The Education of Children from Military Families: Identity and Agency

Dr Judith McCullouch, University of Winchester
Michael Hall, University of Winchester
Sophie Ellis, University of Winchester

Corresponding Author: Dr Judith McCullouch
Email: judith.mccullouch@winchester.ac.uk

Abstract

The paper addresses the identity characteristics of children in military families (service children) and the conceptualisation of their educational experience. Looking beyond the bare facts of academic attainment and participation in higher education, the paper explores the impact of identity and agency on educational progression and accordingly presents the consequences for educators in engaging with the complex and distinctive realities and identities of these children, challenging stereotypes about both service children and their perceived disadvantage. Existing research in the form of quantitative data sets and academic literature was reviewed and empirical data collected from school-age and undergraduate service children through interviews and questionnaires. Emergent theme analysis was viewed through the social constructivist lenses of Bandura, Bourdieu, Bronfenbrenner and Wenger and related to agency, identity and capital. Service children are found to be under-represented in the higher education population. Contributory factors include the distinctive constraints they face, including frequent mobility and family separation resulting in a high risk of emotional, behavioural and attainment problems. These precipitate a loss of personal agency, leading over time to the erosion of ambition to remain in education. Hence, continuing education becomes less attainable or desirable. Recommendations from the research include specific service children professional development for schools, further and higher education institutions.

Keywords

military service children, education, rights, progression, inclusion, values, identity, agency

Introduction

Over the last decade much attention has been given to the progression of under-represented groups into Higher Education for example for disability (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015) and minority ethnic populations (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014) and as a result a considerable amount is known about the progression and higher education participation of these groups. Far less is known about the progression and participation of children from military service families. Our research seeks to establish evidence for action that will stimulate, enable and foster in children and young people from service families appropriately high ambitions and the awareness and skills to access and succeed in further and higher education through the most appropriate progression route.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) cites two articles particularly pertinent to this position: Article 28 (right to education) 'Every child has the right to an education'; Article 29 (goals of education) 'Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.' The Armed Forces Covenant endorses these rights, stating that "…those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services." (Ministry of Defence, 2011:5). Thus, this research takes an *a posteriori* stance on the military in that it accepts the existence of the military and seeks to examine how others' lives are affected by its existence. The research therefore addresses the educational experiences of service children from an ethical and educational standpoint.

Service children are seldom perceived to fit those factors common to understandings of exclusion from higher education, such as deprivation (Riddell and Weedon, 2014). However, our research shows that they are under-represented in the higher education population. The research also highlighted that service children face intractable constraints including frequent mobility and family separation resulting in

an increased risk of emotional, behavioural and attainment problems. Bandura et. al. (2001) noted that agency governs ambitions, and purpose, and supports resilience to daunting obstacles, creating momentum. Although it emerged that these children are often adept at masking the impact of their loss of agency, it became clear that eventually the effort of coping takes its toll, and continuing education becomes less attainable or desirable.

Research approach and methods

The focus of this enquiry was to use quantitative statistical data and qualitative data about children from military families' experiences of education to identify the factors that impact on their progression from maintained primary and secondary school to Higher Education. The research included both secondary data (quantitative and qualitative) from a range of sources and primary, empirical data drawn from three groups of participants – service children from primary schools, those at secondary school and undergraduates from military families. These children were, at the time of the data collection, being educated in the UK in maintained schools and one UK University. Those at the University had attended a range of schools including maintained, private, and boarding schools and also military schools abroad.

Service children represent a specialist group population (Newby 2010) based on the criterion of all possessing the specific characteristics under investigation. Therefore, the participants were drawn through a purposive, specialist sampling method process using recommendations, professional knowledge, volunteering and ease of access (Cohen et. al.; 2011; Newby, 2010; Yin, 2009). The resultant sample was primary (n=38), secondary (n=39) and undergraduate (n=13).

Data collected must provide sufficient evidence to enable "warrantable inferences" to be made when answering the research questions (Plowright, 2011: 189). Plowright contends that there are three methods of gathering data: observation; asking questions; and artefact analysis. For this research one of these was employed, that of asking questions. Questionnaires are usually one of the main sources of data for educational enquiry (ibid) and were chosen for their efficiency to generate a large quantity of information in a short period for a quite low cost (Newby, 2010). They can be handed out and analysed in bulk, they are standardised offering a pre-defined set

of questions (open and closed) in the same order to all participants and they are anonymous encouraging honesty (ibid). They do rely on participants reading and understanding the questions and offer no scope to provide further clarity or to probe for further information (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, questions were used both to elicit factual information about the respondent's life and to learn about the respondents' world as they see it. This gave both quantitative information on the population group of interest and qualitative responses. The questionnaires were administered on paper; for the school children the first part asking for factual information was completed by parents. The questionnaires provided ways into the respondents' social and cultural world, creating access to the knowledge, skills, cognition and emotions that contribute to their identity (Yin, 2009). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews arising from initial analysis of the questionnaires with the undergraduates gave the opportunity to gain greater awareness of what these participants thought and believed (Seidman, 2006). Stake (1995:24) recognised that the interview is "…the main road to multiple realities," and hence enabled the respondents and interviewer to work together to gain in-depth understanding of their particular situations (Newby, 2010). Interviews are time consuming at all stages: interviewing, transcribing and analysis, and are reliant on the skills of the interviewer (Seidman, 2006). Data was also drawn from filmed interviews with the sample primary and secondary school pupils and undergraduates.

Secondary statistical data was obtained from sources in the public domain and by request for data not in the public domain. These came from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Office for National Statistics (ONS), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Secondary qualitative data were obtained through searches and recommendations from the Forces In Mind Trust (FiMT) and the Army Families Federation (AFF).

Analysis is informed by the literature, secondary and primary data and viewed through a social constructivist lens. This examines the conceptions of the learner, of knowledge and the relationship between them holding that knowledge is relative and subjective to the context and experiences of individual and group (Schwandt, 2007).

This is further covered in the Capital, identity, agency and values section of this article. In this research, the statistical secondary data sometimes gave different numbers from different sources and hence could only be used to yield comparative outcomes rather than finite ones. The qualitative secondary data had a high level of subjectivity, expressing the views of the sample, rather than confirmable facts. This study benefited from a reflective approach using emergent thematic analysis (Gibbs, 2007). The thematic analysis approach used data-driven analysis (themes emerging from the data) when processing and presenting (coding was not used). This was then cross-referenced to concept-driven analysis when considering the data against the literature and theoretical lens (Gibbs, 2007). The findings were initially organised from the perspective of each of the respondents and then collated against the emerging themes without moving into interpretation. Separating the presentation of findings from the discussion enabled an open mind when looking at themes within and across the data. This then helped to establish priorities without restricting the analysis to solely looking for matters common to all and hence losing sight of what is in the individual accounts (Gibbs, 2007).

Small samples and multiple variables in the primary data precluded statistical analysis and limited the ability to confirm significant differences between measures as they affect margins of error, confidence levels, power and effect size that can be derived from statistical tests. Therefore, the findings on this data are presented as comparative, not absolute. However, through emergent theme analysis, we were able to determine indications of trends and comparisons which enabled explication of areas of deficit and therefore for attention. This enabled us to set out to gain an authentic understanding of the experiences and views of the participants (Schwandt, 2007). Credibility was secured by taking care to ensure that the interpretations placed on the data reflected the participants' views. As the context of the research was one that would be familiar to others who might use the findings, transferability was made possible. Dependability was achieved by "…ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented" and by showing through the data that the findings were not "…figments of the inquirer's imagination" (Schwandt, 2007:299). As such, the findings presented here represent real experiences of service children and consistent with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and as such are deserving of attention.

Challenges experienced by service children in the literature

It is argued by the Department for Education (DfE) that being a service child brings benefits. These include the possibility for children to strengthen their resilience, develop the skills to socialise and make new friends quickly, and the opportunity to gain a wider range of experiences than their non-mobile peers (DfE, 2013). The DfE (2013) and National College of School Leadership (NCSL) (2011) note mobility as the pivotal factor in the disruption of a service child's education in which moving between schools has an inverse impact academically and pastorally. Notably this includes broken continuity of provision through delays, poor communication and transition arrangements, (particularly for those with additional needs and those sitting examinations), curriculum changes, emotional wellbeing, disrupted friendships and the increased potential for bullying. The implication is that service children possess the strengths and qualities needed in order to 'cope' with such experiences. Furthermore, the NCSL (2011:4) asserts that mobility can be used as an opportunity for both cognitive and affective learning. Mobility can be a context in which children can reflect on their feelings, emotions and moods and those of others.

The policy discourse in the UK does not regard service children as educationally disadvantaged or underachieving [House of Commons Defence Committee (HoCDC), 2013]. However, the HoCDC does note concerns specific to mobile service children resulting in support for service children which has tended to focus on pastoral care. Indeed, this is the emphasis of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) (DfE, 2014) in England. A particular case in point arises through the experience of family separation. Separation is a feature of military life commonly experienced by service children. Additionally, many will experience the particularly challenging separation associated with combat deployment of the parent. The DfE (2013) and HoCDC (2013) noted to a lesser extent that deployment has an inverse impact academically and pastorally creating a higher incidence of mental health issues in children and parents and a higher rate of caring responsibilities than the general population. Children with a parent on combat deployment seem to cope less well than those with a non-deployed parent. This can be associated with an increased incidence of emotional and behavioural problems (HoCDC, 2013). White et. al. (2011) found that children of parents deployed to combat operations were at higher risk of psychosocial problems than their civilian peers. Anticipation, fear and anxiety, ways

of coping and increased excitement of the homecoming all appear to play a part. The cycle of deployment (Devoe et. al., 2012) identifies seven stages experienced by service families as they progress through a deployment: pre-deployment; looking ahead; saying goodbye; separation; surviving the home stretch; reintegration; and moving forward. Reintegration can be particularly hard, especially for older children, as the family members need to become one unit again (ibid).

The Department of Health (DoH, 2015) notes that service children have a higher rate of caring responsibilities than the general population. These young carers in military families may be caring for parents who have injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder or they may be caring for a parent with health problems while their partner is away. If both parents are deployed, the child may be in the care of grandparents or even fostered (Longfield, 2018). Despite these impedances, DfE statistics (2014) show that, for less mobile service children, GCSE attainment matches the civilian population. However, there is a sharp decline as number of moves increases. Close attention paid to the affective development of children can help to inform and hence provide strategies to adapt approaches to teaching and learning (NCSL, 2011).

The need for some consideration of the educational requirements of service children was recognised in July 2015, when the Ministry of Defence Directorate Children and Young People [sic] (DCYP), with DfE, issued advice to Head Teachers in England on the need to exercise sensitivity to term time absence for service children due to parents' deployment (MoD, 2015).

Capital, identity, agency, values

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) pertaining to service children may be explained by considering three aspects: embodied cultural capital arising from the fundamentals of family life, objectified cultural capital concerned with the things that families own and institutionalised cultural capital which is about the level of education of an individual (Saraceno et. al., 2014). Differences to these cultural acquisitions can occur through parents actively and passively exposing their child to culture, transference of values, ways of talking and thinking, attitudes and beliefs, work ethic and orientation toward education and employment (Sullivan, 2007). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1984) argues that habitus creates a field which structures an individual's perception, conception,

and actions within the social spaces they inhabit. Hence, the cultural capital gained by service children is particular to the distinctive characteristics of their lives in a military community.

Bourdieu argues that dispositions acquired through habitus, along within the conditions of the field, influence a person's life choices and educational experience (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Furthermore, Bourdieu reasoned that an individual's position within a field is determined by the accumulation of capital. For Bourdieu, family is the key site for the accumulation of cultural capital and the generation of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The habitus of service children derives from those who have the primary responsibility for developing their habitus - their service parents. Bourdieu (1997) suggests that creation of habitus in families falls more practically to women and the service wife/partner has a particular position in their community. Despite societal changes towards the roles of women within British society, patriarchy is still very much alive within the military community (Jervis, 2011), compounded by the homogenizing, controlling characteristics of the military which can undermine the identities of service wives. The military applies subtle and gender related pressure, in which wives unwittingly collude, leaving them paradoxically positioned and they are simultaneously perceived as members of, and external to, the military (Jervis, 2011). This results in unequal distribution of capital within opposing fields. Military wives and mothers are free to play the game within the military field; however, they are not equal in their ability to play (Grenfell et. al., 1998). This can have profound effects on their identity and agency.

Bandura (1982, 1997) argues that identity results from continuous and reciprocal interactions between a number of factors. This includes cognition, environment and behaviour. People are not passive responders but active agents generating impetus and creating a necessary dynamic though which self-efficacy or agency may thrive. The scope of this agency evolves from the obstacles to change which a person feels they can surmount. This gives rise to the opportunity for individuals to be the principal agents in their own evolution and hence to changes within their cultural group. However, misjudgement of self-efficacy may produce adverse consequences resulting in a reduced perception of one's agency and so inducing reluctance to take further risks. Bandura coined the phrase 'social cognitive theory' which allows the

self to be both agent and object in which people are both products of their cultural environment and producers.

Humans have the capacity to grow and adapt. We create environments with peers that shape human developments and this agency makes us active participants in our own development along with the influence of relative power and stability. Influences external to the community have very little effect on the fundamentals of human behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Wenger (1998) determined that learning, meaning and identity are formed by and give form to individuals, communities and organisations through a synthesis of actions between the person and their context through active social engagement. Hence learning, development and cultural capital are embedded in the history and culture of their community in which it takes place. An individual's identity arises from a social formation of the person and is a marker of membership of the community to which they belong.

Arthur et al. (2015) note that there is an implicit link between instilling character and improving educational outcomes. They urge that:

> "…politicians and policy makers should recognise that moral virtues such as honesty, kindness and courage are just as important as performance virtues such as resilience, self-confidence and grit." (: 27)

This contrasts with some current political thinking, for example the remarks of the former secretary of state for education, Nicky Morgan MP:

> "We know that qualities such as self-control, confidence, perseverance and the ability to bounce back from adversity underpin future success and well-being. We want to ensure that all young people have opportunities to develop these traits." (Morgan, 2016, n.p.)

Thus, where the emphasis on character development is skewed towards a certain reified set of values, there exists the possibility that important dimensions of children's agency and identity may go neglected. The experiences of service children offer an insight into how the prevalence of preferred sets of values contributes to their ambitions. They also highlight how the social context of a child's life will shape values and aspirations and families have an important part to play (Hitlin, 2006). It is interesting to note that Hitlin warns that it is easy to assume similarities between

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values held by parent and child which are not so evident under closer scrutiny gives rise to consideration about how values, embedded within cultural capital, are developed. The case of service children brings to light how over-simplified assumptions about the development of character through preferred values may lead to the inhibition of individual agency and identity, and thus to sub-optimal educational outcomes.

Findings

To establish the service children's voice, two key questions asked in the research were: What are the advantages of being a service child? and What are the challenges? Due to the small numbers in the sample and the qualitative nature of the questions, it is not possible to do a statistical comparison, but we felt there were some clear indications of trends which are noted below. There were no discernible differences between the responses of male and female participants. Predominantly, the advantages expressed related to identity and the disadvantages to agency. It was evident, in contrast to the literature, that the service children themselves regarded deployment as a far greater challenge than mobility requiring them to draw strength from their values. Their awareness of the multifarious effects of a parent away on deployment included: "…missing them"; "…it's difficult to study when he's away"; "…scared for their safety" and "…missed my birthday".

Childcare limited activities. Single parents' problems were evident: "…can't do football club", mother's ill health, jealousy, upset routines etc., situations made tougher by coping with absence and lack of another adult to help. The undergraduates noted the impact on their education:

> "It's only (at) A-level that it hit me. I went from A-grade GCSEs to D and E-grade A-levels. I just didn't cope with it really at all."

There was acceptance of the situation by students who reported comments like:

> "My dad never went to any of my parent's evenings. I was just like, he is away. He can't help that - it was just kind of like letting him know; by the way I am doing this."

> "It was just normal. It was just how it was. It's still the way it is."

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However, one finding indicated that the more unaccompanied deployments they had experienced the less inclined they were to go to university.

The comments related to moving identified problems with friends, schools and housing but, for the most part, the children adopted a pragmatic view of these as "…it's just the way it is." They identified issues in education such as catching up, syllabus changes, regional differences ("Scotland is slightly different - I ended up going straight from primary school into Year 8") and lack of transference of provision for any special educational needs. Children noted that schools have different teaching approaches "…they teach differently in each school" but they did not particularly expect the schools to help them ("we just have to get on with it"). One option is for children to board. 6% of service children do this, compared with 7% of the general population. For some, this is a good choice:

> "I didn't like moving. I left and I went to a worse place. I argued against it until I got put into a boarding school."

For others, the solution is for the family to stay in one place:

> "…my dad has moved around to his place of work."

This can result in the school not knowing they were military children and hence not claim service pupil premium:

> "…my teachers never knew. I never told them. I didn't really get any support or anything like that."

From our research, for the most part, the parents' education aligned with the child's intent to go to university and the parents with higher rank had greater tendency to have attended university. This was compounded by children of higher ranked parents who had attended university, being more inclined to intend to attend university than children of lower ranked parents who had attended university. There was no particular indication that children from military families intended to join the military more that children from the general population. When compared to their civilian counterparts, service children seem to have a raised awareness of the military and therefore were able to make informed decisions when considering the military as a possible career. On one hand it was a definite (perhaps an easy) option

ISSN: 1758-2199

"I'm going into the Army, like my dad", while for others, their knowledge of the military life enabled them to be very clear they would not join the military ("I'm definitely not joining up", "I really don't want anything to do with that.").

Our research showed that those schools with a close association with military bases and a good number of children from military families try to manage the social and emotional needs of the service children, "…they know how to judge our needs without making a fuss". The growth of twenty-four-hour, easy access, and digital media coverage increasingly means these children are bombarded with images and information that may be distressing. In schools where this culture is not acknowledged or understood, the children from military families tended to keep their status quiet as this meant greater control of behaviour (adult and child) towards them (well-intentioned and otherwise) "It's easier if we keep it to ourselves." Some were not sure their schools knew. When teachers were aware, even during a deployment they preferred to keep it to themselves

> "I was never very open about it and just kept it to myself. As a teacher when you see a child going through something you want to talk to them. But I didn't want that."

A particular challenge associated with their identity as a service child was that they tended not to rate safety at school as good or very good, were not inclined to enjoy their lessons, and felt that their schools did not take bullying seriously. In their friendship groups, the children from military families either kept together with a shared understanding:

> "When her dad went away, I looked after her and when mine did the same she did the same for me ... we kind of acknowledged each other as being slightly different."

or accepted that their non-service friends would not understand:

> "Having general friends to help you take your mind off it (deployment) is nice."

For pastoral support and decisions about education parents featured much more than schools in the children's direct support systems "Mum and dad talk to me about

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choices in school." Few children expect their schools to help them make decisions about their future. Children from military families can come under the agency of different national, local and departmental authorities, each of which has their own way of operating and maintaining records, and with little communication between each, necessitating the essential role of parents. The older children demonstrated awareness of wider factors affecting their continuing education. One aspect was financial considerations, knowing that debt is not acceptable to the military:

> "…it costs money to carry on after 16"
>
> "…it's a burden on my family"
>
> "I worried about my parents' finances"
>
> "I didn't get to go where I wanted to go because I wanted to stay where I was initially but the army wouldn't pay for that"
>
> "I ended up going to probably one of the worst rated colleges in the country just because it was nearer to me and it was free"

Another is a wider view of family responsibilities:

> "Daddy has PTSD – we've come through the darkest of days."

Some of the 'advantages' the children cited expressed the service child's identity. They agreed they benefited by going to interesting places, doing things civilian children would not do and getting unusual presents from parents stationed overseas. They noted that they had developed character traits such as those associated with courage such as bravery, confidence and resilience, and highlighted traits gained associated with independence. They felt their service upbringing had also given them responsibility, adaptability and being organised and people skills: cultural understanding, acceptance and an unbiased viewpoint. All commented that they felt special and had pride in being part of the military community. One saying seemed to encapsulate their service identity.

> "Everyone counts you as a person who hasn't got much problems and are just normal like everyone else when actually it's a bit hard with moving

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and parents in military, with them getting posted further away and in danger. Not literally not normal –we're different from the crowd."

Discussion

It should be remarked that we only know what the children tell us and do not know what they are *not* telling us. It is not possible to know how much of what was voiced by the service children in their responses to the advantages and challenges of being a child from a military family was the child's original thought, how much had been absorbed through the service children's emersion in the field (Bourdieu, 1986) and how much had been absorbed from parents, teachers or friends as a management device. It might be argued that if a child is told often enough that they are brave for example, then it becomes rooted, as emphasised by Yeager and Dweck (2012) who note the importance of implicit theories of self to our interpretations of and reactions to challenges.

The views on the advantages and challenges expressed by the undergraduates reflected those noted by the school-aged children from military families; however, they were tempered by hindsight and maturity, suggesting the perceived person gains have become embedded and actualised - though at what cost is not known. The character traits expressed by the children, whether real or generated, show positive mind-sets but also mindfulness of what they have to cope with as well as recognition of the need to develop such qualities as the means to survive their situation, particularly the emotional demands. As Bandura et al. (2001) contends self-efficacy is a pivotal factor in determining momentum and sense of purpose. Accordingly, the service child's recital of values indicating pride, determination and so on may be masking the impact of the loss of agency imposed by the service child's life.

It could be argued that loss of agency does not necessarily mean lack of self-belief. Bandura et al. (2001) identified three pathways of influence: socio-economic status; parents; child's self-efficacy. Membership of the military provides clearly defined strata of status through the rank structure and it is noteworthy that in our research the children of senior non-commissioned officers expressed the strongest views of their identity, with clearly defined values and strong ambitions. For their parents to

have achieved such a level of promotion will have required persistence, dedication, personal development and leadership so it is reasonable to expect their children should demonstrate similar traits. Nevertheless, whilst the children felt pride in being part of the military community and in what their serving parent(s) were doing, they often preferred not to have their status known in order to avoid unpleasant consequences from those who did not understand the realities of service life. Hence service children are denied an outlet and acknowledgement for their pride, one of the values that provide security and identity (Goffman, 1990).

The pre-eminence of the effects of separation and combat deployment in the children's responses underlines the manifest view that service children's security and sense of identity resides with the family. Contribution by their parents enhances their discipline and determination to succeed, illustrating the principles that Bandura (2001) and Hitlin (2006) espouse in which parental influences have a notable impact on a child's aspirations. The undergraduates interviewed acknowledged the various factors that might put them at a disadvantage but felt that as children from military families they had the necessary focus and determination to overcome them and succeed. Few service children in the research had any expectations of their schools; the children understood that they just needed to 'get on with it'.

It was evident from our research that, tempered by their level of maturity, service children expressed a strongly-held sense of identity with reflected moral performance, courage and independence stances. It might be considered that these positions are derived from parents' cultural capital and hence likely that service children subconsciously absorb and then reflect forces values. As a consequence, it may be deduced that holding these values underpins attitudes of the children towards engaging with the school teaching and learning activities causing their general disposition towards school to regard it as both a requirement and the right thing to do.

Service children's values may help in terms of attitudes to and disposition towards school as service children might be better able to apply themselves, cope with the transition to new settings, make friends and integrate. Alternatively, it may be that their cultural capital protects them, creating a web of security and insulation, hindering their integration outside the refuge. This might create a view that school,

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and hence education which sits outside of what they understand to be the course of their lives. The service children knew they were different and gave ways in which this was a disadvantage. The increased maturity of the undergraduates highlighted their awareness of impact on factors outside themselves. These were financial considerations, ill health (including mental) and caring responsibilities, single parenting, and the career sacrifices of non-serving parent. To survive, the security bubble created within the family ensures the children cope the best they can with their situation but as a consequence, school seemed to be just something that you do. For service children, it is possible that education is synonymous with going to school; in other words, that education is an activity as opposed to an integral element of childhood. Education becomes viewed as ever changing but seemingly the same with the setting, staff and other children taking on the same status as the ever-present magnolia paint on the walls of each military house. Thus, the service life may come to represent not a life of uncertainty but one of certainty – family, structures, moving, absence, danger, and social boundaries.

There is a danger of taking a deficit view relating to the life of the service child. Service children may well see success in education and life differently or distinctly with school viewed as a discrete entity somewhat disconnected with the trajectories of their lives. Consequently, they may progress *through* school but not necessarily continue with their education by progressing *from* school. It was clear that their cultural capital and identity helped through school and to achieve a level of success but not necessarily to continuing education. Additionally, there are some structural constraints that agency simply cannot be overcome, addressed or be militated against possibly contributing to the service child being disengaged from the social 'games' of getting to further and higher education. Government discourse on resilience in education has focused on the positive character traits that are associated with it. It might be questioned whether the means to achieve these benefits is desirable. It also might be considered that by stating that the lives of the service children are advantageous the responsibility for addressing issues is abnegated. There is a tone in the writings of government and educational policy makers that either all is well, or something should be done as they write to direct 'schools should' or 'local authorities should' – in both situations passing the onus for action on to others.

Bandura et al., (2001:187), espousing the principles of social cognitive theory asserted that choices made in formative years shape the course of lives. The theory assumes that people are by nature “self-organising, proactive, self-regulating agents [therefore, if agency is removed] there is little incentive to act or persevere in face of difficulties.” As a consequence, it could be argued that the removal of choices and agency of service children through their mobility results in disengagement with the process of education. If this is so then by extension there is the strong possibility that the social and institutional impediments the service children meet as consequences of their lifestyle create barriers to advancement in the expected conformity of our education systems. After all, the persistence and continued additional efforts required of service children merely to keep pace with their civilian counterparts demands energy which, without agency, may be fruitless. For example, through their mobility and family issues arising from deployment service children are likely to have reduced opportunities to be involved with broader educational development. Negligible involvement with out-of-school activities such as taking a lead (team captaincy) or developing a skill or a talent, would limit the scope of experiences which would not only curtail the potential or inclination to join each new community but would also limit what the children from military families could use to facilitate their applications to higher education.

Whilst the focus for our research was on progression to higher education, it became evident that this might be only one marker of a successful education, leading us to revisit the question of what characterises a successful education. Is a successful education determined by attainment, progression, resilience, happiness, freedom, and/or agency? Are long-term views the same as short term views? The relationship between society and culture has been raised repeatedly by commentators such as Jacks (1931) and Zielger and Peak (1971) who observe a disconnect between what education should do and what it actually does. Teachers are required to educate the now recognised diversity of learners, to meet the needs of an increasingly varied and rapidly changing society within a bureaucratic structure that inhibits responsiveness (Jarvis et. al. 2003).

Everyone in the armed forces is expected to live by the values of their service which are indicative of the sort of person who “...will respond to a demanding way of life, who aspires to excellence, who share a sense of duty and commitment and who

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understand and live by our collective values," (MoD, 2017:3). It is by these means that a moral component is provided for the armed forces. There are however tensions in the formation, understanding and playing out of values. By accepting values are you doing as you are told? In other words, does subscribing to these values create or remove agency? Within cultures with strong transmission to their children will have even greater tendency to influence when the ties within a family are particularly strong, weaken further the impact of influences from outside that community (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Bandura et al. (2001) generalised this principle by stating that the world in which the child lives with its networks and normative influences is fundamental to determining the direction the child's life takes. It may be that the cultural norm in the military is of activity and action which will present (consciously or unconsciously) to the service children the enticement of future careers that reflect the values in which their family is embedded. If university is perceived as three years of sedentary, inactive study, it might not be as attractive as other opportunities.

Conclusion

It is evident that that the emotional and intellectual effort of coping takes its toll with insidious effects emerging into their consciousness as they mature. As Bandura et al. (2001) indicates, agency through self-efficacy governs ambitions, purpose, and supports resilience to daunting obstacles. However much their values and identity have supported them through their compulsory school years, the corrosive effect of lack of agency was illustrated by the mature reflections of the undergraduates. Combined with the additional demands of sixth form study, these factors may contribute to poorer performance post-16 through disturbed study, resulting in poor A level results, a loss of focus and/or momentum and a perception of university being less attainable to the service child through limited breadth of conventional experiences. The undergraduates who took part in this research were the service children who had succeeded. But for many more service children, it may be that the daunting and persistent obstacles created by the range of factors contributing to the complexities and demands of their lives become overwhelming, determination and intent dissipate and ambition fades.

Recommendations from the research include professional development for schools further education and universities specific to service children to they recognise and understand what the service child brings and know how to provide for their education and emotional needs so they are able to encompass a wider view of education outside their military agency and habitus. There have already been requirements for action from UCAS, DfE and OfS, acknowledging service children as a group which needs particular consideration. To underpin this, we recommend the creation of accurate centralised data sets on the numbers, locations, schools, and achievements of service children. To minimise the effect of moving, we propose to extend boarding school and service pupil premium funding to post-16 education and provide a facilitated structure transition between local authorities.

Research is continuing and we will continue to explore the views and educational progress of service children. This will be extended to further education and vocational colleges, progress through university and those who join the military. We will also encompass those children whose parent(s) are no longer serving, gender perspectives, careers advice in schools, a service pupil premium and the position of mothers. Continuing research seeks to compare and correlate the various data-bases (DfE, MoD, OECD, DoH) to examine the educational markers of service children. Finally, we plan to undertake a longitudinal study to track from early years.

Ethical statement

The ethics for this research were in accordance with the guidance given by British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) and the requirements of the University's ethics committee. Approval and ethics release were sought through the relevant channels and granted.

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