

**Qualitative studies*****Forsman 2017*****Study Characteristics**

<b>Study type</b>	Semi structured interviews RQ4.2
<b>Aim of study</b>	To explore variations in foster carers' experiences of conducting the intervention
<b>Study location</b>	Sweden
<b>Study setting</b>	Paired reading project carried out in seven local authorities in Sweden
<b>Study methods</b>	Semi-structured interviews with participating carers from the Swedish paired reading project. To capture a wide range of carers' experiences, a stratified purposeful sample was used. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted following project completion. The carers were asked to describe how they had conducted the programme and to talk about

	<p>positive/negative parts of the method, and contextual aspects they considered to be supports or barriers. Additionally, the interview protocol included a set of questions aimed at exploring the carers' expectations of the project and perceptions of how their participation had affected relations within the family, their everyday life and the child's reading ability. The interviews were recorded and ranged in length from 30 to 45 min. Thematic analysis, the transcribed interviews were read repeatedly and categorized into initial codes. Next, different codes were sorted into general themes related to the case descriptions. The thematic mapping of the data was further developed to define the process of conducting the paired reading intervention that carers across the data set had highlighted.</p>
<b>Population</b>	Foster carers
<b>Study dates</b>	Not reported
<b>Sources of funding</b>	Not reported
<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<p>Carer situation Foster carers</p> <p>Delivering an intervention Paired Reading</p>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	None reported
<b>Sample characteristics</b>	<p>Sample size 13 foster carers</p> <p>Special educational needs or learning disability Judging from carer information, more than half of the fostered children either had delayed speech, literacy problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or had experienced grade repetition.</p> <p>Gender 13 women and two men; children were 11 boys and 10 girls</p> <p>Age children aged 7 to 12 years</p>
<b>Relevant themes</b>	Theme 1

Getting carers involved in the intervention – a question of attitude? - active involvement of foster carers - One rationale for using paired reading with children in out-of-home care is that the method actively involves foster parents in the reading process. As indicated by the case descriptions, carers embraced this task differently. Some carers talked about reading in general as something important. Children in their care were encouraged to read and they had a positive attitude towards the project. Carers, like Linda (Sufficient, but problematic reading), were already actively involved in the education of the children in their care. They expressed an awareness of foster children's academic vulnerability and tried to prevent school failure. Such attitudes were linked to carers committing to the programme and following through – despite experiencing problems. Previous studies indicate that low expectations and lack of support from key adults are two main reasons for foster children's educational underperformance, but as one carer stated: "These children should have the same opportunities to succeed in school as other children have. We should have the same expectations on them. They are able and we should not pity them or think any less of them, but this might not come natural for everyone. I think that a project like this could be helpful in that respect." (Sufficient reading)

### Theme 2

Being a part of the project meant that carers could become aware of the importance of foster children's school performance - Knowing that good literacy skills are crucial for managing school became a motivational factor to get engaged. Carers, who had not previously been involved in their child's education and reading, were provided with a tool to become active supporters: "I guess you could say that we were aware of him having problems in school, and we were happy that we had been chosen to be a part of the project. Without it we would probably not have sat down to read with him. (Sufficient, but problematic reading) When practicing paired reading, carers would learn more about their children's needs. Receiving feedback on the literacy tests the children did as a part of the pre/post-evaluation had a similar effect. As in the case of foster mother Julia (Sufficient reading), further insights about the children's abilities and needs could enhance the engagement. Some had continued to use paired reading or wanted to try it with other children.

### Theme 3

Opportunity to spend more time with the child - Another reason for carers to get involved was linked to seeing an opportunity to spend more time with the child, as in the case of foster mother Anita (Dropout). For these carers the intervention meant that they could spend 'quality time' together. This relational aspect seemed to be a motivational factor for carers in all participant groups. According to some carers, the intervention had improved their relations with the child.

### Theme 4

Barriers - not needed, beyond the area of responsibility, feeling forced, - There were also examples of carers who had a more or less explicitly negative attitude towards the intervention. As with the case of foster father Martin (Insufficient reading), this could be due to not experiencing that the child was in need of any reading training. Additionally, some carers felt as if the intervention went beyond their area of responsibility: "I feel like we already have a pretty, ehm, foster children have a lot to deal with and then this becomes another liability for us . . . Perhaps it could be something that they can do in school or something that the libraries could take responsibility for." (Insufficient reading) Although participation was said to be voluntarily, one carer even felt as if she was forced. She talked about the intervention in negative terms, and felt a big relief when it ended. It is possible that a negative attitude could come from carers' own school experiences and reading habits. Not all carers seemed to regard reading as something important. This could potentially make it more difficult to get involved. Either way, a negative attitude was clearly associated with reduced programme compliance, compared with those who saw relational benefits or talked about the importance of reading or succeeding in school.

### Theme 5

Integrating the reading training in the everyday life – motivating and prioritizing - The carers who participated in the project took on the task of reading with their foster children on a regular weekly basis. Although the majority complied with the programme, the interviews showed that it could be difficult to integrate the reading training in the everyday life. The key to success seemed to be working with the child's motivation and prioritizing the reading sessions. Some carers meant that having many children to care for made it difficult to find the time: "We already have a tight schedule and since we're so many, there are so many things that need to work out. Our everyday life is planned in detail with meals, dropping off and picking the children up, school work and so on." (Insufficient reading) Others had the same situation but managed anyway, as in the case of foster mother Julia (Sufficient reading). Carers who were used to reading with or helping children with homework were more successful in finding the time. For them, engaging in this intervention was not radically different from what they already did in their daily life with the children. Moreover, their positive attitude towards the project made them prioritize the reading.

### Theme 6

motivation and prioritising - But the intervention also had to fit within the children's everyday life. As indicated by the case descriptions, carers meant that the reading sessions competed with activities such as sports, watching TV and hanging out with friends: "Other activities were more appealing. You have to motivate them, but it's not always that easy. They did not want to read, and you can't force them into doing this." (Sufficient, but problematic reading)

### Theme 7

Overcoming reluctance - Some children were reluctant to read, and the carer above makes a point about motivating the children. A period of 16 weeks was described as long, and it turned out to be difficult to keep up the motivation throughout the whole project. Some carers thought that it could have been easier motivating the children had the intervention lasted a shorter time. Others meant that children do not have to enjoy it at all times. When it comes to homework or attending school, children will sometimes resist, and the same goes for paired reading. The responsibility to making it work lies on the carers: "It's on us as adults to make sure that this goes well . . . I think that it's beneficial if the adult is positive, because your attitude will be reflected on the children. Perseverance does it! I think that it's on us to communicate this to the children." (Sufficient reading)

### Theme 8

Use of rewards to motivate, but better motivation was using books that children were excited to read - At times, giving stickers or using bribes could be facilitating. As in the case of foster mother Linda and her boy Yusef (Sufficient, but problematic reading), children could be motivated to read more when they themselves noticed progress. However, the actual key in motivating the child and making the intervention work seemed to be making the reading session into an enjoyable activity. If the children got to read books or other reading material that excited them, it could be something to long for: "It was not like they thought it was bothersome to read – quite the opposite! They longed for it. They chose their own books, books they found exciting, so they wanted to know how the plot would unfold." (Sufficient reading)

### Theme 9

Challenge of choosing appropriate reading material - However, choosing appropriate reading material could be rather challenging. As in the case of foster father Martin (Insufficient reading), choosing wrong books made it difficult to motivate the child. Another carer who had experienced difficulties motivating her children explained that the releasing point for them was when they dropped the books and instead read the IKEA catalogue. Carers like Julia (Sufficient reading) would try to make the reading sessions cosy. Having the one to one time could be important for both children and carers: "He thought that this way of reading was so nice and wanted me to read with him at all times. I think that it was special for him to get close to me, to spend time with me and to get my full attention." (Sufficient reading)

### Theme 10

Flexible approach - Making the reading training enjoyable also involved being sensitive to the child and adapt a flexible approach when delivering the intervention. If a child at one time did not want to read the full 20 min, carers could make them read less and try to catch up at another time. Having a rigid approach made it even more difficult to motivate children who were not used to read in their everyday life. At times of carer/child conflicts, a flexible approach could also involve having someone else reading with the child. Having more than one person reading with the child could make both siblings and the extended family involved in a positive way.

### Theme 11

Practicing the paired reading method - a great or disturbing way of reading? - According to interviewees' responses, this was a new and unfamiliar way of reading. Some were enthusiastic about the method, thinking it was great, and noticing its positive effect on their child's reading. In contrast, others found it disturbing. In the weekly monitoring sheets, reading aloud together and/or correcting the child were described as frustrating factors that affected the reading in a negative sense. During the interviews, this sentiment was echoed repeatedly and further explained through statements such as: "I think that reading aloud together, it was not okay. It ruins the concentration, so I can understand that she didn't like it either . . . She got really irritated when I corrected her. The first couple of times it was okay, but when I continued she said 'Stop it! You're spoiling my reading'." (Insufficient reading)

### Theme 12

temporary difficulties - For some the difficulties were temporary. Once they got a hold of it, carers could see benefits with this particular way of reading. As mentioned before, sitting next to each other and having the full focus on the child's reading could lead to new insights about their abilities and needs. Carers also experienced how paired reading, in particular reading aloud together, enabled them to model competent reading: "It was a bit tricky at first because you're not used to reading like this. But it was fun once you got a hold of it and it brought a sense of togetherness. I could actually notice a difference in his reading. He adapted to my reading speed, learned that you should make a pause at punctuation, and heard how words that he didn't know were pronounced." (Sufficient, but problematic reading)

### Theme 13

Difficulties that remain - However, difficulties could remain. Carers had different approaches in trying to handle this. Some were inflexible in their approach and practiced the method in a manual-based way, which made the reading problematic. Insisting on reading in a way that did not suit the child would make the reading training less enjoyable and often lead to conflicts. As in the case of foster mother Anita (Dropout), this could ultimately lead to a dropout. With help from the special education pedagogue, foster mother Linda (Sufficient, but problematic reading), on the other hand, adapted the method to the child's preferences, and thus made the reading training more enjoyable. Having a flexible approach and adapting the day-to-day delivery of the intervention was in some cases essential in order for the reading training to work at all. One carer succinctly stated: "She was the one doing all the

reading. We just followed along and only intervened if it was 'going to pot'. You have to adapt to her conditions and the situation we had with her otherwise she gets annoyed and the reading will fail." (Sufficient reading)

#### Theme 14

Independent reading, following not leading - According to the carers, some children wanted to read alone all the time. For others it could take weeks before the child became confident enough to take on the independent reading. This could be frustrating. One carer told how she was advised not to push the child despite this. She let the child be in charge of the reading and afterwards she thought that this was a key factor for the improved self-confidence that she later on noticed in the boy's reading. One can assume that some children might need encouragement to read by themselves. Either way, judging from the carers' experiences, it looks as if it is better to adopt a strategy of following and not leading the child.

### Study arms

#### Paired Reading (N = 15)

Paired reading is a method for literacy tutoring by non-professionals. It is based on structured and regular carer/child reading. It is not a manual-based method and has been slightly modified in different settings. The key elements aim to ensure that the child receives as much help from a reading partner as necessary through modelling, correction, questioning and discussion. The first stage of the procedure involves the child and partner reading aloud together. When the child wants to read without support she or he gives an agreed sign of wanting to read alone. If the child is unable to self-correct a mistake, the partner repeats the correct word and joins in. The method thus involves a cycle, moving from reading together to reading alone.

### Risk of Bias

Section	Question	Answer
Aims of the research	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes
Appropriateness of methodology	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes
Research Design	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes

Section	Question	Answer
Recruitment Strategy	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Yes
Data collection	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes <i>(However no discussion of study setting or saturation of data)</i>
Researcher and participant relationship	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Can't tell <i>(Unclear that researchers critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location)</i>
Ethical Issues	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Can't tell
Data analysis	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes <i>(However, unclear that researchers critically examine their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation)</i>
Findings	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Can't tell <i>(No triangulation, respondent validation, or use of more than one analyst apparent)</i>
Research value	How valuable is the research?	The research is valuable
Overall risk of bias and directness	Overall risk of bias	Moderate
	Directness	Partially applicable <i>(Study was based in Sweden)</i>

**Griffiths 2012****Bibliographic Reference**

Griffiths, Rose; The Letterbox Club: An account of a postal club to raise the achievement of children aged 7 to 13 in foster care.; Children and Youth Services Review; 2012; vol. 34 (no. 6); 1101-1106

**Study Characteristics**

<b>Study type</b>	Semi structured interviews RQ2 RQ4 Evaluation of an intervention Letterbox
<b>Aim of study</b>	To explore participants' views about each aspect of the Letterbox Club in greater detail, including whether the children continued to use any of the items they had received.
<b>Study location</b>	UK
<b>Study setting</b>	Three different UK local authorities
<b>Study methods</b>	Semi-structured interviews six months after the children had received their last parcel. parcel, with a sample of four children and four foster carers for Letterbox Red and Blue in 2009, and with six children and their foster carers for Letterbox Green in 2011, selected from three different local authorities. These explored participants' views about each aspect of the Letterbox Club in greater detail, including whether the children continued to use any of the items they had received. Unclear how thematic analysis was performed.
<b>Population</b>	Children in care aged 7 to 11

<b>Study dates</b>	2009-2011
<b>Sources of funding</b>	not reported
<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	Age aged 7 to 13  Care Situation in foster care
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	None reported
<b>Sample characteristics</b>	Sample size four children and four foster carers for Letterbox Red and Blue in 2009, and with six children and their foster carers for Letterbox Green in 2011
<b>Relevant themes</b>	<p><b>Theme 1</b> Encouragement to learn: "many carers and children did feel that receiving the materials had provided important additional support and encouragement to learn. For example, the carer of a boy aged 8 wrote, "The parcels have played a big part in Hamza becoming more enthusiastic about reading. Even made him keen to bring home school books". "Mr Quinn [my teacher] done a test on us today and I got twenty out of twenty on it. Because I answered all twenty of them right, because I've been playing the maths games and it's helped me with my adding up".</p> <p><b>Theme 2</b> Receiving personalised packages created the sense of being important and that someone was interested in them: "It may not seem a lot, but when you've not had much attention in your life, it is." Children clearly felt they could make decisions themselves about what to do with the materials, and were usually keen to share them: "Jake felt rather special as he loved the postman delivering the parcel for himself each month. He enjoyed getting everyone together and playing with his games and reading his books". The bright envelope was important to many: "Brandon watches the post and can immediately identify 'his' package." Many children told us they kept each envelope, "because it has my name on".</p> <p><b>Theme 3</b> Enthusiasm maintained for the parcels: Children who had been in Letterbox Club before were still very enthusiastic when they were members again. One carer said that her foster daughter had had the Red parcels eighteen months before, and when her first Green parcel came she "just ripped it straight open. Excited and straight into it!" Her foster daughter said, "It's a great thing and it makes you feel a bit happier ... To get the parcels, it'll take a lot of money to put together for people, but it makes people happy".</p> <p><b>Theme 4</b> Source of continuity: The fact that the parcels followed placements was important: The fact that the parcel is delivered to the child's home address was particularly important to children who had moved recently or frequently. One boy (aged 9) in the earlier pilot had expressed this very poignantly: "So somebody knows where I live?" The foster mother of a girl aged 10 who had moved three times in a year, said, "The Letterbox Club was the continuity, something that stayed the same when she moved from A to B. She'd had so many ups and downs and I think something like that, that stays the same, is quite important to children and it was very important to Kelly." A carer with two foster daughters aged 11 confirmed this: "They love just getting the parcels and that was important to them, especially when they hadn't been here very long, it was like 'somebody from the outside knows I'm here'."</p> <p><b>Theme 5</b></p>



Useful for under resourced foster homes: Some foster homes had comparatively few books suitable for the children they cared for, so the Letterbox Club parcels were a valuable resource.

### Theme 6

Something to call their own: Even where foster families were already well-provided, many carers commented that a critical element in gaining children's interest was that the Letterbox books were their own. For example, the carer of a boy aged 9 said, "We've got a cupboard absolutely full of books, but he never paid them any attention at all, so it was nice that these came just for him." Similarly, Katie's foster mother wrote: "The books she has received we've often got already, being a 'bookish' house, but none the less she enjoys the parcels and it gets her to read old favourites again".

### Theme 7

Being part of a club: Lewis, aged 8, told us: "It was good fun because I've never been in a club before". The aspect of being a member of a club seemed to have encouraged many children to tell their teacher at school about the books and games they had received. Perhaps "I'm a member of a club" provides a simpler, less problematic explanation than the more emotional "I'm getting books and games because I'm in care". Elements in the parcels that emphasised 'being in a club' (all marked with a Letterbox Club logo) were consistently popular, including personalised sticky labels with "This book belongs to..." and the child's name printed on them.

### Theme 8

Children liked the element of surprise, not knowing what books they might get, and carers, too, commented that this broadened the range of books their children used. Many foster carers said that they looked forward to the parcels arriving as much as the children. For example, the foster mother of Janie, aged 8, wrote, "Everything in the parcels was excellent, but the Diary of a Killer Cat was superb and the CD is used in the car all the time – I love it, too!! Hope we can have more parcels one day."

### Theme 9

Relationship building aspect of Letterbox: Children enjoyed Where's Wally? (published as Where's Waldo? in North America) for its social qualities – one carer of a girl aged 8 wrote, "We all had a go at Where's Wally? – even the teenagers wanted to have a go." There were many reports of children reading to each other, and asking others (both adults and children) to read to them. For example, Kyle, aged 12, told us he read excerpts from the Guinness Book of World Records to his younger brother: "I'd show him stuff that was a bit weird and stuff. Like the dog with the longest tongue". The majority of carers (over 80%) indicated that the parcels had helped them do more with the child. Many foster carers commented on the value of the materials in helping them make better attachments with their children. The carer of Marley, aged 10, wrote, "Found it a great way to bond with my daughter", and the carer of Danny, aged 9, said, "He has had fun, and we have spent a lot of time together because of Letterbox Club." Cadey was 11, and his foster carer wrote, "He is still a reluctant reader, but the books give us an opportunity to spend time together". The carer of another 11 year old said, "It's nice to have something to do with Jamie, where he doesn't feel I'm forcing my attentions on him. He finds it very hard to be close to anyone, but he's been keen to be read to and to play the games he's made. It's made me feel more comfortable with him".

### Theme 10

New ways of reading (audio): At least one parcel in each age range included a story on CD with its accompanying book. Many carers commented that they had not previously thought of using audio stories with their foster child, but said they were often used at bedtime or on car journeys. The carer of Damon (aged 11) said, "He's of an age where he wouldn't appreciate a bedtime story from me, but he listened to the CD at bedtime" and another, with a foster son aged 8, wrote, "Best gift ever... He never seems to get enough of it".

### Theme 11

Variety in the packages was helpful: Foster carers commented favourably on every genre of books in the parcels – one foster father said, "Poetry, I'd never have thought of that, but it's great!" Non-fiction was similarly praised by foster carers: "I've learnt such a lot". Classic books, where many foster carers would already know the story, were welcomed: for example, when Danny, aged 10, received The Silver Sword, he said, "my [foster] dad knows this story, he read it when he was at school".

### Theme 12

Encouraging education in a non-threatening way: providing educational support in a nonthreatening and enjoyable way could contribute to improving the stability of foster care placements. Certainly, the parcels raised the profile of educational activity amongst children and adults in many of the participating families, and for some children it seemed to have begun a 'virtuous circle' of improved engagement at school and improved feelings of well-being in the child, with consequent feelings of relief and positive engagement for the foster carer. As Kezia (aged 12) said, "When you come home [from school], you're not expected to read or write, are you! Cause it's sort of your spare time. But because I got the Letterbox

Club, I did sometimes read or write at home, and it helped me at school because I was prepared to do it at school." Her foster mother's pleasure at the improvement in Kezia's attitude to school was evident when she was interviewed.

## Study arms

### Letterbox (N = 14)

The "Letterbox Club" is an intervention that provides reading, writing and mathematics materials to children in public care with the aim of improving their educational attainment. Materials are sent addressed to the child at their place of residence, for children to use on their own or to share with other family members. In response to concerns expressed by carers that materials addressed to them implied an expectation of them offering educational support, the decision was made to send materials directly to the child. The child would be told they were a member of a club, the "Letterbox Club", to reduce any feeling that they were being given compulsory homework; The materials would be provided in installments, to avoid the child feeling overwhelmed, and to provide an element of novelty and excitement each time the child received a parcel; The parcels would be sent through the post, making distribution relatively simple, including for children whose placements were outside each local authority area.

## Risk of Bias

Section	Question	Answer
Aims of the research	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes
Appropriateness of methodology	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes
Research Design	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	No <i>(Authors do not clearly justify the qualitative research design)</i>
Recruitment Strategy	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	No <i>(Unclear how participants were selected for the qualitative aspect of this mixed methods)</i>

Section	Question	Answer
		<i>study, or why these were the most appropriate. Unclear why some participants chose not to take part.)</i>
Data collection	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	No <i>(Semi-structured interviews were conducted, however it is not explicit what the methods were. Form of data is not clear and the researchers did not discuss saturation of data.)</i>
Researcher and participant relationship	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Can't tell <i>(unclear that researchers ritically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location)</i>
Ethical Issues	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Can't tell
Data analysis	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	No <i>(there was no description of how/if thematic analysis was performed. Unclear that researchers critically examine their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation)</i>
Findings	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Can't tell <i>(Often unclear what portions of the data were retrieved from the qualitative interviews and which from comments on the questionnaires. No discussion of credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst))</i>
Research value	How valuable is the research?	The research has some value <i>(The research focuses on an intervention of interest. No discussion of generalisability of findings.)</i>

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Section	Question	Answer
Overall risk of bias and directness	Overall risk of bias	High
	Directness	Partially applicable <i>(It is likely that some of the data was collected prior to 2010)</i>