with system
330	To be an institutional gatekeeper	rules from system
332	Because, yeah, we weren't supposed to put any of our values into it (scoffs). Or that's how I felt.	rules from system
339	Horrible. Horrible.	negative experience with school, learning challenges
341	Well they were both failing. Everything	learning challenges
341	Uh, the boy, was a real trouble maker.	behavioural issues
344	he would have fights, he would tell the teachers to fuck off, I mean, you name it	behavioural issues
345	I was getting phone calls, almost daily. From his principle.	negative experience with school
346	they put him in a special program thing for a week or two weeks there	learning challenges
347	He was, yeah, completely not respecting anything.	behavioural issues
350	well I would assume, the same old same old. I don't have to follow any rules	characterization of the child
351	Who is going to make me follow the rules? I don't have a parent.	characterization of the child
352	I have a social worker that I cry to and she gives me what I want	characterization of the child
356	well, the little girl was very social and I really thought that could have helped her	characterization of the child
358	Like she was the kind of kid that you could just feel like she needed to be hugged, you know?	characterization of the child
361	But um, she was flunking everything	learning challenges
361	She had learning disabilities up the, like, just crazy. I don't think she ever learned how to read.	learning challenges
365	they were going to push her through to high school	negative experience with school, learning challenges
366	Her report card came back and she flunked everything, and they had a meeting to push her through to high school.	negative experience with school, learning challenges
369	I told her, I mean, you aren't ready for high school	negative experience with school
372	And I took them to a, to have them tested for learning disabilities, to try to get them support	engagement in system
374	nothing panned out	frustration
375	I told the social worker, uh, cause they finished school in June, and I said by September if they are still with me, I said I am not taking them back to that school	negative experience with school
380	They were with a bunch of kids that they grew up with and its the same old, same old	negative experience with school
383	Like, lets give them a fresh look	engagement in system
383	Lets put them in school were they are not already labelled	engagement in system
386	And they didn't let us do that	negative experience with school, lack of support
387	What, do you want me to just pass the next 10 years watching these kids?	frustration, obstacles with system
390	And I don't understand all that rigmarole about all the questions and all the things that you made us go through to get to this point to be able to take these kids	training, negative experience with system
392	To just disregard it, to not let us do a single thing we want to do.	lack of support
395	I would never do it again.	negative experience with system
404	I think that there are a lot of people out there that are doing it for, maybe the wrong reasons	frustration
406	But if you want me to parent, let me parent	obstacles with system
412	we didn't really have that much experience, because they came in March, February-March, and by June they were done, right?	short term care
415	But uh, no I wasn't impressed with their school at all	negative experience with school
417	The girl was flunking everything, yeah, but she wasn't behaving badly and stuff, It was just learning.	learning challenges
421	I mean they didn't really do anything. They sent him to that place for a week, and whatever, and that was it	lack of support in school
430	Why is he getting away with this? I don't understand. How are you going to teach him anything? Respect?	boundaries/rules, frustration
433	You aren't teaching him anything except that he can get away with everything	boundaries/rules
453	And every time we called and asked them for help, they were like, "well I don't know" and "we'll get back to you".	lack of support
466	Similar approach as my own kids.	routine
468	Your homework is, like your schooling, it's your most important thing.	boundaries/rules
469	It is not my life, it's your life. Do you want to be a success or do you want to be a failure?	encouragement
475	I put it to them, you have to be responsible for it.	learning at home, teaching responsibility
476	Like, I'll help you	willingness to help
478	but you have to put in the work.	learning at home
481	I can support for you and get you the help that you need, whatever, but like, it is up to you.	willingness to help
484	They just didn't get it.	frustration, lack of engagement in system
491	Like they're children who need special care, and I get all that	awareness of needs
492	But they also need to get a reality check.	boundaries/rules
494	And no one is giving them a reality check. They are just, anything goes.	boundaries/rules
503	Like I am sorry I am not, uh, I haven't had you since you were a baby, and I don't have a connection	lack of engagement in system

	with you	
504	but my way of making a connection with you is trying to improve your life	willingness to help
505	Not now, not tomorrow, but like, future.	willingness to help
519	Well that anything is possible. As long as they put in the effort	learning at home
521	Like, and you have to take responsibility for yourself.	teaching responsibility
524	Period. Nobody is gonna come and do it for ya, definitely not social services.	lack of engagement in system
533	Well I wanted them to learn that there is a whole other array of possibilities besides what they have already experienced.	learning at home
536	Like they have only seen this much, and it is probably 90% cloudy, and there is a lot of other life out there.	encouragement
565	Obviously we aren't doing it the way you want us to be doing it so maybe we shouldn't be doing it anymore.	frustration, obstacles with system
568	Like I am not doing this, I am not doing it for the money, I'm not doing it for the glory	engagement in system
569	I started it to help one particular kid, and you're not giving me that kid	willingness to help
570	You're not giving me all of this, and now you are complaining on top of it, so you know what, its not worth it for me.	negative experience with system
577	They don't want us to help these kids	obstacles with system
578	they just want us to keep them quiet and pacified until they get to 18 and then they can kick them out of the system	frustration, negative experience with system
580	They just don't want problems	frustration, obstacles with system
592	as long as you all abide by these stupid rules and the kid isn't complaining, then everrrrrything is wonderful	frustration
597	But then it wasn't wonderful at their homes either, right?	characterization of birth home life
600	So why did they wait 12 years to take them away from them?	frustration, obstacles with system
604	No, but what is the bottom line? Is it just a business? Like any other business?	obstacles with system
608	I would like to think that you are actually helping some kids, but I haven't seen it	negative experience with system
609	I haven't seen any person that's gotten out of there and said, "wow what a great experience!"	negative experience with system
612	They are all bitching and complaining, and they are all miserable, they are all uneducated	behavioural issues, negative experience with system
615	They are gonna send him back, and say, you are on your own	negative experience with school
616	He doesn't have his high school graduation paper, he doesn't have anything else.	negative experience with school
631	His whole life is lacking.	characterization of the child
666	I wouldn't even want to	frustration
666	But I am so jaded by my own experience.	negative experience with system
668	I would say to people before they became foster parents... don't do it.	negative experience with system
672	It was such a bad experience. It really was. I can honestly say at this point in my life it was a bad experience.	negative experience with system
719	Well, I think it should change. I really do.	frustration
732	Its like they wanted us to take all the emotion out of it	frustration, lack of support
732	and just do, like yep, these are the rules, boom boom boom, follow them	boundaries/rules
738	Like, there are group homes, so you could put the kids there. Why are you looking for foster parents	confusing experience
741	Why are you trying to integrate them into families if you don't really want them integrated into families?	confusing experience

Table A4: Coding from Leo's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
34	I put, well, my easy response is vocation.	vocation
39	I am probably at the other end of that, 17 years later, but I felt vocation. I dont think I could have resisted.	vocation
43	Well they go from bad to worse to wonderful	multiple children, experienced
43	So, 17 years, that means 7 children, youth. Only boys	multiple children, experienced
46	Um, that was the hardest. My first one was the hardest.	negative experience with child
49	Oh because he was a broken kid, and he couldn't be repaired	characterization of the child
49	So at one point, when I realized years later, that, here I am giving, giving, giving, trying, trying, trying, and you know, he ran away	engagement in system
56	So, it was a process for the adoption, that never happened	adoption journey
57	He ran away, got into trouble with the law. He ended up in prison, he was 2 years in prison	behavioural issues, incarceration
61	but he was the worst. That was the most challenging.	negative experience with child
72	no, he is in detention at the moment. He may integrate back	incarceration
76	Or, well he wants to come. But he has to show he can handle it. And he has to be trustworthy	boundaries/rules
77	And he did a few things that were pretty bad.	behavioural issues
85	You are an advocate	advocacy
87	I think that is the key role	advocacy
87	They don't say it that way when you are going through foster parenting, but I would say advocacy is a	advocacy

	huge role	
88	I feel like I am an advocate for the child	advocacy
89	And I have to stand up to the system.	advocacy
90	Sometimes, to make sure they get the best treatment. Um, make sure they get medical, the best school	advocacy
91	And interface with the parent, if there is one. Which can be challenging	interactions with birth family
92	I've never had, actually my biggest challenge would be from the system itself.	negative experience with system
95	Institutional mentality.	negative experience with system
103	So he was with me one year. And I couldn't get eligibility, because he was from out west.	obstacles with system
106	His mother had not been educated, she was from out west, so I took him and enrolled him in a private school.	engagement in system
109	Well because you're up against a system that insists, in Quebec, that you have eligibility or you have to go to French. You are not going to send a kid, at 14, to French school, who is not going to stay	obstacles with system
114	So I sent him to a private school and sent Batshaw the bill. And they laughed, and I paid the bill anyway	engagement in system
115	So I would say that it is a bit extreme, but that is one example where the eligibility actually came through, but it came through in November, and this is back in June when you knew you had to move fast	obstacles with system
118	And these things do not move fast.	obstacles with system
122	they were students, dentist students, and I would say the level of care was not adequate	obstacles with system
126	so I just said, forget this, and I put him on my insurance policy. My private insurance policy, and got him to a dentist. Like I was just frustrated with that.	frustration, engagement in system
130	I had those means	engagement in system
132	And I have a work environment as a minister, where the church said, of course, we will cover your foster kids	external support
133	A lot of jobs would not, unless they are adopted, or your own	external support
134	So those are a few examples where I think the key word would be advocacy	advocacy
138	And I couldn't wait. Like a report, a neurologist, you don't wait. You don't go through a free whatever. You find what you need. Any of us would do that.	engagement in system
142	So find it for a kid, who doesn't have a real defense	advocacy
142	And you are his defense. So I would define the role more in that way.	advocacy
145	and also because the kids I have had had needed that advocacy	awareness of needs
146	They needed to know that I was there for them and I was rooting for them	awareness of needs, advocacy
148	that I would stand up against anybody and take them on.	advocacy
152	Um, I would say that um, well I mean, one has to, uh, have a clear sense of who one is	self awareness
153	So this wasn't meeting a personal need, in terms of, I would be dating a person. The kid was there, I was the parent.	boundaries/rules
156	Always being clear about my role. Boundaries always very clear	boundaries/rules
162	So as I had children, foster kids, and treated them as the same family, you know, if there is a gift for one, there is a gift for all, so you kind of create that environment of justice and equality	family values
164	So it created I would say a deep healing	self awareness
168	so, well that was a clearly personal benefit. The feeling that something deep inside of me was reconciled, as I had and fostered kids.	self awareness
170	And felt empathy. In many ways, for what they were experiencing	empathy
172	Or had, at least, had felt that in my own life.	empathy, self awareness
173	So this was a, and every time, it kind of let me go deeper into, you know, that inner kind of world	self awareness
178	I think by 15 years, I am going, "wow this is a real benefit to me".	self awareness
192	So I am conscious that, when kids are in care, um, its already hard	empathy, awareness of needs
193	But if you had those other dimensions, for example, if you are in the foster care system, it depends on the level of commitment	engagement in system
195	I think foster care can be a wonderful thing, a caring thing, but it also can not be so great.	positive experience with system, negative experience with system
198	So, if people aren't going, a parent or a foster parent, doesn't go the extra mile, then the kid may be losing out on the extras	engagement in system
199	Like after school programs, uh, anything to help them integrate and get the services they need	engagement in system
203	I would say the biggest challenge a lot of foster kids, majority of these kids, is just to have a friend	challenges of social life in care
207	He was in a very specialized school, with St. Michel, a school, which was a horrible place!	negative experience with school
208	They had given up on their kids, and I felt a real sense of "are you kidding?"	negative experience with school
209	You know, he's not learning, there's no education, its just about control, behaviour	negative experience with school
210	And he would act out, like act out. Police called. Hospitalized. Really big acting out	behavioural issues
211	So, I went to my local school and said to the principle, I live in the neighbourhood, I can be five minutes away, uh, if there is an issue. But this kid needs an opportunity.	engagement in system
216	So I did and she said, well you know, this is a kid who on paper, we would never take	characterization of the child
217	And I said, well, that's because he is not in stability	stability
218	So I had to sell myself and I had a co-parent	external support
224	So the school took a chance, and had brought him into a regular French school in the neighbourhood	engagement in system
225	According to postal code, which is the way it is supposed to work.	awareness of needs, advocacy
228	And, he did well. I would say he did well enough the first year	positive experience with school

231	And that was a wonderful match, a wonderful match.	positive experience with school
234	Well, because it was a bridge between uh going towards high school who are not ready, emotionally not ready, academically not ready, it was a 2 year program	positive experience with school
236	And it gave him all the chances that he needed to, well he blew a lot of those chances, but he had all that he needed	positive experience with school
244	He had a lot of changes.	inconsistency in placements/schools
	So, I think the challenges are pretty evident linguistically, academically, falling through cracks	learning challenges
245	And then needing specialized something, that a school board can't provide	awareness of needs
247	You gotta find it. You gotta pay for it.	engagement in system
249	Or you wait in the system, and the system is too slow. You have kids who are in crisis now.	obstacles with system
252	So back to the advocacy, so nothing really negative about the school system	advocacy
253	cause its not the school system, its how foster kids don't quite, they are not normalized.	negative experience with system
258	So this situation takes them from here to here	inconsistency in placements/schools
259	you might have to move out of your school that you were in, so you are losing your connections, your friends	inconsistency in placements/schools, challenges of social life in care
260	It adds to the trauma.	trauma awareness, challenges of social life in care
264	In behaviour, aggressiveness	behavioural issues
264	when they were a little younger they could control when they go to the washroom. It was an act of control	awareness of needs
270	its kind of that, that link between self-control, self-preservation, self-affirmation, and then being told: no choice, no choice, must do, have to. Obligation	characterization of the child
275	For children, any child, but especially for a child in care who doesn't have the same status.	characterization of the child
280	Um, well I would say that one example is there was a *community school* that took a chance.	positive experience with school
284	I think that, in that case, I was let down, and I had to find information. And I was thinking, I had to look for it	engagement in system
287	and then, to be told, the best place is over here, but no one told me that no one told me that the best place is there.	obstacles with system
290	So sometimes, I look back and I say, if you are just a regular parent, or not, well just a parent who maybe doesn't have internet at home, maybe doesn't have the wherewithal	obstacles with system, lack of support
294	Like, a lot of parents don't have that confidence	obstacles with system
294	And if they are kids in care, you don't want the issues known, you are embarrassed	obstacles with system
299	its like that, um, those examples when a professional will actually step forward, a social worker in a school, or a professional, or an administrator, or a principle, and just make that, will pause enough for you to say, and to talk, and to find a solution.	positive experience with system
304	So I have had those very good experiences.	positive experience with system
304	But that's also because I present well. I am a minister. If I have to, I will wear a collar.	engagement in system
310	I am not being looked down on, but I am not looking down on. So I see a partnership, right?	engagement in system
327	So I would say, that inflexibility at times, its not about fostering, its just about institutionalism	negative experience with system
329	And its full of shit. Its not about the wellbeing of the child, or a parent	negative experience with system
332	as to a child staying at home in a natural environment with a biological parent, or them being placed. Because sometimes its just desperation.	awareness of complexity of system
336	And it's no reflection on love or commitment, it's just the reflection of screwy timetables, or working at night and who is going to care for the child. So, I have seen those kind of, uh, imbalances.	awareness of complexity of system
345	Well, because, you are lucky if they can handle a school day	awareness of needs, struggle in school
345	So they handled the school day. And you gotta conclude it	awareness of needs
346	and put a little encouragement at the end of the day and say you did great, and now come, let's go to the park	encouragement
348	Now its reward, now its play, you know, give some TV time	awareness of needs
349	my kids, my foster kids, can't, could not handle adding to their day.	awareness of needs
353	so I got a tutor for my actual foster son, and I paid whatever, I got a tutor and paid the amount	engagement in system
354	I could not find anything in the resources that could help me	lack of support
355	Or there was something available in the West Island or downtown. YEAH ITS NOT REASONABLE	lack of support
360	So they came to my house, and they did a wonderful job	engagement in system
365	If you have to, during recess, where teachers would keep children. We negotiated this	engagement in system, external support
369	But then get through it and then after, you can do cadets, football.	encouragement
372	So those were negotiated possibilities. but that means someone is willing to negotiate.	external support
375	And that's empowering for them.	encouragement
381	So I see them learning that they are not socially adept	challenges of social life in care
382	I see them learning that they cannot fit into a normalcy	struggle in school, challenges of social life in care
383	I see them learning that they gotta have a small class cause they are dumb	learning challenges
384	Um, they need all that extra that other kids seem to be not needing	learning challenges
385	which is not true, but again, its perception	empathy
391	Well, there is a challenge. Because if it is not congruent between home and school, you got a challenge	awareness of challenges
392	So sometimes you have to change schools.	awareness of needs

393	Like last year, I had to get a new school. And he got a great school.	positive experience with school
394	but it was downtown and so you are trusting a 14 year old to get there and to be where he needs to be, and he couldn't handle it.	negative experience with system
399	So, but that was the best school. Or, the best for his level, for his integration	awareness of complexity of system
402	So, I um, it's such a fine balance between the individual, the kid, a foster parent, a school, and then you have social services	awareness of complexity of system
403	Where really I have no status, so I can't sign anything related to school.	lack of status as foster parent
408	It's not the parent, the biological parent. I get the call. Sickness, truancy, right? I am the defacto parent in that academic work.	lack of status as foster parent
411	Well, I say, well, you sign. If you want to be correct, just put another category on the paper that says foster parent, and I sign	lack of status as foster parent
413	And I have no issue with that. Well, with social services a bit	lack of status as foster parent
414	But I never had parents who were interfering. They didn't want to carry that.	interactions with birth family
417	They don't want to go to the meetings, they aren't going to pay for private education. They aren't gonna do that	interactions with birth family
424	Those challenges are changing	obstacles with system
428	Well, that's what we want. And she became my worker, for 15 years. She retired two years ago. So that was pretty amazing, that continuity was exceptional.	stability
432	That continuity was great. I had the stability	stability
432	But the kids get unstability, they get changes, constantly	inconsistency in placements, inconsistency in school placements
433	So now, with the new CIUSSS, the new system, I say kids are gonna get more screwed then ever	obstacles with system
434	There is less time energy, there is less freshness	obstacles with system
442	So I say, with these new changes, it will be tougher with foster parents now	lack of status as foster parent
443	When things are slippery, slidy, and I would say some foster parents, I think the financial motivation, you have to be <i>very</i> careful	awareness of complexity of system
445	I have a full time job... I had the freedom to make sure that I am maxing them for the benefit of the, the child	awareness of needs
450	So if I am going on vacation, they are going on vacation	awareness of needs
456	If I was relying on this [money from being a FP], maybe I would be more cautious about rocking the boat or challenging the system.	awareness of complexity of system
466	I think, just generally kindness	care
466	Um how to live in relationship to others	learning at home
467	That it can be relationship based, not rule based, but rules are part of it.	boundaries/rules
468	I always go towards grace rather than judgment	care, understanding
470	I will make accommodation, and I will even cover for them in certain cases	awareness of needs
487	yeah, and share the wrath of the social services. I got shit, and he didn't get shit.	care, encouragement
492	when you actually work to build a relationship with a kid, you know, so, he is not sick. But, you understand what he went through that weekend.	understanding
494	And that he is actually sick in a different way. Psychologically, but he is not sick physically	trauma awareness
495	So I have that day, and it might be what he needs.	awareness of needs
498	So give it to him, and lie about it, and say he is sick.	awareness of needs
509	But I have been in the same place for the last 23 years? 24 years. And I think it's the continuity	stability
511	I think in all the movements of life and challenges and schools and parents and all kinds of stuff, it is awfully good for people to know, or a child to know as they become an adult, they can go back	stability
514	Like why do they go back to a school or a teacher that they remember? Why do they go back to a neighbourhood? So that they can make those links and reflect on that,	stability
517	and realize that there is one person in the midst of that, he is still around	stability
527	So I get those moments, and I think those are a lot of what it means to have invested in relationship	care, understanding
528	Cause its without judgment, it is in the moment what it needs to be	care
532	You don't get much of the positive, or... so, you know you kind of have to hope that the fact of the stability is maybe the one thing, that relationship, is what they might come back to.	stability
537	I think its a gift, for ourselves, and for a kid.	empathy
575	And another thing, when one of your kids has been sexually abused, you got to deal with that	empathy, trauma awareness
575	You gotta name that	awareness of needs
576	You know, the Mohawk kid was Mohawk. You have to deal with his culture	empathy, awareness of needs
577	This kid is black, and he is in a white home.	empathy, awareness of needs
588	That they used to be very foster care specific. A child who is this, this, and now they realize that good parenting is good parenting.	care
592	Ultimately, whatever they are, you make the links to what they need	awareness of needs
592	You have to be willing as a foster parent to keep it large, and say, what does the kid need?	awareness of needs
594	Not what do I need, but what do they need? And how do I make that happen?	engagement in system
597	And be reasonable. Not be like, spend all your time, uh, cause you probably don't have it	self awareness
602	one comment, would be, we were never allowed, as a foster parent, to know another foster parent who could be within streets of our house.	lack of support, lack of status as foster parent
606	With confidentiality of the system. So what that means is, foster parents couldn't have support of other foster parents.	lack of support

609	So I wanna raise that, as a very problematic thing	lack of support
613	So if you are talking about, the system again might well be preventing the people who need to talk to each other and who could be supportive of each other	obstacles with system
617	And I think also the BS is that a child comes to you, and you don't know the real needs	limited information given
620	Well you dont need to know the whole story, but you need to know if they were fetal alcohol	limited information given
622	You need to know in a crisis, uh, when they just explode out of passionate deep anger, and they are throwing and breaking, you need to know that they have that disposition.	limited information given
626	So I would say, the system often, in order to get a foster parent involved, will hide some things	obstacles with system
627	And then deny the very ways of other foster parents, or other experiences, of how you could actually help	obstacles with system
629	And again, it will change or not, I am not hopeful about the change in the CIUSSS. I think it will move backwards. And I think there will be less foster parents	negative experience with system
631	It is getting litigious. Now they are measuring my windows. The government came last year to measure my windows.	negative experience with system
649	Part of me understands it, and then part of me says, well, what is the best for this child	awareness of complexity of system
650	If it's this child, it's a different answer. If it's all children, then the basics are all the same	awareness of complexity of system
653	But I would say, you've gotta, at some point, say, okay, here's the law, but what about this kid and what is the best in this scenario. Well, and that might not be a government-window-measuring	awareness of needs, advocacy

Table A5: Coding from Harper's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
1	When I became a foster parent, a respite parent, it was the same "demarche" that you had to do if you are becoming a full foster parent	training
2	So it's the same thing, you have the 6 hour interview	training
4	well they give you that much time to find out who you are, the ins and outs	training
5	then they go inside your house and they check the plugs and they check for fire extinguishers	training
11	you have to be a bit of a monkey to get these kids.	self awareness, characterization of the child
39	then he said, you wanna volunteer? And I was like, sure!	time to volunteer
40	So I went through the interview first, and then they paired me	training
41	And what I found different about big brothers big sisters to Batshaw, is Batshaw, well there is a lot more to chew on, uh for the kids	characterization of the child
45	They pair you with the first kid that needs something	characterization of the child
45	It doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl, it's whoever needs someone	characterization of the child
46	So, it has taken me on a, not quite 20 year ride that has been amazing!!	positive experience with system, experienced
49	I am like a voluntary social worker. Well I am like an honorary social worker	engagement in system
53	the fostering came in because the little boy I was matched with, um, he had been removed from his mom and placed in care I think when he was 5	characterization of the child
55	But he was not socialized enough to be there	characterization of the child
56	He had just been left to run wild. And so, he is never going to be in a foster home	behavioural issues
59	Well, its really, the math is so simple. All you have to do is be consistent, reliable, in charge.	stability, boundaries/rules
62	Cause the parent has left them in charge	characterization of birth family home life
62	They are kids, they don't wanna be in charge.	characterization of the child
63	So you just take back the charge And it relieves them of all kind of stress	boundaries/rules
63	So I when I met him, I had been to the group home before to meet the social worker	group home experience
78	So I met him every week. I got an agenda, and I said I am coming back next week.	stability
79	Cause his mother would say she was coming and then wouldn't come	characterization of birth family home life
79	and the usual thing that breaks a whole family foundation	stability
80	that leaves you not trusting anyone and trusting the wrong people because they know that you are broken	characterization of the child
81	So every Saturday, they had me three weeks just visit him there, and just do stuff together	commitment
82	He toured me in the group home, and he wanted to show me around	group home experience
93	and every single door is locked. "So this is where they keep the food, and this is.." and every door locked shut. And I was like "What is this place?"	group home experience
87	the social workers were honestly, just lovely	positive experience with system
87	So I became friends, I am still friends with them now	positive experience with system
88	And he was at a school when he started, I don't know if that fits into your questions, but he was at a, he was at, there was a school for special kids	specialized education
90	And there was nothing wrong with his brain	characterization of the child
90	He is sharp as a tack. He is extremely bright	characterization of the child
91	But he was just left to run wild and no one could reign him back in	behavioural issues

93	its like a special school, where there is like 4 kids in the class	specialized education
94	And he, he was just not socialized at all.	struggles in school
118	we stayed in touch, and then he ran off and then David had to get rid of him	behavioural issues
119	like he had to go into a group home cause he was breaking into things and stealing money	group home experience, behavioural issues
121	And um, and then he went to prison for a couple of years	incarceration
122	But when you have no money, that is where you go	incarceration
122	And when your parent has money, you don't go to jail.	incarceration
142	He is a bright kid, he is a smart kid	characterization of the child
142	I just saw him and gave him tickets to a Kiss concert last night. So he went out with friends.	long term support
145	I buy him groceries now and again	long term support
145	I help just enough, and he doesn't push too much	long term support
147	I am going to pay for his uh, I want him to get his drivers license. I want him to succeed.	long term support
150	His mom died um, uh while he was still in my house, and his father, we are not sure who he is	characterization of birth family home life
158	I honestly had all the support I needed	support from system
158	I had the support I needed if I was gonna do or make a dumb move, everyone was there, ready	support from system
159	Cause you're not trained to be a parent for a child who's had trouble	lack of training
160	But, you just, you used your sense.	self awareness
162	well, I didn't have a problem, which is why I am still doing this	positive experience with system
184	its a real respite from the world when you go there [to a group home]	group home experience
184	It's like being dunked in, uh, certainly not goodness	group home experience
185	Its being dunked in, uh, a dose of reality, that people don't	group home experience
187	if you never grew up with that, well I had no idea this kind of stuff existed! And the damage it does.	group home experience
190	I was committed. There was nothing to whine about.	commitment
190	You take the kid out and he throws up the bubble gum smoothie you got him in the car and that's okay	commitment
216	So did I have trouble with the system? Well, no	positive experience with system
217	I had more trouble with people not, not that I expect them to follow what I was doing, but the amount of people that were interested in it	commitment
219	and I don't know if they think the kids are too damaged, or, well they dont want a foster kid, they want their own kid	external ignorance
220	That frustrates the shit out of me.	external ignorance, frustration
224	I think I wanted to be a social worker. I remember looking at the classes and thinking I would like to do that	positive experience with system
225	But I am happy I didn't, because to affect change it is so difficult inside the system	obstacles with system
226	I am complaining more for them than for me	obstacles with system
227	Hmm, but rewards. Just still having the relationships with the kids	long term support
229	just to watch the kids move along, and now she is out of the system and her husband is a welder	long term support
232	They are doing pretty well. And just the whole family connection.	long term support
234	I just, it's been a zillion times better than any school class would have been	experienced
235	dealing with the social workers, they were always kind of trapped, either by budget or by... but I would see them bend the rules enough, you know, to hug the kids	obstacles with system
240	Well, and challenges, I don't know, it's been a piece of heaven.	positive experience with system
243	I just had no idea this stuff even existed until they said he had nowhere else to go, and that was before his mom died	external ignorance
247	I made him the same dessert for 6 years. He had the same breakfast, he didn't want to change. It was easy	stability
248	And I didn't have kids of my own, so it is just kind of entertaining to go to those movies and do those things	positive experience with system
254	I just treated like he was my guy for the weekend and we would go and do stuff.	exposure to "normalcy"
255	And, uh, I took him to my friends. My friends were all open	exposure to "normalcy"
255	Just take him along, like even grocery shopping, anything normal	exposure to "normalcy"
256	And I still know a lot of kids in the system, I see them now, and it is just so sad	negative experience with system
257	It's like, fuck, what a mess	negative experience with system
263	So the first one, he is a super smart kid	characterization of the child
269	[in a group home] after dinner they have their chore, and they either go up and have rest time and then they do art	group home experience
270	Not like art, art, but like, they have to learn how to be people on the wall. There are rules. Like, when you get angry... what do you do	group home experience
273	Yeah you know, like normally you hope you learn that from your parent just by osmosis	group home experience
274	But, wow I would just always marvel at this, oh, it was just, like, they have had to learn. Differently	group home experience
284	But I suppose the teaching part, cause when he was at the school he was at, it was like, get up on the table apparently and be like a monkey	behavioural issues
285	There was no, ya know... I think they were more observing him.	lack of education
288	But it was the fact that, unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to everyone else, that he, if you spend 6 months of steady time, the behaviour, the jitters, stop	stability, commitment
290	And he changed, and so you can actually calm someone down so that they can learn	calmness as necessity for learning

290	He wasn't learning anything at that school	negative experience with school
295	Well because it was for special, I don't know what kind of, kids.	specialized education
298	They were just trying to manage behaviour	behavioural issues, negative experience with school
305	People, the danger there, is half the people think it is about them and not about the child.	external ignorance
307	And there are foster parents out there that are trying to fill their own needs	external ignorance
308	I mean they are trying to do well, from what they know, but, ah!	external ignorance
315	when they let me, um, when we were allowed to have our own quiet time and I could read him his own book, then we were allowed to have our door closed and I would read to him	engagement in system
317	I think what is important about the learning is that there is an emotional quotient to it	learning process, awareness of emotion
318	cause they did say to me, if he ever says anything, that you, remark, because you can't learn if you are all fucked up like that.	learning challenges
321	You just can't. It's hard enough when you are not fucked up.	learning challenges
324	So we were reading this book, which I still have. I read them, um, like fairy tale books	commitment
325	he loved to read it! He was smart as a whip. If I made a mistake, he could tell.	characterization of the child
326	I would read along and as soon as I made a mistake, he was on it. Like on it!	characterization of the child
346	So I said to him, do you know what pledge means? and he said yes, he said "a pledge is a promise and my mummy never keeps my promises to me."	characterization of birth family home life
349	So I think before they can learn, there are so many other things!	learning process
349	Thinking about what is 2 and 2 and 5 and 7, it is everything that is around that	learning process
350	He just happened to be bright so he was fortunate	characterization of the child
351	which also kept me engaged on another level because he is a sharp kid.	engagement in system
354	he used to talk about his mother all the time. Which is fine, thats normal	?
355	"My mom is this, she is wonderful" because they are hanging on to any shred of DNA.	characterization of the child
356	They are hoping beyond hope that this person will rise like a phoenix from the ashes and become a super hero parent	?
358	It ain't gonna happen! It never does, for one reason or another	negative experience with system
361	all I was doing was showing him behaviour of an adult	example of parent
362	And as he is digesting the behaviour of a responsible adult, he is like, oh my mom is a mess	example of parent
363	And it is so discouraging. And you don't want to admit that your parent is a mess.	example of parent, awareness of emotion
366	And then, when you have to admit it, its like ugh, it is heart breaking	awareness of emotion
367	you are talking about education, about p's and q's and how much they can learn about history or whatever, it doesn't go in until there's a reason for it to go in.	learning process
371	They, so, honestly, 80% of that is by example. Like anything else	example of parent
371	So you have to spend enough time with them that they see!	commitment
372	Cause no kid wants to hear all the time, the nagging	awareness of needs
373	So you show by example, and you learn by example.	example of parent
389	Its not really about the content that she is learning, it is really like any school.	learning process
390	It is more about the idea that you finished it.	learning process
393	Yes, some of the content matters, when you get into higher levels of learning	learning process
394	But it is like, just finish it.	learning challenges
416	Well, they changed schools. My girl, has changed schools, well I can't even tell you how many times she has changed.	inconsistency in school placements
419	I feel like I like where she is now, cause she pays more attention in her structured environment.	characterization of the child
446	So if you are talking about how they learn, it is like, how can you learn when you don't have a mother? It is like, really?	necessity of support in learning
449	It is not by changing curriculum, I think.	necessity of support in learning
452	I think it is people being interested and involved, that aren't paid for it.	necessity of support in learning
457	It takes a village	necessity of support in learning, commitment
457	And it takes patience, and it helps to have a kid that doesn't have severe learning disabilities.	necessity of support in learning
459	Cause when they do it is like, the information doesn't even get halfway in	learning challenges
459	So it is not about school accomplishments, at that point	learning process
460	It is like, the kid doesn't know how to, he lunges at every person that comes through the door	behavioural issues
461	You have to deal with that, so school, well. I mean you need to go to school, but, I guess I don't know where to start.	learning challenges
463	So what do you do? You start one kid at a time, with a grown-up.	example of parent
479	I tell these kids, your living situations could be helping a lot of other kids, because you know what you like about it and what you don't like about it,	example of parent
481	If there is a way to funnel them, and make their experience something to be excited about, or proud about	awareness of emotion
482	put the responsibility of the next group coming up, I think it is a wonderful way to let the kids know that they are really good at something	encouragement
484	And they are really good at managing a very difficult life situation.	encouragement
487	So it is not about learning content. Although they have spell, because that is a problem	learning process

490	But with these kids, what they need is someone to find the talent that they have and find what makes them different in a good way, or what they are sharp at, and then you just go with that.	encouragement
496	So telling them that they are really sharp or they are good at this, or that. "You can do this, or you could do this.	encouragement
501	But I think with the teachers, there has to be another little class about finding out what is wonderful about this kid and what they are frigging good at and just try, and hammer that.	learning process, awareness of emotion
509	So it is trying to fill them with some self-worth	encouragement, awareness of emotion
510	And these things are not on the curriculum of maybe anything	learning process
517	And it is just showing them, at 18, where you can go, what the options are	encouragement
518	It is not always just chaos	encouragement
518	It is okay to live on your own	example of parent
519	You just prepare them for the world in a different way, but without really talking about it. Just drag them around with you for years, that's all (laughs).	example of parent, engagement in process
552	None of these kids, like, not necessarily foster homes, but in group homes cause that's where my kids lived.	group home experience
555	It's like, it's like their learning is about how to be. How to try and be.	learning process
568	And it's more information about how to be, and what is ahead for you, and how to be hopeful	encouragement
588	With kids, you always have hope. You always have to have hope	encouragement
608	Well, just things like, kindness	care
608	Reliability	stability
660	I think the education is taking her to your friend's house that have kids, showing her what "regular" families do	exposure to "normalcy"
661	and that she is always welcome, and that, you know, that she gets to know my friends and my friends like her and they are there for her.	exposure to "normalcy"
667	It's uh, I have lived a non-traditional path	example of parent
669	So, just to let them know that they are good, and they are smart	encouragement
670	and even when they make mistakes, and they make <i>lots</i> of them	encouragement, care
684	You just have to keep at it and not get discouraged	encouragement
685	not everyone is, no matter what you have been through, not everyone is as fortunate as you in some other ways, so always be kind to people	empathy
686	It's really about, and the manners too, and the thank you and the please, all these things can get them farther than geography	example of parent
692	So I take the bent ones, and I try and straighten them up	commitment

Table A6: Coding from Gloria's Interview

Line Number	Direct Quote from Transcript of Interview	Code
14	So we thought about adopting, so we were actually going to get married too, so that we could adopt	personal fulfillment
27	so then, we decided we wanted more kids	personal fulfillment
31	so I said there is something called foster care	limited knowledge of system
45	So I did it all again, and the rest is history. That was about 25 years ago.	experienced
57	Good. Bad. Ugly. Horrible.	positive experience with system, negative experience with system
59	I have had kids, my very first kid, first foster child was an absolute nightmare	negative experience with child
62	My first foster child was 16.	older children
68	And we are still in touch with her. And still love her, and everything like that.	long term support
71	I would say that there's (pause) out of approximately 150, there is probably 50-60 that I still keep in touch with.	experienced, multiple children
74	sometimes some of them are, they disappear for a few years, because things aren't going well	characterization of the child
77	And they don't wanna disappoint. And then they just show up	characterization of the child
81	Christmas, I mean, I do, 200 gifts. Cause I just give to the kids, and all that stuff, and I give to as many as I can	generous
82	some have been absolutely horrible, with no support from [the agency] at all. They don't get it.	lack of support
85	Horrible in what ways? Like, just the behaviours and stuff	behavioural issues
89	This child is (pause) I adore him, but I can't have him with the girls. He asks them for hand jobs. He is limited	characterization of the child
93	He doesn't understand sexual boundaries and stuff.	characterization of the child
96	He stole a phone. Batshaw didn't help me	lack of support
97	No consequences. There are no consequences for this kid	lack of support, lack of consequences for child from system
98	there is not a place in foster care for him. It's a group home. Foster care will not take him because he cannot be with animals.	group home experience
100	I had a little chihuahua, and I chose him [the boy] over my chihuahua, because any kid that is here, that's my priority.	familial values
104	I don't look beyond. I have been doing it long enough that I can say yes or no, depending on the time	self aware

105	this last incident and stuff, um, because Batshaw is in such a mess	negative experience with the system
106	and there was no support, there was no nothing, no consequence for him	lack of support, lack of consequences for child from system
109	Um, it happens every single time with this child when there is a new worker. The same thing happens over and over again and usually the workers figure it out within about a month	negative experience with the system
119	there is a good and there is a sad	positive experience with system, negative experience with system
119	A bad? Um, kids stealing	behavioural issues
120	I had (big sigh), in the last 2 years, I had one child that was a prostitute, and a drug addict, and an alcoholic	characterization of the child
121	I went to AA with her, I did absolutely everything with her.	engagement in process
123	finally she couldn't stay. She was 19 and she couldn't stay at my home anymore because she wasn't following the rules	boundaries/rules
132	it was, uh, really stressful, and stuff like that.	stressful experience
140	I almost, well I did quit fostering at that time.	stressful experience
146	I was, I was just, I was adopting him! At least let my husband say goodbye after 5 years. At least let my kids say goodbye, you know?	adoption journey
152	My husband couldn't console me. There was no consoling me	stressful experience
189	Like I am going to be losing this guy, and my worker knows. I might go away, you know. Five years is a long time to have a kid, and then, just	self aware
192	and its not because of the child, it's because of the system	familial values
192	And because of the worker. And because of the father. You know? And the judge	negative experience with the system
206	I can say it get's easier, but I don't think it gets easier, but I think you just get used to it.	experienced
213	And I think you just learn to put it in that sac, and you move. It's not that you don't feel anymore, it's just	self aware
219	It's just, you sort of, get used to the pain	acceptance of how things are
227	The system.	negative experience with the system
227	School.	negative experience with school
229	them (sighs), especially when workers change	obstacles with system
229	Cause one has a certain vision on what's going to happen, and the other worker comes in and has a different vision	obstacles with system
238	Schools don't get it, because, for one foster parents all have fanged teeth and we drip blood	negative experience with school
239	The school that this boy is in, everything is perfect, everything is fine, wonderful, this and that, yet he is suspended,	lack of communication with school
245	They have their own little club. it's like the old boys club, except it's in the school and its females mostly.	negative experience with school
251	you have him over there but I want him over here, so he can have a friend	negative experience with school
252	I want him to have a phone call. One friend to phone him. Not one has phoned him in five years	negative experience with school
255	When you have, which might not be the perfect school for him, but maybe he will get a friend.	negative experience with school
259	And I said, "you just want the money". And they go, they know better.	negative experience with school
260	He needs to learn how to do the kitchen, he needs to learn how to do basic things	lack of learning
262	That's what he needs. He doesn't need to know the 12 times tables	learning process
319	I said, "I have done everything	commitment
321	And I said, "And because? There is no help for me! So what? I just let him go?!"	lack of support
322	I stop being a decent parent so that you'll actually help me and do something?"	lack of support
333	he did a lot of therapy with the child, and would come in	learning process
334	and we would collaborate with how I was going to continue it at the home	learning process, learning at home
335	So that, we were both working on the same things at the same time.	learning process
344	And I am extremely pro-parent	advocacy
355	there are sometimes where you can do a closed forum where I leave, but there is so much similarities that we need to talk about.	advocacy
359	Because foster parents are having the same problems as the parents	advocacy
360	So let's put our heads together. Instead of being adversarial, let's actually get ourselves together and let's do something	advocacy
376	I have more kids than I would ever want in my life. And I wouldn't not have one of them	multiple children
383	it's the toughest job you'll ever love	confusing experience
386	I can't imagine being without it.	personal fulfillment
412	he was extremely challenged and stuff. He repeated kindergarten.	struggles with school
415	And he was in grade 2, and they asked for something, for the kids to bring in something from their childhood, from when they were a baby.	external ignorance
417	He has nothing. There are a lot of kids that have <i>nothing</i> from their childhood	external ignorance
419	Like, you can't be doing this. And they don't care, or they didn't care.	negative experience with school
422	You have <i>no</i> idea what he is going to talk about	external ignorance
426	he did the best he could, and he went, and he was shut up	negative experience with school
427	Because he was talking about his first memory, which was being thrown underneath the table and his father beating the shit out of his mother. And the police coming	characterization of home life
429	And he is talking about that. And he is talking about being sexually abused, and he is talking about the	trauma awareness, characterization of

	first murder he ever saw	home life
431	And, he was shut up	external ignorance
431	so, I went, how could you do that? You are not validating the fact that this stuff happened with him.	negative experience with school
439	I will protect my kids till the end, but I also let them, uh, breathe on their own.	protection, care
539	Yeah I have one, where the child, because the child was transported to NDG, and she was late, and they were giving her detentions because she has to be brought back, and they said they give her a detention at noon,	negative experience with school
542	and I said, "Its transport, it's not her fault!" Doesn't matter, this and that,	lack of communication with school
544	so I went and I took the detentions	protection
545	And they said "You can't do that" and I said "As long as you are giving her a detention she doesn't deserve, I will take the detention."	protection
552	A lot of them were just under the radar. They, there is no help for them.	lack of support in school
567	Depends on the kid.	awareness of needs
572	She, after she has done homework for an hour, we have to play a boardgame or something together, because she does too much.	awareness of needs
609	If you ask me for help, I will help you	willingness to help
609	Other than that, you know, if younger ones, you come home from school, there's a snack waiting for you, and you do your homework immediately	boundaries/rules, routine
623	we do fractions, we do fun stuff. We do, sometimes, I am doing Simon Says if that is going to get them to figure it out	willingness to help
628	it depends on the kids. If the kids are having trouble reading, I do sticky notes, and I'll put them on the wall, bar, chair, and I put sticky notes everywhere.	willingness to help
630	And I start pointing, most of them are sight words anyways. So, my whole house, full of sticky notes.	willingness to help
642	Some teachers are burnt out, and they want nothing	negative experience with school
642	Some teachers are really gung-ho and want to help	positive experience with school
643	I've had, um, guidance counsellors, that if I hadn't intervened, the kids would never have gotten out of high school, because they didn't tell them what they needed to have enough credits	negative experience with school
646	Um, it depends on the parents, how much input they have.	characterization of home life
667	Some do. Some are <i>fantabulous</i> . You know? And they will do absolutely anything for the kid	positive experience with school
668	and others, do the basic necessities, and others do zero. Nothing.	negative experience with school
681	So you have the two spectrums, just as in life.	aware of complexity of system
682	So I can't put the whole thing down, but I can't build the whole thing up. Because it's an individual.	aware of complexity of system
697	You know, its modelling	example of parent
697	I want them to understand, uh, about animals, about caring.	care
701	cause I can't tell them what to be in their lives. I dont ask them what they want to be in their lives	teaching responsibility
704	I mean, I just, I want them to be happy	love
707	If I can say one sentence, one act of kindness, one consequence I gave them, that triggers something positive in their lives, I have done my job.	generous
711	Cause not everything ends on a good note, but there might have been something good. You don't know what that is.	care
716	As I said, find something that you love to do, and figure out how to get paid for it.	teaching responsibility
719	Uh, preferably not to repeat history. That you can change it	teaching responsibility
719	Uh, be proud of who they are	pride in self
724	The world is your oyster. Have so much fun. Party like a rock star.	fun
726	Have fun along the way, but don't hurt anyone along the way	fun, care
726	Be conscious of your actions	care
727	Find out who <i>you</i> are	pride in self
727	And if they can look in the mirror, and be happy with who is looking at them back, that would be cool. Because we <i>all</i> suffer with that	pride in self
731	and, I show my kids that I have emotions. I have bad days	awareness of emotion
732	I am angry today. I am not angry at you, but I am angry today.	self awareness
733	So I am gunna give myself a time out. So teach yourself to give yourself times-outs	self awareness
734	And its okay to be angry, to be happy, it's okay to be sad. It's okay to be all of them all at once	awareness of emotion
738	And we are fluid, we are not perfect. And to say we are not perfect	pride in self
747	But if you are in a thing you can't do, phone me, and I will get you out of it	willingness to help
792	I had one kid almost bum my house down. I told her she wasn't allowed in my house,	boundaries/rules
793	and she could sit there, but until she learned to live in the house, she was gunna sit outside	learning at home
794	Yep. Oh, we ate outside with her, and stuff like that. It was just like, a consequence to fit the crime.	boundaries/rules, care