

**A View from a PRU:  
An Ethnographic Study of Pupil Referral  
Unit Practice in Wales**

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## **DECLARATION**

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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## **Abstract**

This is an ethnographic study of a Welsh Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). PRUs have historically been characterised by low rates of pupil attainment and have been of marginal interest in terms of policy and research. In an attempt to mitigate this neglect, the Welsh Government has committed to improving PRU practices and the academic outcomes of learners, through a number of policy changes. It is against this canvas of recent policy changes, that the thesis explores the professional roles and identities of teachers and the educational experiences of pupils, through a number of qualitative methods including interviews, observations and participatory methods. Drawing on theories of pedagogy, recontextualisation and an enactment approach to policy, the study highlights how these changes in policy have reframed professional roles and identities within the setting. However, the data also indicates that professionals working within the PRU actively resist policy that does not align with their professional beliefs and values. The thesis illustrates how through exerting agency, teachers adopted hybrid professional roles, based on a social pedagogy which accommodated both the pupils' social needs and academic learning. By giving the marginalised young people a voice, the data suggests that the PRU was able to offer pupils a positive and supportive educational experience, where a sense of belonging led to improvement in the pupils' wellbeing and social learning. Whilst endorsing recent policy initiatives focusing on the educational outcomes of children in PRUs, the study cautions against the dangers of narrow metrics of educational attainment recontextualising the social pedagogy within PRU practice. The thesis not only has direct relevance for educational policy in Wales but contributes to wider debates about the role of alternative education settings in relation to inclusion in education, children's rights and the value of alternative provision more generally.

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## **Abbreviations**

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health service
DBS	Disclosure Barring Service
EOTAS	Education other than at school
LRE	Least restrictive environment
ORF	Official Recontextualising Field
PRF	Pedagogic Recontextualising Field
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SEBMH	Social emotional behavioural or mental health difficulty
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCO	Special educational needs co-ordinator
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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# **Chapter one: Introduction**

## **Background to the Study**

This PhD is about a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) during a particular period of policy change within Wales (Welsh Government, 2017a). It is interested in exploring the daily practices and routines of staff and pupils inside the PRU at this time. Using ethnographic methods including interviews, participant observations and participatory methods over one academic year, the intention of the study is to understand how macro-level policy changes have manifested themselves in the micro-level practices of this PRU. The study also hopes to move beyond the often-negative rhetoric that exists in relation to PRUs (The Daily Telegraph, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2018) and deepen our knowledge about their position in debates on inclusion and exclusion in education.

Having spent a number of years as a youth and community worker in a Further Education (FE) College community radio station in the North of England, which supported young people who were often on the fringes of mainstream education and close to dropping out of it, I became increasingly interested in how less formal and alternative educational environments could support young people with their academic and social learning. With my own commitment to youth work, which aimed to support young people with their learning, development and participation in society, I became aware of how important these less formal educational spaces could be for young people. The community radio station gave young people an opportunity to express themselves and take on responsibilities through dedicated levels of support, trust and belief from adults. I witnessed the improvements young people made socially and personally, developing their communication skills, abilities to work as part of a team, self-esteem and confidence. Speaking on the radio about their own lives and interests helped

them to develop their identities and gave them a platform from which to have a voice and be heard within the local geographical area.

I became frustrated at the lack of opportunities being given to young people and the sense that their personal issues were being individualised, seen as personal problems rather than products of wider structural issues.

However, as I came to realise, these were not just personal problems, they were part of wider societal troubles and public issues (Mills, 1967). I therefore became interested in alternative education as a provision, and wanted to understand how these settings tried to support young people who were struggling with their education. PRUs became of interest to me for this reason. With the negative narratives often focusing on the individual pupils themselves, I felt there was even greater urgency to gain a deep and careful understanding of their experiences. As settings in between mainstream and special education I was interested in understanding how PRUs worked and how young people experienced them. With little empirical research on PRUs generally and in Wales in particular (McCluskey et al, 2013 being the exception) I felt that the voices of these young people, like those in the radio station, were not being heard. I therefore began to develop my research focus, which was intent on giving these young people a voice, reflected in my choice of research methods.

From my own experiences of working with young people who very often articulated that they felt they didn't belong to the college where the radio station was based, I wanted the study to provide some insights into PRU pupils' educational experiences and the work of professionals in these settings. Whilst providing a space for young people to be heard in research is widely recognised as important, particularly for those with behavioural and emotional difficulties in PRUs who have rarely been listened to (Corbett, 1998), translating this into my study was not straightforward. The practical and ethical challenges involved in realising this were significant (as discussed in later chapters), including the ethical tensions between protection and voice. Nonetheless, I felt that providing pupils with an

opportunity to voice their opinions was important, and one that I retained at the centre of the research.

In addition to capturing the voices of young people in the PRU, my own professional experiences were located on the margins of education. The senior college staff were clearly committed to supporting the radio station but there was always a continuous battle to fight, in relation to its perception regarding its worth and value (socially, academically and economically) by those outside its immediate confines. Whilst many people valued the radio's work and understood its purpose, others felt it was an unnecessary burden for the college and was merely a creche for unruly young people. This again reflects the private problems/public issue debate (Mills, 1967) and questions regarding the purpose of education, as a source of social support, development and learning. Increasingly, alternative approaches to learning like those provided by the radio station, which offered social development to young people, were becoming side-lined. This vision of education (as a source of social support) was becoming less valued. As a result, education was moving away from providing a public service, towards a more refined and narrow educational experience, reducing it to predetermined academic outcomes (Ball, 2003). This narrowing of education not only happened in this college but has been documented across England, even moving into PRU provision in recent years (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). Very little research has explored the professional roles and practices of staff in PRUs to date (Meo and Parker, 2004) and a consideration of this is also missing from the latest best practice evaluations in Wales (Estyn<sup>1</sup>, 2015). I felt that a focus on the professional roles was crucial to this study, as the teachers themselves are a central part of the PRU context, contributing to the young people's experiences. I also wanted to understand more fully, who worked in these settings and what they perceived as the most important aims of PRU work. In doing so, I could begin to explore how they went about performing their daily work alongside

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<sup>1</sup> Similar to Ofsted in England, Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.

policy changes, and how this created the PRU environment which the young people experienced.

PRUs are the most commonly used form of alternative education provision in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018a). Supporting young people who are struggling in mainstream school settings, PRUs and their staff aim to engage with learners who display a variety of highly complex social and emotional needs, including suicidal tendencies, social anxieties and acts of physical and verbal aggression. Given the highly complex needs of young people who enter PRUs, the educational engagement work that PRU staff carry out can often be extremely challenging (Meo and Parker, 2004; McCluskey et al, 2015). Historically and still to this day, negative representations of PRUs and their learners have been circulated by the mainstream media (The Daily Telegraph, 2013; The Sun, 2019) and politics (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). Headline grabbing references to ‘unteachable kids’, the ‘shocking underclass of our school system’ and the ‘scandal of ever-increasing exclusions’, evoke highly disparaging representations which can stigmatise and ‘other’ learners (Solomon, 2011). However, there are concerns about the varying degrees of quality in PRU provision (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2014) which raise questions in relation to educational inclusion and a child’s right to an education, which is on a par with their peers in a mainstream setting (McCluskey et al, 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the difficulties that these young people face, the academic outcomes for PRU learners are often much lower than their peers in mainstream settings (Estyn, 2015). Nevertheless, the consistently pejorative narratives surrounding PRUs that are circulated by the media are striking and leave little room for alternative understandings and framings of them to emerge. It is against this background, and in a context of recent policy changes taking place in PRUs across Wales (Welsh Government, 2017a), that there is an urgent need to better understand PRUs and the staff and pupils within them.

This study has not emerged from an intention to ‘get to the bottom’ of the poor educational outcomes of young people in PRUs which often form the

backdrop to the media's messages about PRUs. Rather, through employing a range of ethnographic methods it aims to provide a more careful, nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of PRU practices in Wales. I felt that this understanding would be developed further by acknowledging the physical location of the PRU, as part of the contextual dimension of it.

A number of theoretical ideas and concepts are drawn upon throughout the thesis to support the analysis of the data and develop my knowledge within the above identified areas of interest. These include theories of pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000), which support a micro-level analysis of the PRU's practices, connecting them to wider external structures and an enactment approach to policy (Ball et al, 2012). In doing so, the study seeks to uncover how Welsh policy changes are enacted at the micro-level. Relatedly, the thesis draws on the sociology of the professions (Evetts, 2011) and in particular the theorisation around hybrid professional work to help illuminate the teaching practices within the PRU. Therefore, whilst I entered the PRU with an open mind in terms of what I might find, I did not go in with an empty one. I was guided by the aforementioned theoretical insights and concepts and my research questions and interests, which informed my focus in terms of observations and questions asked, once in the setting.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

Chapter two introduces PRUs in an historical context, relating them to debates around inclusion within education. A consideration of the wider forms of alternative education, such as youth work, is also considered. The chapter then provides an overview of the latest legislation and policy in relation to PRUs, outlining the Wales specific context and discussing the experiences of PRUs from the perspectives of young people.

Chapter three focuses on the professional role of teachers within PRUs. The chapter begins by considering the professional roles in PRUs, connecting these to theories of an ethic of care, social pedagogy and other professional practices. Following this a discussion on emotions in the workplace is

considered. Finally, the main theories drawn upon throughout the thesis are introduced, including theories of pedagogy and recontextualisation; professionalism and hybridity; educational policy enactment; and liminality.

Chapter four outlines the methodological approach taken in the study, referring to my own epistemological position, the methods used to collect data during my time at the PRU and the process adopted to analyse this data. Being immersed in the setting for a prolonged period of time as a volunteer, I also reflect on my own positionality as a researcher and the ethical conflicts, considerations and limitations which must be acknowledged as accompanying a study of this nature.

Chapter five is the first empirical chapter of the thesis and provides an in-depth description of the PRU, including initially, an overview of the referral meeting process and the decision-making involved in placing a child within the PRU. The staff, pupils and PRU's values are then introduced, followed by a consideration of the PRU's environment, its spaces and some of the daily routines which take place.

In Chapter six the teaching roles and identities of staff from the PRU are considered. Using empirical findings from the thesis, the chapter develops an understanding of how staff perceived the core aims of their occupational roles and outlines the types of professional identities that exist in the PRU. This begins with a focus on the 'teacher in charge' role before moving on to the broader teaching population. The chapter then moves on to consider the teachers' personal commitment to the work and the emotional tensions that this could create for them.

Chapter seven focuses on the educational experiences of the young people from within the PRU, through the participatory data collected with the pupils as part of the study. The chapter is divided predominantly into two sections focusing on the positive and negative experiences which the young people articulated.

Chapter eight provides a discussion of the main findings from the thesis, informed by the theoretical and empirical literature from previous research. The chapter also offers some insights into how the findings from the thesis can add to wider debates on inclusion within education, including the positive contribution PRUs can make in this regard.

Chapter nine offers recommendations for PRU policy and practice in Wales, by drawing on the empirical data from the research. The chapter also outlines some of the limitations from the study, making suggestions for future research in this important area of educational provision.

Chapter ten offers a summary of the thesis, including a discussion of the limitations within the study, before providing some concluding remarks.

## **Chapter two: Alternative Education and Pupil Referral Units**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this study was to explore the micro-level practices and experiences of staff and pupils in a PRU using ethnographic methods. This formed the basis of the search terms used when reviewing the literature. I decided to review literature from the 1970s up to the present day, searching major and relevant academic journals, including the British Educational Research Journal; International Journal of Inclusive Education; Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties; and the British Journal of Sociology of Education, as well as a web search of Google, Google Scholar and academic search engines within Cardiff University. The main search terms used included 'Pupil Referral Unit', 'alternative education', 'school exclusion' and 'education other than at school (EOTAS)' as a Welsh specific term. Of all the items found, those most relevant to this study were selected. In addition to qualitative studies, I also searched for reports and evaluations of PRUs from within the UK, using the same range of search terms. The reference lists from all the literature gathered were also reviewed for further relevant research and reports.

This chapter begins with a historical overview of alternative education provision in the UK, which then moves on to a consideration of PRU provision in relation to debates on inclusion and education. The chapter then describes the current PRU context in the UK. As the study takes place in Wales, the following section is dedicated to Welsh education and policy, before an overview of PRU provision in Wales is outlined. The final section of the chapter considers the experiences of those young people who have found themselves within these forms of schooling.

## **Historical Overview of Alternative Education**

Alternative forms of education for young people disengaged with academic learning have been the norm in Britain since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). Indeed, it was during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that interest in children deemed as ‘deviant’ or ‘maladjusted’ grew. Quoting the work of Sully (1895) from the book *Studies in Childhood*, Bridgeland (1971:49) describes how the author focused on childhood maladjustment. This was understood to refer to those young people whose behaviours were deemed too extreme and unmanageable for parents, guardians and teachers, who were not adequately adjusted to their environment (Bridgeland, 1971). This early work coincided with the emergence of educational psychology (Bridgeland, 1971) which shifted the focus away from biological explanations (which viewed deviancy as fixed and located within the human mind), towards explanations that acknowledged the role that social and environmental factors had in this (Cooper, 1999a). This gave way to the argument that certain education environments (namely those that emphasise care over control) could have positive effects on children’s emotional states (Cooper, 1999a).

Alongside Sully’s more scientific and psychological approach to understanding children’s emotional difficulties were others dedicated to supporting those in need. This included a morally orientated approach, which avoided punishment and sought to support young people through acts of firmness and kindness (Bridgeland, 1971). Mixing these moral and scientific approaches together at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was seen to be the beginning of the ‘therapeutic movement’ (Cooper, 1999a:16) and was part of a much wider cultural and social shift in understandings about human psychology and the role of the social environment in this. According to Cooper (1999b) it was at this time that residential establishments were set up to support young people deemed unmanageable for families and schools, where care was prioritised over control. Alternative schools of mini communities which focused on self-discipline over externally imposed regulation, was the norm in these new establishments.

These new understandings about children and young people and their emotional, social and education needs helped inform policy-making in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the key aims of the 1944 Education Act was the creation of education suitable for all learners. What emerged from this Act was a ‘tri-partite’ system of schooling, characterised by grammar schools for the academically able, technical schools for the technologically ‘inclined’ and secondary moderns for the rest (Trowler, 2003). This arrangement was deemed sufficient to meet the needs of the full spectrum of learners, although in reality, these aspirations did not transpire as pupils still struggled to access schooling that was most suited to their needs. Local authorities at the time were tasked with guaranteeing that children and young people of compulsory school age received some type of ‘efficient, full-time education suitable to her/his age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs’ (Blyth and Milner, 1993:255). This represented the importance placed on meeting the needs of the child, reflected in the emphasis on the provision of different kinds of schools for different kinds of ‘minds’. Within this provision however, some children struggled with the order and routine of the classroom and in 1945 the Handicapped Pupils and Health Service Regulations were passed in law (Cooper, 1999a). Children were identified and grouped as having various illnesses and disabilities through terms including ‘maladjustment’ for whom special forms of education provision were deemed appropriate. Between 1945 and 1980 the use of segregated special provision increased steadily.

However, with this new emphasis and the subsequent increase in the identification of children’s needs, ‘an unhelpful and false dichotomy between education and therapy’ occurred (Cooper, 1999a:23). In order to best meet the needs of those young people identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties, emphasis was placed on treating ‘needs’ over supporting academic development. This led to the creation of off-site special schools in the 1970s, providing education for pupils deemed disruptive or disengaged from education. Such schools were routinely poorly resourced and thus viewed as providing inferior quality education (Lloyd-Smith,

1984). Whilst not being answerable to any official governmental education guidelines, this meant that their standards of provision were highly variable (Lloyd-Smith, 1984), being described as 'sin bins' (Cooper, 1999a:23) for unwanted pupils (Slee, 1995).

Despite some concern over the quality of these settings, they did offer a progressive approach to supporting young people through providing caring, informal learning environments (Cooper, 1999a). Whilst this may not have resulted in widespread reforms of mainstream schooling, they nevertheless fed into a growing conversation about the best way to support children who were struggling within these settings (Cooper, 1999a). This also propelled debate around issues of inclusion when using alternative provision (Solomon, 2011). The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) acknowledged the challenge of providing inclusion alongside offering the best possible provision for young people. It stated that all reasonable attempts should be made to educate children within a mainstream setting but recognised that the child's individual needs were also of paramount importance (Cooper, 1999a).

Throughout the 1980s, despite a commitment towards inclusion, the segregation of pupils into different provisions continued to increase. These increases were thought to come about due to two main imperatives (Lloyd-Smith, 1984). Firstly, there was the view that disruptive pupils hampered the effectiveness of schools in offering good academic outcomes to learners. Any attempts to support the needs of disruptive learners were viewed as beyond the abilities of the classroom teacher, and the removal of disruptive pupils was deemed necessary, to protect the educational learning of the majority (Cooper, 1999a). Secondly, there was an increased concern for the needs of the disruptive child, who required a particular kind of educational environment that was supportive to his or her needs. Both the 1993 Education Act and the 1994 Special Educational Needs (SENs) Code of Practice announced new laws relating to SENs and their assessment. The laws introduced official measures to identify and support pupils with SENs,

which included monitoring measures that relied on the expertise of external agencies with this work (Cooper, 1999a).

With an increased focus on need came a greater likelihood that a child would be educated away from the mainstream. These Acts offered local authorities the option of creating a new form of alternative provision called a Pupil Referral Unit (Harris, 1995). Different viewpoints existed, however, about the purpose of these new units. Whilst some practitioners emphasised the importance of academic learning and re-integration to mainstream schooling, others prioritised the social and emotional aspects of learning, thus casting their attention to addressing the self-esteem of learners and their social learning needs (Solomon and Rogers, 2001). PRUs therefore became an amalgamation of both academic and social learning approaches, with priorities dependent on cultural attitudes and professionals' understandings of education and learning in a given context (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). To this day PRUs continue to be legally both a formal and an alternative type of education provision in Wales (Estyn, 2015), sitting somewhere between the two.

There are of course, much wider debates about freedom and discipline within education, which draw upon different learning contexts and viewpoints about the meaning and approach to education in formal and non-formal settings. Alternative education consists of multiple approaches to learning, which have existed in some shape or form since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Miller, 2007). Whilst early forms of education developed a limited and disciplinary approach to moulding young people into future workers of the state, alternative approaches to schooling became popular for their ability to offer an education which valued individuality, creativity, spirituality and a flexible rather than rigid programme of study (Miller, 2007). Religious groups were at the forefront of these early alternative forms of schooling (Batsleer and Davies, 2010). These methods had their roots in the works of early philosophers and educationalists such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, where education and learning was about the whole person and their physical, mental and psychological development

(Bruhlmeier, 2010). The approach taken here was embedded in a view that education should follow the natural growth of the child instead of societal and economic demands at a given time (Miller, 2007). These views on education were seen as ‘progressive’, centring on the development of the child’s moral, emotional and physical characteristics in a holistic fashion. Such an approach was able to connect with the immediate environment of learners, away from specified academic curriculums. An example of this is Summerhill school, created by A.S Neill in 1921. The idea behind this school was to create a schooling environment where children had relative freedom over what they would learn and when, allowing greater choice over their lives. The aim was ‘to make the school fit the child – instead of making the child fit the school’ (Neill, 1992:9), where personality and character were seen as just as important, if not more so, as academic learning.

Youth work has its own moral philosophical underpinnings and is also part of a progressive educational approach. Young people are supported in developing a sense of self and relationship with themselves and others (Young, 1999). For Young (1999:4) youth work is fundamentally about values and as such moral philosophy. It ‘is a process through which young people come to increasingly understand their values and integrate those values with their sense of identity and their actions in the world’. Working with these values in mind, youth work involves anti-oppressive practice, which challenges limiting societal structures, supports and promotes minority groups and specifically, young people (Batsleer and Davies, 2010). In this sense youth workers can be seen as advocates for young people, promoting their rights for inclusion in society and for equal opportunities (Davies, 2010) as part of an ‘opportunity-focused’ and emancipatory practice (Williamson, 2018).

Central to these practices are relationships, reflection and questioning (Jeffs and Smith, 1996). Young people are not instructed in their journey by youth workers, but supported and facilitated through acts of acceptance, honesty, trust and respect (Young, 1999; Batsleer and Davies, 2010). Youth work aims to empower young people in making and acting on their own decisions

about issues affecting their lives, in this way helping them to ‘make sense’ of their lives through ‘conversation’ (Jeffs and Smith, 1996). Some have suggested that the emphasis on the social and relational could be seen as a romantic model of youth work (Wylie, 2010), whilst others have argued that it enables young people to learn through relational experiences, in terms of what they can contribute and take from these associations with others (Davies and Gibson, 1967). However, according to Jeffs and Smith (1998) policy makers’ overly simplified understandings of young people in society, has led to youth work becoming increasingly either about supporting young people who are deemed as vulnerable and in need, or as a controlling practice for those deemed unruly, with behavioural deficits.

These policy changes, and their associated pressures on the youth work sector to meet targets related to social policy concerns, meant that in many respects youth work moved away from its core underpinnings of continuity, an educational base and autonomy (Jeffs and Smith, 1998). Short-termism crept into project work, with quick turnarounds and brief interventions overtaking the previously embedded slow building of relationships with young people (Batsleer, 2013), raising ethical concerns about practice (Slovenko and Thompson, 2016). As a result, Williamson (2018:9) describes how youth work across Europe has come to simultaneously produce autonomy for young people, whilst also being a constraint ‘through protecting them or seeking to proscribe some forms of behaviour...’. In a similar vein to the concerns held by Jeffs and Smith (1998) this has commonly resulted in a divergence of practice, with libertarian youth work for young people who are already accepted, and a more guided or controlling version of youth work delivered to those deemed troubled or troublesome (Williamson, 2018).

Although the core work of PRU professionals may not necessarily align with the advocacy and rights-based approach of youth work (Davies, 2010), there are parallels. Like youth work, PRUs are a type of non-formal education (Spence, 2007), which takes place away from formal schooling. They support both young people displaying the needs described by Jeffs and

Smith (1998) and those who are troubled or troublesome (Williamson, 2018). Whilst youth work has been recognised as a part of education provision, such as in the Nuffield Review (Pring, 2009), the degree to which these latter practices are authentic youth work, however, remain up for debate. This is particularly so given that attendance at school is compulsory. The guided or controlling aspects diminish the voluntary act of young people freely entering a youth work relationship (Jeffs and Smith, 1998), and the structured curriculum learning content may be less relevant to the needs of certain young people (Ravenscroft, 2020). Nevertheless, there is likely to be a blurring of professional roles in all non-formal education settings, where youth workers are asked to step into teaching roles and vice-versa (Jeffs and Smith, 1998). In these settings young people are supported with both their social and academic learning. Whether PRU practices align with the authentic notions of youth work though, remain questionable.

Agreement on what counts as alternative education also continues to be a site of contention and struggle. Raywid (1994) identified some key debates on purpose and enrolment within alternative provision: 1) is alternative provision only for those who do not fit within mainstream school; 2) how is the problem viewed - is it about the pupil, or the school system?; and 3) is the aim to 'fix' the child in order for re-integration into mainstream schooling or to offer an alternative approach to outcomes altogether? According to Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) these questions can support researchers in making sense of what counts as alternative provision. In a mapping exercise, Thomson and Russell (2007:12-13) also identified nine different areas of alternative provision that aligned with those of Ofsted (2011):

*Table 1: Categories of alternative provision*

Nature of programme	Type of activity	Examples
Vocational	A programme that is specifically gained towards a particular occupation/profession/career. Often offering an actual qualification that will help a young person to enter the 'world of work'	Construction Motor vehicles Hair and beauty
Work skills	Generic work skills are developed such as 'being able to follow instructions'	General experience on farms
Basic skills	English, Maths, Science and IT are offered (not necessarily at GCSE level)	E-Learning sites
Life skills	General skills needed to function in society are developed, such as social skills, cooking, talking without swearing	Team-building exercises
Activity based	The programme has an activity/leisure focus	Fishing Cycling
Environmental	The focus is on teaching young people about nature and how to utilise materials in the outdoors and survive outside	Work in forests
Art	Has a focus on teaching and learning the arts	Dance, media, music and drawing, pottery
Therapeutic	Focuses on offering a remedial option	Anger management Family therapy
Work experience	Various work placements that form part of a young person's educational package, some are offered as part of actual programmes	
Academic	Has a strong scholastic focus, with an emphasis on known educational qualifications such as GCSE	One-to-one tuition

Within this table we can see the different aspects of education which are variously incorporated into alternative forms of provision, which predominantly centre on experiential and therapeutic learning in the progressive, child-centred mould. There are also some approaches that are more closely aligned to traditional schooling and the local economy, through vocational and academic routes.

Debates and differences of opinion over what counts as alternative provision continue to this day. Within Wales, when it comes to supporting learners who are no longer able to learn within a mainstream setting, a list

of alternative provisions has been identified under the umbrella term of EOTAS. It is here where we currently find PRU provision in Wales.

## Current PRU Provision

Today, Pupil Referral Units are a type of alternative school provision for pupils who are unable to attend a mainstream school for a variety of reasons, including behaviour, social and emotional needs. In Wales PRUs sit within the wider area of school provision known as 'education other than at school'<sup>2</sup> (EOTAS), which aims to meet the specific needs of learners. Several types of alternative provision are available for young people, including FE colleges, individual tuition, voluntary organisations and PRUs. PRUs remain the most commonly used form of alternative provision outside of mainstream schooling across both England and Wales (Welsh Government, 2018a). The latest figures for Wales highlight that over 43 percent of pupils educated through EOTAS were enrolled in PRU provision during the 2017/18 academic year. This was from a total of 2188 EOTAS pupils (Welsh Government, 2018b), which translated into three pupils per every 1000 of the total pupil population in Wales (including mainstream provision). This was the highest rate since 2009/10 (Welsh Government, 2018b), highlighting the continued demand for PRU provision. A total of 958 pupils were therefore registered in PRUs across Wales in the 2017/18 academic year. This figure could be an underestimate, however, given the complications in capturing this data due to processes such as 'managed moves' (described in detail later in this chapter).

As of January 2018, there were 23 registered PRUs in Wales. All of them supported a cohort of pupils through short, medium and long-term placements, with a view to reintegration at the earliest opportunity (Welsh Government, 2018b). PRUs face the same processes and measures as mainstream schools when it comes to school inspections, though there are

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<sup>2</sup> Education other than at school refers to any type of educational provision outside the school where local authorities fund individual pupil placements.

not yet the same levels of scrutiny in Wales as there are in England, where an emphasis on monitoring has side-lined the therapeutic practices of PRU provision (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). PRUs do, however, have a greater degree of freedom when it comes to their curriculum, and have traditionally been able to offer an education that is bespoke to the needs and interests of their learners where possible.

In Wales, all PRU provision is state funded. In general, education will be delivered through one of the following pathways as part of PRU provision:

- *Hospital and/or home education provision*
- *Single or multiple site provision under a single management structure*
- *Provision supporting teenage mothers or expecting schoolgirls*
- *E-learning provision*
- *Peripatetic provision*
- *Umbrella provision for pupils to follow individual programmes (Estyn, 2015:3).*

PRUs generally cater for a much smaller cohort of students compared with mainstream schools, resulting in small class sizes, which young people often value as part of the provision (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). In addition, PRUs have traditionally focused on supporting the social difficulties of pupils alongside their academic learning (Solomon, 2011). Due to these circumstances, staff are afforded more time to spend on individual needs, taking a less formal and more child-centred approach to practice. In this way, staff are more likely to form closer relationships with their pupils (Hart, 2013). It is this less formal approach that Pomeroy (1998) believes to be one of the clear distinctions between PRUs and traditional schools. Whilst schools typically display a hierarchical structure, PRUs aspire to be less-hierarchical in comparison, and attempt to support the development of closer relationships between staff and pupils (Smith and Connolly, 2019). However, these less formal relationships and the associated PRU/school hierarchical dualism should not be overstated, as some mainstream schools continue to place an emphasis on the pastoral side of their provision (Sellman et al, 2002; Wyness and Lang, 2016). Nevertheless, as PRUs cater

for a much smaller cohort of pupils in comparison with mainstream schools<sup>3</sup>, these less formal relationships are likely to be far easier to develop and maintain within a PRU environment, where teaching staff are more familiar with their pupils needs and interests. Along with a focus on supporting the social needs of learners, the familiarity between pupils and staff is therefore increased. With the focus on social needs and relational approaches, it has been suggested that a central part of any quality provision within alternative settings should require specialist training for staff, in areas such as counselling, special needs and curriculum development (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). A detailed account of legislation and policy recommendations is provided later in this chapter. It is to the experience of pupils in PRUs that we now turn.

## **Experiences of Young People in PRUs**

As suggested at the outset of this chapter, it is important to try and make visible the pupils who attend PRUs, given that they have traditionally been on the boundaries of education, somewhere ‘in-between’. These young people are also at an increased risk of being on the margins in later life, both socially and economically, due to the overall poorer quality of education they are likely to receive (Parsons, 2009; McCluskey et al, 2015).

Of the research available in Wales about pupils’ experiences of EOTAS, McCluskey et al (2015) found that young people were generally positive about both the academic and pastoral support they had received. Their data was collected as part of a wider evaluation for the Welsh Government (discussed later), which focused on exclusions and experiences of young people in EOTAS in Wales (McCluskey et al, 2013). A total of 48 children and young people were interviewed either individually or in groups about their experiences of exclusion and EOTAS provision. The participants felt that they were respected and listened to and appreciated how teachers

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<sup>3</sup> 958 pupils were enrolled across a total of 23 PRUs in Wales during the 2017-2018 academic year

dedicated time towards meeting their individual needs. In particular, the young people felt they were treated ‘more like an adult’ (McCluskey et al, 2015:601). The wider study (McCluskey et al, 2013) did also note, however, that there were huge variations in the quality of overall provision in Wales, as described by teaching staff and other family members. Issues around meeting children’s rights were also highlighted, which are addressed shortly in relation to debates on inclusion. Despite some negative aspects of the provision, having more equal relationships with staff and certain freedoms to voice their opinions is nevertheless highly valued by pupils in alternative provision (Te Riele, 2006; McCluskey et al, 2015).

Te Riele’s (2006) international study focused on practices within two alternative schools in Australia. A variety of ethnographic methods including observations, interviews with pupils and staff and a student survey were used to get close to daily practices, in order to make the lived experience more visible (Te Riele, 2006:63). The research argued that successful teaching and learning in these settings is reliant on caring professional practices, including the use of the emotions, so that positive relationships can be formed. In later empirical work, again using ethnographic methods, Te Riele et al (2017:63) found that the relaxed relational approach used by staff allowed pupils to feel connected on equal terms, with staff ‘getting them’. It is these approaches to practice in EOTAS which allow young people to feel understood and included, which they themselves often recognise as a positive element of alternative provision (Nairn and Higgins, 2011). Nairn and Higgins (2011) carried out interviews with four young people in alternative provision in New Zealand. The young people described the positive feelings they felt, primarily due to the positive relations they had with staff and the greater degrees of control they had over their environment and actions (Nairn and Higgins, 2011:184). Through being treated equally and respected in the settings therefore, the young people were able to develop a sense of identity and belonging, which may have been lost during their exclusion experience (Nairn and Higgins, 2011).

Arguably, young people value supportive relationships in PRUs, which in a broader sense is connected to their understandings of what contributes to improved wellbeing (Fattore and Mason, 2017). Fattore and Mason (2017) carried out qualitative research with 126 young people aged between eight and 15 years across a number of different schools in Australia, about what wellbeing meant to them. Data was collected through one-to-one interviews or in small focus groups. They revealed a connection between wellbeing and relationships and suggested that young people placed significant importance on familiarity, trust and respect (Fattore and Mason, 2017:278). Happiness was associated with being cared for and close familiar relations provided an experience of worth and belonging.

Similar research findings have been found in other special schools which support young people with behavioural difficulties (Nind et al, 2012). Using a range of activity-based visual research methods with a group of girls in a special school allowed Nind and others to communicate on the young people's terms. They found that what the pupils valued most were the caring, relaxed and understanding relationships available to them in the setting. It could be argued that these experiences are particularly significant for PRU learners, as they are opportunities for relational care that may not otherwise be available to them in their personal lives (Te Riele et al, 2017). Approaches such as this can also make a positive difference to the pupils' experiences of education more broadly (Noddings, 2003). Baroutsis et al (2016) carried out an empirical study in one alternative school in Australia using ethnographic methods including interviews and observations. Participants included eight staff and 18 pupils and through active participation in the school's daily programme, the researchers found that an inclusive, respectful approach created a sense of belonging and connectedness with learning, which had previously been lost.

Tensions in the relationships between pupils and teachers are most likely to occur when teachers are required to exercise discipline (Te Riele et al, 2006), for instance, when asking pupils to obey certain rules. A degree of flexibility in this area can sometimes help to overcome such tensions

(Levinson, 2016). Having flexibility around rules can help to maintain a less-hierarchical structure in the setting that enables teachers to continue working on an individualistic and humane level with pupils (Te Riele et al, 2006).

Nevertheless, the creation and maintenance of positive relationships within PRUs remains one of the main challenges for staff (Meo and Parker, 2004). Others too have found that the kind of balance that exists within an alternative school setting, between levels of autonomy and control, can make a huge difference to the environment and the pupils' experiences (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). In summary, previous research highlights how young people in PRUs value and appreciate the less-hierarchical approach taken by staff, which enables them to form positive relationships with others.

## **Alternative Education and Inclusion**

The creation of alternative schools such as PRUs meant that the needs of certain pupils could be more adequately met through mechanisms such as closer one-to-one support (Phtiaka, 1997). Yet their emergence also raised concerns about inclusion as pupils became segregated from mainstream forms of provision (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011). Phtiaka's (1997) ethnographic study, which explored and compared the experiences of young people with behavioural difficulties in both mainstream and special schools, added to this inclusion debate by considering whether there was any value in dividing pupils up into separate forms of provision. Phtiaka (1997:184) describes how the curriculum in the special school was not comparable or indeed as comprehensive as the mainstream curriculum, which therefore limited the pupils' educational outcomes and interests. This highlights how the rights of the child enter into debates around inclusion, where access to a good, rounded education is a fundamental necessity for all children.

These concerns around the rights of the child are still relevant today within Wales. McCluskey et al (2015) highlighted that whilst listening and

supporting were strong themes within their PRU research, many settings also had a very basic curriculum, offering only a limited range of subjects. Their findings also highlighted how PRUs were not included when it came to the latest developments in the curriculum. Additionally, they identified concerns with the number of training opportunities available for PRU managers, and some reservations about poor behaviour management systems, where pupils could be placed in isolation rooms, with punitive approaches preferred over preventative ones (McCluskey et al, 2015). In conclusion the study described how alternative provision could still be a highly variable experience for young people. Some of the settings clearly focused on offering an education which took account of children's needs and rights, whilst others only offered a limited curriculum, with fewer pastoral practices, and instances of prolonged isolation.

The authors suggest that there is a need therefore, to ensure that children's rights are upheld within alternative educational settings. This relates specifically to those rights set out within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including Article 12 'where every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously'; Article 19 which focuses on protection from abuse and violence; Article 28 which outlines how 'discipline in schools must respect children's dignity' and Article 29 which states the need to develop 'the personality, talents, mental and physical abilities of the child to their fullest potential' (United Nations, 1989).

The Welsh Government have a clear commitment to children's rights and inclusion within education, and the evaluation by McCluskey et al (2013:4) highlights how 'the two issues of exclusion and EOTAS are inextricably linked in policy and practice'. In terms of alternative provision and inclusion McCluskey et al (2015) describe the inherent tension this presents for the Welsh Government. This is particularly so with the introduction of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure in 2011. Having a commitment towards ensuring that each child has access to a good quality education becomes difficult when pupils can be excluded in Wales. As

McCluskey and other (2015) highlight, this can often result in an inferior education experience, with fewer learning resources available to pupils, and an increased risk of harm to their wellbeing (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014; McCluskey et al, 2015).

PRUs can also be vitally important and beneficial experiences for some learners however, as the work of McCluskey et al (2015) and Phtiaka (1997) emphasise. The caring and supportive teaching practices can result in noticeable improvements in pupils' self-confidence and motivation (Phtiaka 1997: McCluskey et al 2015). McCluskey et al (2015) make this clear in their conclusions, noting how the pupils' descriptions of alternative provision could also be seen to closely align with the UNCRC. Pupils said that they felt listened to in these settings once more (Article 12) and had new opportunities for achievement (Article 29).

Nevertheless, the act of segregation can still have negative consequences for pupils. The tensions here highlight the difficulties that exist in terms of realising the aspirations associated with children's rights and voice in Wales, within the context of alternative educational provision. There have been some concerns that this commitment to children's rights can at times be rhetorical (Williams, 2013). The UNCRC itself can be seen to have uncertainty within it in this regard. Whilst Article 12 focuses on the active child who should be enabled to have a voice, Article 3 refers to how adults must represent children's rights and best interests (the passive child). The commitment towards ensuring young people have a voice is therefore difficult to achieve without the dedication of adults. Lundy (2007:933) usefully highlights how any risk of tokenism within the realisation of Article 12 can be diminished by ensuring that four elements are adhered to:

- *Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view*
- *Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views*
- *Audience: The view must be listened to*
- *Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate*

These elements can prove useful for those who wish to carry out research with young people, where their views and expressions are sought. The difficulties of realising these aspirations both in PRU practice and research remain problematic however, particularly when vulnerable groups of children are viewed as in need of protection due to a heightened sense of risk (Connolly and Haughton, 2017). Constructions of the child, who is seen as needing support along the journey towards adult maturation, can be passive in this sense (Holloway and Valentine, 2000).

Focusing once more on the inclusion debate, Phtiaka (1997) takes a fully inclusive or all-encompassing position, suggesting that the most appropriate way forward for an inclusive education system involves the abolition of special units and the adaptation of mainstream schools. This, she argues, would involve catering for the needs of the most vulnerable learners in an environment which is less pressured, and where caring pupil-teacher relationships are valued (Phtiaka, 1997:186). As Phtiaka points out, a great deal of knowledge and expertise has already been developed in alternative schools about how best to support and work with problem pupils, which can therefore be transferred into schools which need that support. This vision of Phtiaka has, of course, yet to be realised in the UK. Whilst various forms of educational provision remain, debates on inclusion will continue in terms of understanding the best ways to support learners who exhibit different levels of learning and social needs (Norwich, 2002; Meo and Parker, 2004; Dudley-Marling and Burns, 2014).

Developments of an inclusive and adapted mainstream system are visible in countries outside the UK, however. Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) carried out research which focused on inclusive education practices in three countries; Australia, Canada and Finland. Finland was found to have the most inclusive education system, where inclusion was viewed as an all-encompassing approach. Almost all pupils were educated within a mainstream school in Finland and therefore segregated provision was limited. Although segregated special schools do still exist, these have declined rapidly since 1998. Pupils who need significant support with their

learning can receive additional part-time special education provision within their mainstream setting, where staff who are adequately trained can support any learners who are struggling (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011). This support focuses on reading, writing and numeracy and usually takes place in the hours outside the main schooling day (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011).

Those on the political right have sometimes viewed the approach adopted in Finland negatively, but since these changes have taken place Finland has consistently performed well according to pupil achievement measures (OECD, 2015). Increasing diversity and avoiding competitive education markets which focus on pupil attainment means that Finland has 'not pitted students with diverse abilities against one another' (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011:281-282). Having a high percentage of learners who receive special support within mainstream settings also means that special provision no longer appears 'special', which can help to reduce the risk of labelling or stigma that pupils might otherwise experience. As such, according to Graham and Jahnukainen (2011), the Finnish system has been successful in offering a more inclusive schooling approach to young people.

The segregation of certain learners into alternative forms of provision continues to be widely viewed as exclusionary (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011). As both Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) and Phtiaka (1997) allude to, the act of segregation can perpetuate differences amongst learners (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011). This viewpoint was clearly felt by the young people in Munn and Lloyd's study (2005:207) who described feeling 'singled out', which increased a sense of segregation and therefore made the idea of inclusion a more distant reality. Segregation can create 'othering' where the collective is no longer able to understand this 'other' as part of the self (Hoggett, 2000). The consequences of this, particularly with separate PRU buildings, are that such settings become refuges, isolated from the mainstream (Nairn and Higgins, 2011) and perpetuating a sense of exclusion for pupils who can feel emotionally and geographically isolated (Nairn and Higgins, 2011).

These concerns continue to this day, as reports highlight the ongoing difficulties around a lack of communication between alternative and mainstream schools and poor opportunities for reintegration to mainstream settings for learners (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). The danger of segregated settings, including PRUs therefore, is that they simply become holding grounds, ‘cast adrift from mainstream society, as if they were long-stay institutions or prisons’ (Solomon, 2011:46). This narrative of the ‘holding ground’ forms part of a broader theme within the education literature, around notions such as ‘car parking’ and ‘warehousing’ (Dillabough et al, 2007; Maguire, 2013). These terms refer to the ways in which certain groups of learners, often stereotypically viewed as difficult, or unwilling to learn, can become contained within educational establishments that merely reinforce these learner identities, and which therefore fail to provide any meaningful opportunity for a positive learning experience (Cornish, 2018).

The pupils who are ‘singled out’ through exclusion can find themselves within a transitional period in between education settings whilst at the PRU. The findings from Nairn and Higgin’s (2011) study into alternative schools in New Zealand described how spatial theories matter when it comes to understanding the consequences of school exclusions for the wellbeing of pupils, many of whom may experience emotional marginalisation as a result.

However, when it comes to the full inclusion of all learners in mainstream schools, similar concerns have been raised about how this too, can be experienced as exclusionary. Simply placing all learners in mainstream settings and equating this with full inclusion is a fallacy (Hodkinson, 2007), particularly if adequate resources to support learners with additional needs are lacking. In these instances, inclusionary practices can be seen to risk greater exclusion (Hodkinson, 2007), as those with additional needs and difficulties in their lives are treated differently, standing out from their peers. This can lead to stigma and feelings of isolation and ‘otherness’ once more (Hodkinson, 2007). The most recent examples of this can be seen in the narratives provided by those in the care system, who described feeling

singled out and stigmatised within mainstream schools because of differences in how they were treated and supported (Mannay, Evans et al, 2017). Debates over inclusion and segregation and the manner in which young people are educated are therefore complex processes, which involve and depend on the kinds of professional practices adopted by individuals, and the experiences of learners in a given context. The debates over inclusion/exclusion cannot, therefore, be viewed in simple binary terms, but as a site of struggle and contestation.

Others believe that inclusion should relate to the 'least restrictive environment' (LRE) (Hyatt and Filler, 2011), where emphasis is placed on 'the quality of instruction provided for students...not where this instruction is provided' (Dudley-Marling and Burns, 2014:20). The LRE therefore prioritises how a child is taught rather than where a child is taught when it comes to understandings of inclusion, in order to appropriately meet the needs of every child. Whilst the ideal might be to have a fully inclusive education system, where all learners are supported within mainstream schools, the reality is that this currently does not exist, and would require significant additional investment. In this current context, competing debates continue around inclusion and the best approach to adopt in order to support the needs of all learners. Indeed, as Norwich (2002) has consistently highlighted, the inclusion debate within education will inevitably be contradictory in nature, when learners must be offered an education that treats them all the same, whilst also acknowledging and supporting their individual differences.

Concerns over inclusion and the segregation of learners has grown further with the increased marketisation of schooling and the introduction of league tables in England (Wyness and Lang, 2016). League tables categorise schools based on inspection results and the academic outcomes of learners, through what has been described by Ball (2003) as acts of performativity.

The increasing prioritisation of academic outcomes and the scrutiny of teachers' and schools' performance means that schools have become more

individualised as a result. This marketisation of schools has forced them into competition with each other, in order to attract pupils into their provision (Wyness and Lang, 2016). Wyness and Lang (2016) describe how in England, this focus on performance and outcomes resulted in a loss of the social dimension of schooling in mainstream provision, which had negative consequences for pupils' wellbeing and sense of belonging (Pyhalto et al, 2010). As a result, Parsons (2005) suggests that this led to disengagement, segregation and exclusion for some pupils. The study by Wyness and Lang (2016) used a case study approach, focusing on one secondary school in a deprived area of England. Primarily using interviews, 18 members of staff and 20 pupils also took part in focus groups. Interested in the social and emotional dimensions of schooling, the study found that teachers spent considerable amounts of their time supporting the improvement of pupils' wellbeing. As many of the young people had a range of social and emotional difficulties, the school had a more holistic approach to improving outcomes through the building of strong, meaningful relationships (Wyness and Lang, 2016). The study therefore highlights how this school was making attempts to challenge the barriers to learning, arguing for a model of mainstream schooling that resembled Fielding's (2006) conception of the 'person-centred learning community'. This includes an approach which values relationships, care and commitment to the child as a person and as a central aspect of schooling life. While these changes have primarily been discussed within the context of England, the upcoming section on legislation and policy in Wales highlights how education reforms have moved Welsh education towards an accountability framework (Andrews, 2011), albeit to a lesser extent.

Despite these calls for a more person-centred approach in mainstream provision, authors have argued that the segregation of pupils is often viewed more favourably by some mainstream schools, as those struggling academically can have a negative impact on a school's performance (Booth et al, 1997; Vulliamy and Webb, 2000; Parsons, 2005). The misuse of 'off-

rolling<sup>4</sup> (Power and Taylor, 2018; The Guardian, 2018) has also become prominent in recent times in relation to exclusions and PRU provision in the UK. Although exclusion rates are difficult to accurately measure, given the various forms of exclusion available and their temporary nature (Power and Taylor, 2018), figures have fallen in recent years across Wales, with 2394 young people accessing EOTAS in the 2009/10 academic year, compared with 2157 in the 2014/15 academic year (Welsh Government, 2017b). Power and Taylor (2018) voice caution, however, in using oversimplified measures of exclusion as a gauge for inclusivity within the Welsh education system. They point towards strategies such as managed moves (Macrae et al, 2003; Carlile, 2011; Mills and Thomson, 2018) in Wales, which enable schools to transfer pupils into other school settings whilst still keeping them on the school register, thus avoiding an official exclusion. A managed move will usually involve a short period of time in a PRU for a pupil, during the school transfer process. This also highlights how it becomes difficult to gain an accurate representation of how many children attend a PRU, as those in the managed move process can be dual registered at both a school and a PRU (Welsh Government, 2018a). Whilst this process is mutually agreed as being in the best interest for both the school and the pupil, it can therefore mask the true extent of how many pupils are being removed from a school. Off-rolling is viewed less favourably than a managed move, as this process is seen as being in the best interests of the school and not necessarily the pupil. There continue to be concerns about the increased use off-rolling in the UK therefore, which highlights how mainstream schools remain focused on academic outcomes and performance.

This section has provided some insights into the complexities that exist in relation to debates around segregated provision and inclusion within education. Some examples of a more therapeutic orientated approach to schooling do exist in mainstream schools in England (Wyness and Lang,

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<sup>4</sup> ‘off-rolling’ involves schools pressuring parents or guardians to voluntarily remove their pupil from the register of a mainstream school. This means that a child is not recorded as being excluded. In this sense the removal may be in the best interest of the school and not the child.

2016) and Finland (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011). However, whilst the system described in Finland has resulted in a reduced need for segregation and alternative provision, alternative provision is still widely used in both England and Wales, with exclusion rates increasing in England in recent times.

There is currently no comprehensive approach to schooling available in the UK which, as desired by Fielding (2006), places social and therapeutic learning at the centre of mainstream provision. The need for alternative provision therefore remains when it comes to debates on inclusion in education. Alternative provision is viewed as a necessary form of education for those young people who disengage from mainstream schooling, particularly when it is felt that a pupil's needs are not being adequately met (Dudley-Marling and Burns, 2014). PRUs can be seen to meet the rights of children in this regard, certainly when it comes to offering a caring and supportive educational experience where they feel valued and listened to (McCluskey et al, 2015). As the work of McCluskey et al (2015) highlights, however, there remain concerns about the varying quality of alternative education made available for young people in Wales and as such, debates on the suitability of PRU provision will continue.

The next section of the chapter outlines the policy context in relation to PRUs across Wales, as the Welsh Government begins to make changes in order to improve PRU provision.

## **Legislation and PRU Policy**

PRUs have previously been on the periphery when it comes to being considered in policy and research in Wales (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014). Recently, however, this increased interest in the media around the abuses of 'off-rolling' from mainstream schools (TES, 2018; The Guardian, 2018) and academic outcomes (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018) has led to greater scrutiny of PRUs. This focus has been witnessed in Wales where recent changes to PRU policy has begun to align

the provision more closely with wider educational policy reforms (Estyn, 2015; Welsh Government, 2017a; Smith and Connolly, 2019). For instance, a greater expectation to improve academic outcomes for learners in PRUs is beginning to be realised, with the annual publication of exam results (Welsh Government, 2019a). Before describing the latest policy changes and debates that have taken place regarding Welsh PRUs, it is important to acknowledge and provide some background on the Welsh education system itself, which was devolved from the rest of the UK in 1999.

### *Education in Wales since devolution*

Moving under the control of the newly established National Assembly of Wales in 1999, education began to be governed by the new Welsh Government (Power, 2016). Doing it the ‘Welsh way’ was the ambition of former First Minister Rhodri Morgan, who delivered his Clear Red Water Speech in 2002 (Morgan, 2002). This marked the beginning of education reform in Wales, which would see policy reforms initiated in order to create a distinct and progressive education system, moving away from the choice and market-driven approach adopted in England, towards a unified comprehensive system (Power, 2016). This first phase of Welsh education reform was committed to equality of outcome over choice, as choice within education was related to a market approach according to Morgan (2002), where individual best interests overshadowed wider considerations for the collective good. Here then, was a commitment to social justice within Welsh education and a strong focus on equality of outcome (Drakeford, 2007). Following a progressive approach to school policy, in contrast to England which had looked to the past for inspiration, Power (2016) describes how this was most noticeable within early years education. Calling for a ‘back to basics’ curriculum for children in England, the former education minister Michael Gove felt progressivism was doing a disservice to children. In contrast, the Foundation Phase in Wales for early years learners harnessed the progressive approach found across Europe, where child-centred schooling and the wellbeing of the child was prioritised (Maynard et al,

2013). Wales therefore followed a distinct education policy path from that found in England and looked to avoid the market-driven reform described earlier in this chapter (see Wyness and Lang, 2016).

However, there has been some negative commentary on these education reforms in Wales (Dixon, 2016; Evans, 2016), which have been reinforced through media headlines about the poor performance of Wales in comparison to the rest of the UK, in particular in relation to PISA rankings (BBC, 2010). The emergence of the ‘crisis narrative’ (Dixon, 2016; Evans, 2016) and post-PISA panic resulted in a series of reforms initiated under the education minister Leighton Andrews (Andrews, 2011). These included the introduction of greater accountability mechanisms as an attempt to improve the Welsh education system, with national tests for numeracy and reading appearing in primary schools and the formation of grading or banding of secondary schools. It was felt that although this was presented through a positive rhetoric of necessity in order to support failing schools, there was in fact a close alignment appearing within this new Welsh policy, albeit to a lesser extent, to policies found in England. This was particularly so in relation to market-competition, accountability and the use of league tables (Dixon, 2016). These reforms saw the introduction of additional layers of structural change or meso-level governance, through the creation of four regional education consortia. Their task was to work with schools in order to improve standards in numeracy and literacy and to offer professional development programmes. As part of a new school improvement initiative, this was viewed as a bypassing of local authority responsibility (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018).

With these increased changes however, there have been concerns raised about inadequate levels of support for such reforms (OECD, 2017), particularly when meso-level bodies appear to be duplicating approaches which are already established (OECD, 2014; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018b).

Welsh education policy is now seen to be moving into a ‘third wave’ of policy reform with the introduction of the new curriculum in Wales (Donaldson,

2015). These reforms intend to place greater emphasis on trusting teachers and allowing them greater flexibility and agency over the design and delivery of the curriculum (Power et al, 2017). As a holistic approach to learning, the new curriculum will cover six central areas including: Health and Wellbeing; Expressive Arts; Humanities; Maths and Numeracy; Science and Technology; and Languages, Literacy and Communication (see Donaldson, 2015:39). These curriculum reforms are still very much in their infancy, being trialled within Pioneer Professional Learning Schools<sup>5</sup> across Wales.

As this new curriculum highlights, there appears to be a renewed focus on supporting the wellbeing of pupils in schools, as part of a broader societal concern with supporting the health needs of young people through education (BBC, 2019; Morgan et al, 2019). These new policy reforms within mainstream schools in Wales, and the accompanying freedoms they provide staff (Power et al, 2017) could therefore be seen as a movement away from the educational policies of school scrutiny and accountability. The aspirations of prioritising pupil wellbeing and health could also be viewed as an attempt by the Welsh Government to strengthen mainstream schools' inclusive practices when it comes to supporting all learners, reducing the need for EOTAS and PRU provision. However, there is still uncertainty around how effective these changes will be, with particular concerns raised about whether the needs of the most disadvantaged pupils will be met (Power et al, 2017).

Previous research has suggested that when the curriculum becomes broader, with less clearly defined pedagogic goals and boundaries for learners, those from the most deprived backgrounds are more likely to struggle academically (Bernstein, 1990), which can lead to disengagement with schooling. In a more recent and extensive evaluation of the Foundation Phase in Wales over a three-year period (Power et al, 2018), where the curriculum and pedagogy is said to be broad and open to interpretation by

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<sup>5</sup> Pioneer Professional Learning Schools are schools across Wales which are piloting certain aspects of the new curriculum in Wales

teachers, similar findings were discovered. However, it is important to note that a highly structured and visible pedagogy can also be detrimental to the education outcomes of young people from deprived backgrounds (Sadovnik, 1991). Using the work of Bernstein (1990) to describe the hierarchical rules and relations of authority and conduct in the classroom, Sadovnik (1991) describes how young people from underprivileged backgrounds can also struggle in classrooms where the rules governing relationships between the teacher and learner are explicit, as well as those governing the pacing of the acquisition of knowledge. According to Bernstein (1990), young people from underprivileged backgrounds are less familiar with this dominant pedagogic code in the school and are therefore more likely to struggle in accessing this explicit pedagogy.

#### *PRU policy reforms in Wales*

In terms of PRU policy in Wales and in relation to the broader educational landscape described above, it has been suggested that PRUs are currently moving into a phase of greater accountability (Smith and Connolly, 2019), albeit less extensively than in England (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). The framework for action (Welsh Government, 2017a) was recently introduced by the Welsh Government, outlining the way forward for PRU practice across Wales and highlighting some of these accountability measures. It was in part due to the concerns described earlier (McCluskey et al, 2013) about the quality of alternative provision in Wales and the commitment by the Welsh Government to children's rights, that these policy changes began to be implemented. At a similar time to the commissioned evaluation of EOTAS (McCluskey et al, 2013) the 'Right to Learn' report was also published in Wales, which highlighted the varied quality of provision in PRUs and the concern that was held for children's wellbeing (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014).

The 'Right to Learn' report was carried out by the former Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler in 2014. It emphasised the ways in

which PRUs in Wales had been ignored or overlooked in new education policies aimed at school improvement. Over 100 pupils and staff from 16 different PRUs in Wales completed an online survey, and pupils were also consulted within three PRUs. The research revealed that over half of the pupils felt worried about a lack of money in the home for things like food and heating (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014:11), highlighting the poverty that is often associated with PRU learners (Welsh Government, 2018b; Parsons, 1999). Most pupils enjoyed spending time in the PRU and felt they had good supportive relationships with staff. 90 percent of the pupils also felt safe in the PRU environment, describing how they could trust staff who understood their needs. The main challenges identified for delivering education in PRUs included resourcing issues and low numbers of staff. With a wide range of pupil needs displayed in the PRUs, there were difficulties in obtaining suitable training for staff to deal with this array of emotional challenges (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014). The benefits of PRU provision were the small class sizes, which supported the development of good relationships between pupils and staff.

As the above report highlights, PRUs in Wales have found it challenging to support the complex and varied needs of learners. These difficulties of PRU learners are similar to those described across the rest of the UK. For instance, in addition to having some form of social, emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulty (SEBMH), a high percentage of pupils will have a special educational need (SEN) and many will be eligible for free school meals (an indicator of social deprivation). The most recent available data for EOTAS in Wales highlights this pattern, with 86 percent of pupils recorded as having a SEN and 39 percent eligible for a free school meal during the 2017/18 academic year (Welsh Government, 2018b). It is perhaps unsurprising then, considering these additional needs, that pupils who attend PRUs gain fewer GCSE qualifications than their peers in mainstream schools (Pirrie et al, 2009; McCluskey et al, 2015; Malcolm, 2018;).

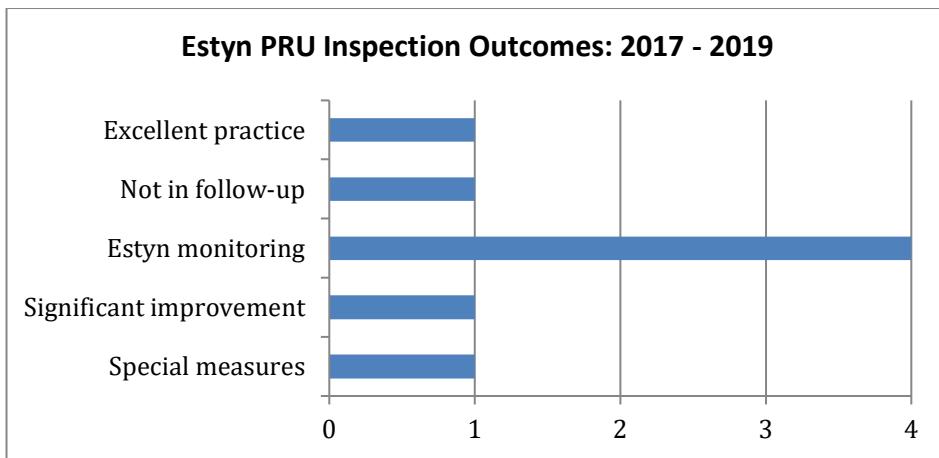
With a renewed interest and concern with PRU provision in Wales, the Welsh Government commissioned the evaluation of EOTAS, to support them

with their development of future education policy in this area (McCluskey et al, 2013). The evaluation was an extensive mixed method research study which used statistical and policy analysis and interviews with a range of stakeholders, including local authority representatives, professionals from EOTAS and children and their families. In light of the findings, some of which were described earlier, a number of key recommendations were put forward to the Welsh Government. These included additional training opportunities for staff and the implementation of measures which would help to understand the effectiveness of PRU provision, such as recognising good practice (McCluskey et al, 2013:8-9). As with the 'Right to Learn' report, emphasis was placed on providing staff with greater amounts of training support, whilst accountability measures were also noticeable, in relation to the tracking of pupil progress and the collection and evaluation of educational outcomes.

In response to identifying and sharing good practice from the recommendations set out by McCluskey and others (2013), a subsequent good practice survey was carried out by Estyn on PRUs (Estyn, 2015). In total 20 providers were visited, where documents were reviewed, and interviews completed with managers and pupils. Variation in the quality of PRU provision was outlined here once more, with further improvements suggested in relation to monitoring and tracking pupil behaviour and learning (Estyn, 2015). Emphasis was placed on ensuring that learners had access to a suitable range of learning opportunities and experiences whilst in a PRU. Essential too, was a need for staff to have the same access to training as their counterparts in mainstream schooling.

The latest data available from Estyn continues to highlight the variation in good practice between PRUs in Wales, as determined by Estyn's inspection framework guide (see Estyn, 2019). Over the past two years, eight inspections have been carried out, covering the full range of outcomes available within the Estyn framework:

*Table 2: Estyn PRU inspection outcomes: 2017-2019*



(Estyn, 2019).

The table highlights how PRU practice varies across Wales. Whilst one PRU is viewed as having excellent practice, another one was placed into special measures, which requires regular and sometimes unannounced follow up inspections from Estyn, to monitor necessary improvements that have been identified. The remaining six PRUs received outcomes between these two extremes.

Following these various reports in Wales on PRU practice and EOTAS, the Welsh Government responded in 2017 with the release of their framework for action (Welsh Government, 2017a). Outlining the Welsh Government strategy moving forward for PRUs, the framework discusses how collaborations have been carried out with various groups in order to consider how PRUs across Wales can begin the implementation of new national education policy reforms. The report is also seen to be acting on the recommendations set out by McCluskey and others (2013), highlighting the need for more robust accountability measures, through monitoring and progress systems. This includes the publication of attainment data for pupils at Key Stage 4 (Welsh Government, 2019a). Encouragingly, the Welsh Government recognised and picked up on the recommendations raised within the evaluation report about the need to acknowledge individual level statistics to promote and understand the profiles of EOTAS pupils (McCluskey et al, 2013). They note that academic outcomes for these

learners should not be compared in a ‘like for like’ way with mainstream learners, and that academic indicators fail to accurately reflect the ‘distance-travelled’ by some learners in EOTAS (Welsh Government, 2017a).

However, outcome data is now publicly available for those PRU pupils who have completed Key Stage 4 exams in Wales. Only two percent of PRU learners achieved the Level 2 threshold<sup>6</sup>, which includes English/Welsh and Maths in 2018 (Welsh Government, 2019a), compared with 55 percent of learners in mainstream provision (Welsh Government, 2019b). These figures highlight the huge gap that exists between academic outcomes for learners in mainstream schools and PRUs. Yet academic performance data of this kind continues to provide little in the way of insights into the contextualised nature of PRU learners and the difficulties which they face. There is, therefore, still a need to develop a ‘distance-travelled’ framework for these learners. Such a move would encourage a movement away from crude progress metrics and acknowledge that the curriculum needs to be broader for learners within PRU provision. How these softer outcomes are captured in some meaningful way for learners has not yet been identified but the Welsh Government (2017a) are actively seeking to include PRUs and the wider EOTAS provision within the delivery of the new curriculum, which is encouraging progress. This includes the allocation of funding to EOTAS provision, for the training and professional development of PRU teaching staff. And where there have been concerns raised previously, about PRU students having access to an adequate and broad curriculum, the new framework for action is committed to improving this. It aims to encourage and develop the relationship between PRUs and mainstream schools, so that access to resources and facilities can be shared and made accessible to all learners (Welsh Government, 2019c).

In terms of focusing on both academic and social learning objectives, this raises questions over quality and success within education, and what should

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<sup>6</sup> This is a number of qualifications equivalent in size to five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including two specific GCSEs: GCSE Maths and GCSE English or GCSE Welsh First Language. As well as these two GCSEs, it can include any level 2 qualification approved for teaching in Wales to learners who are 16 years old or younger.

be included within any accountability framework, in addition to academic attainment. Highlighting some of the internal struggles and tensions around the purpose of education and learning once more, Mills and Thomson (2018) describe the different priorities held by teachers and leadership teams. This was particularly so when it came to planning the curriculum within alternative provision settings across the UK. Some of the teachers in their study wanted a curriculum which focused on pupils' interests, with greater vocational options, and success measures which included improved attendance and softer skills (such as improvements in confidence). Others viewed improved quality in core subject areas as the most important curriculum development, alongside improvements in academic attainment levels (Mills and Thomson, 2018:108).

The framework for action in Wales also prioritises the support for the wellbeing and social learning needs of PRU pupils as part of these reforms. Additionally, it suggests that further understandings of PRU practices are required prior to any introduction of non-statutory or statutory requirements. How this will be achieved, however, is unclear.

As this section has highlighted, there has been a renewed and encouraging focus on PRU policy in Wales, which aims to improve practice for this cohort of learners. The PRU reforms are still in their infancy but as they take shape, it appears as though these changes are beginning to align more closely with the broader educational reforms taking place across Wales, particularly in relation to increasing levels of accountability (Smith and Connolly, 2019). What impact this changing landscape has on the professional practices of teachers in Wales (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) is considered within the next and subsequent chapters of the thesis.

### *PRU policy reforms in England*

The background to Thomson and Pennacchia's (2014) research project has already been outlined in this chapter. Investigating quality within alternative provision, the authors found that quality provision included

having positive regard for the learner; recognising relationships as a learning goal in its own right (highlighting the importance of social learning within PRUs); attention to space and place; carefully considered transitions out of alternative provision; a prioritising of safety and security; close monitoring of pupil progress; quality staff; and regular monitoring and evaluation (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014:6). These findings resonate with much of the discussion outlined in this chapter so far. Emphasis here is placed on social learning and relationships, within safe and secure spaces for learners. Levels of accountability and monitoring are also recognised as important, as is the process for transitioning pupils out of alternative provision.

The most recent and comprehensive review of alternative provision in England was carried out in 2018 (Mills and Thomson, 2018), with the aim of building further evidence in relation to alternative provision. The research was qualitative in nature and involved interviews with 276 schools and 200 alternative provisions across England. 25 in-depth case studies were also completed within alternative provision settings in England. Again, there are similarities within these recommendations to the previous reports discussed so far. There is a need for well-trained staff and particular pedagogic techniques, such as de-escalation, which incorporate positive reinforcement and school-wide behavioural expectations. Bespoke spaces within the buildings, which support the management of pupil behaviour and provide a calm, supportive environment were also encouraged. The spaces identified included gardening spaces, care rooms and breakout rooms. In respect of outdoor spaces, there has been a wide recognition of the benefits that such areas can have on supporting a child's development, such as building their resilience, independence and the skills to cope with anxieties and social competence (Gilligan, 2000; Gordon, 2014). Indeed, this freedom for young people has been said to allow for a certain level of escapism from adult control, providing a degree of risk, unexpected challenges (Connolly and Haughton, 2017) and an experience which can develop a child's sense of

belonging and attachment to a particular area, where they take ownership over their immediate environment (Gordon, 2014).

In relation to outside play and being socially active, school summer holiday activities have also been identified as a useful way of providing positive experiences for young people (Morgan et al, 2019). Research has shown that the wellbeing and mental health of young people from deprived backgrounds may be at greater risk, due to them having fewer opportunities to engage in summer school activities, which can increase the likelihood of them experiencing periods of loneliness and falling further behind with their education (Morgan et al, 2019).

The report by Mills and Thomson (2018) also highlights how the academic progress of pupils is now monitored and tracked in order to evidence successful provision. Whilst in Wales there is an aspiration to track PRU learners, this report describes the difficulties of evidencing 'soft outcomes' such as concentration levels and social skills. This is particularly the case when it comes to setting benchmarks for individual pupil progress (Mills and Thomson, 2018:111). Moreover, in terms of pupil progression beyond EOTAS, and in a similar vein to the recommendations in Wales (McCluskey et al, 2013) Mills and Thomson (2018) highlight the lack of longitudinal research and data which explores the trajectories of learners, including their pathways to future employment, training and learning. Indeed, developments of this nature are a necessary aspect for understanding the effectiveness of alternative provision (Mills and Thomson, 2018) and evidencing 'value for money' within PRUs (McCluskey et al, 2013:9)

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has provided a detailed historical overview of PRU provision in the UK and Wales. Highlighting the debates which exist around alternative provision and the segregation of pupils in relation to issues of inclusion and children's rights, the chapter also described how the Welsh Government are making attempts to improve PRU provision through changes in legislation

and policy. The next chapter focuses on the professional roles of PRU staff and the theoretical concepts which help to inform this study.

## **Chapter three: Professional Practice and Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is split into three main sections. It begins by providing an overview of professional practices in PRUs, relating these to the concepts of social pedagogy, an ethic of care and the roles of social work and youth work. The chapter then moves on to emotional work, using the professional role of social work to consider how caring roles such as these involve emotional work on both a personal and professional level. In the third section of the chapter the main theoretical concepts that are drawn upon throughout this thesis are introduced, including theories of professionalism, pedagogy and recontextualisation, policy enactment, and finally, liminality.

### **Professional Roles**

As outlined within the previous chapter, the work of PRUs has traditionally been concerned with prioritising social learning, through therapeutic and pastoral practices (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). Studies which have focused on teaching practices within alternative provision continue to support this assertion (McGregor and Mills, 2012; Michael and Frederickson, 2013; Te Riele et al, 2017). As Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) attest, most literature in this area places an emphasis on relationships, where positive relationships between pupils and staff are noted as a first step towards improving a young person's educational experience (Michael and Frederickson, 2013; Cahill et al, 2018). Cahill et al (2018) carried out a small qualitative study to explore the curriculum and pedagogical perceptions of 10 teachers in alternative provision across the Republic of Ireland. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study found that teachers appreciated the difficulties being faced by their learners, opting for a learner-centred approach to curriculum and pedagogy, where a

flexible approach to pedagogy and positive relationships with pupils were valued (Cahill et al, 2018:14).

The ease at which mutually strong and trusting relationships between staff and pupils are created within PRUs should not be overstated, however, as the inherent difficulties of achieving these relationships need to be recognised. The study by Meo and Parker (2004), which used an ethnographic approach to explore the day-to-day lives of teaching staff within one PRU, found that sustaining relationships was far from straightforward. Indeed, with high turnovers of staff and the transient pupil population, the goal of building sustained relationships could be challenging. If relationships are to be truly recognised as an important aspect of PRU provision in policy, and as a learning outcome in themselves (Kyriacou, 2015), then recognition needs to be given to the time it takes to develop meaningful relationships with disengaged young people and those struggling emotionally (Williamson, 2011). Although focused on youth work practices with disengaged young people, Williamson's (2011) work recognised and described the importance of time required to build meaningful, trusting relationships.

Whilst Meo and Parker (2004) found that pupils would break both the formal and informal 'rules of play' on a daily basis, in Levinson's (2016) study, which involved interviews with pupils and teachers from one PRU, the findings outlined how positive relationships were maintained by allowing pupils to leave the classroom during behavioural outbursts, and by valuing pupils' views. The setting was described as a 'miniature family' where mutual, reciprocal care existed for one another (Levinson, 2016). Reciprocity has been recognised within a number of studies which report on the value of relationships in PRU practices. Interested in the enablers and barriers of positive outcomes in PRU provision from a young person's perspective, Michael and Frederickson (2013) carried out a qualitative study interviewing 16 young people about their experiences. Positive relationships were the most commonly described enabler, whilst the young people felt it was important for them to be listened to and understood. An

overly authoritative environment was viewed as a barrier which could often lead to conflict.

A similar qualitative study using focus groups with six young people in an alternative provision in the UK focusing on student voice, found that pupils felt valued in the setting and that they placed importance on inclusive, positive relationships with staff (Sellman, 2009). These kinds of mutual and less-hierarchical relationships that young people value in alternative provision are considered further shortly, as part of social pedagogy and an ethic of care approach to working with young people. As with other studies (Gutherson et al, 2011) Levinson (2016) concludes that for any sort of success to be realised in a PRU, positive relationships between staff and pupils are necessary. Indeed, it is widely recognised that in the teaching profession more broadly, effective teacher-student relationships are essential for pupil progression, both in terms of motivation (Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006) and learning (Day et al, 2006).

### *Social pedagogy*

In acknowledging the social aspects of learning which appear to be central to the traditional practices of PRUs, recent authors have suggested that those working in alternative schools are indeed using 'social pedagogy' to carry out their work (Kyriacou, 2015). As an approach which recognises and supports the role of social learning in promoting wellbeing (Smith and Whyte, 2008) it views care and education as one combined task (Cameron et al, 2011). Through unifying daily aspects of living and learning in this way, the child's overall development is supported (Petrie et al, 2006). In order to achieve such work, the social pedagogue prioritises positive professional-child relationships, which aim to be less-hierarchical by including the views and opinions of young people in the decision-making process (Petrie et al, 2006). As an approach, social pedagogy can offer stability to young people, where both their needs and strengths are recognised through child-centred practices that place their happiness at the forefront (Cooper, 2007). Whilst

there remain a wide range of views on what social pedagogy constitutes, Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) usefully identify four core pillars in their ‘diamond model’, where each is reliant on the other in order to meet the goals of social pedagogy:

*Figure 1. The diamond model of social pedagogy*



(Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011).

With positive experiences emphasised as the goal, the framework outlines how this is achieved through a focus on wellbeing and happiness, learning, relationships, and finally empowerment. Relationships are maintained by having a strong affection towards the child, where clearly set rules and boundaries are formed, that whilst creating a sense of security for the child, also allow them to learn socially about acting responsibly in their lives (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). In this sense, social pedagogy can support young people in developing both their dependency and autonomy (Kyriacou, 2015), within ‘shared living spaces’ with adults (Cameron et al, 2011:15).

It is also worth noting the tensions that exist for those practicing social pedagogy, as professional and personal boundaries can become blurred when relationship forming is such a central task (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). The ‘professional heart’ concept has therefore been described within social pedagogy, which accommodates both the professional and the personal within the relationship through ‘head, hands, and heart’ (Boddy,

2011:114). Drawing on professional reflection, the head, hands and heart model provides the practical, empathetic personal-relationship work, whilst the head must also be present, as it provides the necessary balance to the heart through professional knowledge and reflection. Crucial here, is the belief that neither the professional nor the personal is sufficient in the relationship without the other (Boddy, 2011).

Some of the social imperatives of a social pedagogy approach described above become apparent in the PRU practices discussed within the research literature, whilst not being overtly described. This includes the priorities which staff have towards the social needs of pupils, evident through the responsive approach they take (Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al, 2015) over and above their other academic responsibilities. As with social pedagogy (Petrie et al, 2006; Cameron et al, 2011) this is achieved through less-hierarchical relationships, which are child-centred and respectful of the pupils' lived experiences and points of view (Te Riele et al, 2017; Cahill et al, 2018). Similarly, and again connecting to social pedagogy, the creation of positive relationships with young people are foregrounded and prioritised as part of the occupational task (McGregor and Mills, 2012; Te Riele et al, 2017).

However, social pedagogy as an approach remains on the margins of education and learning debates in the UK, despite increased interest in recent times (Kyriacou, 2015). Due to the wide range of different theoretical writings and understandings of social pedagogy, Kyriacou, (2015) suggests that this constrains a universal definition of the practice. To overcome this, he suggests that professional training is required (both initial and in-service), so that social pedagogy can become better understood and recognised as a useful and worthwhile approach.

### *An ethic of care*

Another concept which has recently been associated with the work of teaching staff in alternative education settings (Te Riele et al, 2017) is the ‘ethic of care’, which requires strong ‘moral qualities’ on the part of workers (Tronto, 1994). As an approach which shares many of the underpinnings described within social pedagogy, it recognises the practical importance of caring for others, by being responsive to need through trusting relationships (Held, 2006). In addition, it views care more broadly as an ethical framework (Sevenhuijsen, 2000). Perhaps one of the striking similarities between the ‘ethic of care’ and social pedagogy is the value they place on interdependent relationships between the carer and the cared for, which allows care to become de-stigmatised, reciprocal and a normal part of public life, rather than a practice that is solely reserved for the vulnerable in society (Holland, 2010). In doing so, this can and should support us in moving away from a viewpoint where dependence is viewed negatively (Holland, 2010). Rather, it can be viewed and positioned alongside the priorities we place on achieving autonomy, which is so often the desired positive outcome for young people.

This is important for vulnerable young people who are most in need of stable, caring relationships in their lives, as it can help to improve their resilience (Pithouse and Rees, 2015). Indeed, recommendations have been made for continued levels of care beyond any official caring role (Holland, 2010; Pithouse and Rees, 2015). As Pithouse and Rees (2015) point out, no one is ever completely autonomous, and gaining support through interdependent relationships should be available to all of us, including vulnerable young people, throughout our lives (Roberts, 2011). As with social pedagogy therefore, these priorities highlight the value which is placed within an ethic of care towards interdependency in human relations (Tronto, 1994).

An ethic of care approach respects the views of the young people being cared for as part of a reciprocal relationship, by acknowledging and acting on, what they say is important to them about their experience of care

(Tronto, 1994). Whilst the literature on the ethic of care describes the positive ways in which professionals can work using caring practices, it also highlights that caring as an interdependent act is complex, involving both positive and negative emotions, sometimes within unequal power relationships (Sevenhuijsen, 2000). Finally, Tronto (1994) identifies the ethic of care as both a performance through the act of caring, which professionals show in their practice and a disposition, as something which is part of the professional's character. These approaches connect back to the research outlined earlier on alternative provision (Te Riele, 2006; Te Riele et al, 2017) and PRUs (McCluskey et al, 2015; Fattore and Mason, 2017), where teachers were variously described as creating caring humane relationships with the young people.

## A Profession of the Emotions

The professional practices described above prioritise direct and caring relational work with young people. These require staff to use personal empathy and emotional intelligence to help inform their decision-making, beyond a simple rational analysis of what might be best in a given situation (Hennessey, 2011). As a predominantly face-to-face task, the teaching profession is recognised as one of the occupations where emotions are central to practice (Hargreaves, 1994; Fineman, 2003; O'Connor, 2008). Involved in prolonged periods of social interaction with pupils, teachers often rely on a strong personal commitment to their work. Emotions are therefore closely bound with these morally guided professional decisions. Historically, these have given rise to concerns about whether personal feelings should be part of any ethical decision-making in practice (Blum, 1980). Whilst these concerns are accepted to a point, it has also been argued that a purely rational approach to work fails to acknowledge the individualised relationships that occur at the micro-level of practice (Held, 2006). Indeed, it is through an ethic of care approach, where emotions are utilised within these unique relationships that professionals are enabled to

understand the best course of action in a given situation for each child (Held, 2006).

Others argue that a more balanced approach to ethical decision-making incorporates rational thought with emotional intelligence (Hennessey, 2011). For Hennessey (2011:116) ‘reason and feeling interact and inform one another, leading to decisions and viewpoints that are cognisant of both inner emotions and the outer, social world...’. The value of incorporating personal emotions into these relational practices is also acknowledged within education, where the ‘capacity of connectedness’ is viewed as an inherent part of the professional role (Palmer, 1997).

Being able to connect with others cannot just be taught through training manuals, but also relies on something beyond this, within the emotional dimension of the professional. In this sense staff draw upon reflective practice in their professional work as part of their continuous learning (Schon, 1983). Similar skills have been highlighted in social work, where ‘the capacity to relate to others and their problems’ is viewed as essential and involves ‘personable and intimate aspects’ (O’Leary et al, 2013:137), mirroring many qualities of friendship (Beresford et al, 2008). In teaching, O’Connor (2008) similarly describes teachers’ autonomy in the profession, where individual identities help to guide the teachers’ professional and emotional decision-making. Using their agency in this way is one example of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), where staff draw on their own personal identity and moral commitment or ‘inner dedication’ (Bernstein, 2000) to carry out their work. O’Connor (2008:118) describes the ‘strong personal commitment’ of teachers towards their profession and the role that emotions play in constructing an identity that involves ‘human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love’ (Hargreaves, 1994:175). Direct relational practices therefore rely on the use of professionals’ emotions both within social work (Holland, 2010; Hennessey, 2011; O’Leary et al, 2013) and teaching (Hargreaves, 1998; Noddings, 2003; O’Connor, 2008; Aultman et al, 2009). Social learning and therapeutic work have traditionally been prioritised by staff within PRUs (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015) through

prolonged periods of direct work with young people displaying a range of complex behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Thus, these relational practices, and the use of teachers' emotions are likely to be intensified for PRU professionals (Te Riele et al, 2017).

It becomes necessary, therefore, to consider the use and impact of emotions in the workplace more fully. Emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) has been recognised within the caring professions (Kolb, 2014), including education (Aultman et al, 2009; Te Riele et al, 2017), where staff are required to regulate, manage or suppress their emotions (Hochschild, 1983) in order to meet the emotional needs of those being cared for (Fineman, 2003). When the management of these emotions becomes too great, emotional burnout, stress or psychological damage can occur (Hochschild, 1983; Fineman, 2003). However, emotional labour should not just be viewed in negative terms, as it can also become an aspect of the job which professionals enjoy (Hochschild, 2018). This emotional labour can therefore influence professionals in a positive way in their practice, especially for those who are deeply invested on a moral level. Kolb (2014) describes how for some professionals, emotional labour and moral obligations are inextricably linked. Rather than being a negative aspect of work, staff are able to gain 'moral wages' (Kolb, 2014:21) through the positive emotions and sense of satisfaction that they feel from viewing themselves as caring and compassionate people, who are actively engaged in work which supports those most in need.

Drawing on the work of Hughes (1971), Kolb (2014:25) describes how people engaged in 'moral dirty work' (practices which can leave a psychological wound) are able to overcome such stresses through the collection of moral wages, which feed into their professional aims of maintaining a moral identity. Rather than gaining rewards extrinsically through large sums of money or prestige, these professionals are able to view their work as worthwhile, as an intrinsic feature of their own moral commitment (Bernstein, 2000). As Kolb (2014) suggests, what makes the work difficult is also precisely what can make staff feel good. With both

features of social pedagogy and an ethic of care likely present within PRU practices, it is this morally worthwhile work for PRU professionals, that may support them in valuing and enduring this emotionally difficult job.

Despite the positives that professionals can gain, the challenges of emotional labour cannot be ignored in this kind of close relational work that draws upon personal investment of the self (Aultman et al, 2009; O'Leary et al, 2013). In work such as this, the professional/personal boundary is blurred, and teachers can become particularly vulnerable to emotional labour and burnout (Pithouse, 1996; Grandey, 2000) because of their personal investment in the work. Experiencing emotional overload can result in some teachers leaving the profession altogether (Aultman et al, 2009). Investing in these intensive relationships, particularly in PRUs, can lead to feelings of loss once those being cared for have moved on (Buehler et al, 2006).

Staff need to be constantly aware of the blurring between the professional/personal boundary within the caring professions. This is particularly so where physical acts of kindness are viewed as a useful way of communicating care towards children, which can foster the emotional development and resilience of those in need (Powell, 2001). Acts such as these within close emotional relationships have given rise to heightened levels of risk around allegations of abuse towards children (Piper et al, 2006). These anxieties have often resulted in risk averse practice and the creation of 'no touch' zones within some caring practices with children (Pithouse and Rees, 2015). An awareness and understanding of how personal emotions are used within professional practices and the inherent risks involved in these, is therefore critical for the caring professional, in order to support their own emotional wellbeing in the workplace. It is to these professional and personal boundaries that I now turn.

### *The professional/personal boundary*

As already noted, practices from the social work profession share many similarities to those found within PRUs. In both settings staff are placed on the frontline of welfare work (Pithouse, 1996) and use relational practice skills as part of their central task (Ruch, 2010; Hennessey, 2011; O'Leary et al, 2013). As the personal interacts with the professional in practice, techniques such as those described in social pedagogy (Boddy, 2011) are used to mitigate any tensions that may exist within these blurred boundaries. The same kinds of tensions are acknowledged within social work practice. Techniques such as 'normative distancing' have been practiced in social work previously, which allow practitioners to show compassion towards clients' needs without getting too close (Pithouse, 1996:92). In doing so, this allows social workers to maintain control over the encounter. An approach such as this could be more difficult for PRU teachers, given the extended periods of time they spend with young people each day within these inter-subjective relationships. A continued blurring of the professional/personal boundary in this way could be challenging for the emotional wellbeing of these teachers who may similarly need to develop protective strategies, although little has been written about this in relation to PRU teachers.

Within social work where relationships are often formed with very vulnerable groups of people, both personal and professional development continues to be supported through various forms of training and supervision (Bolton, 2010; Social Care Wales, 2011). This training provides space for critical reflection on practice and allows strategies to be formed for the development of both personal and professional resilience in what is often highly challenging work. Being reflexive in this way can improve practice significantly and the use of emotion and feeling is recognised as an indicator of ethical values (Bolton, 2010).

Critical reflection, however, does not and cannot provide 'solutions' to all the problems which professionals face given their complexity. It does, however, allow professionals to understand the uniqueness of the situations

they find themselves in, which cannot always be reconciled with simple performance criteria (Ruch, 2005). The process therefore allows professionals to realise the existence of the inter-subjective and unique relationships that they have with those they care for, reminding them to be human (Hennessey, 2011). For Hennessey (2011:98) reflective practice is essential for social workers as it allows them to consider the emotions that they feel through practice and can reconcile the personal with the professional. This approach can provide time for professionals to work through tensions, whilst it also allows them to remain faithful to their professional values. As the earlier discussions in this chapter highlighted, teaching practices in PRUs rely heavily on creating close, trusting relationships with vulnerable pupils (McCluskey et al, 2015; Fattore and Mason, 2017). How staff manage this personal/professional boundary in the PRU will therefore be of interest in this study. Learning ways to manage the professional with the personal is important for staff in caring work, particularly in relation to various forms of vicarious trauma that staff can experience. These experiences should also be recognised as playing 'a pivotal role in the development of a better understanding of the lived experience of clients' (O'Leary et al, 2013:147) and are, therefore, an essential ingredient of the caring professional's practice.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Professional practice: Occupational hybridity*

Noordegraaf (2011) describes how there had been many studies which traced changes within professional practices, where professionalism was seen as under attack from managerial reforms (Morris and Farell, 2007). These reforms increased the levels of managerialism, which placed professionals within organisational structures focused on marketised reforms (Freidson, 2001). This included educational institutions (Evetts, 2011), which aimed to drive improvement and enable accountability (Ball, 1993). Professional autonomy and control were said to be diminished and diminishing via these increased managerial and standardised professional

practices (Hanlon, 1999), which would bolster the position of the state within educational practices. This increased involvement by the state was articulated by Bernstein (2000) as the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF). Here, additional control over work was achieved through 'coercive accountability' (Beck, 2008:127) that organised and accounted for work in particular ways. Within these new organisational contexts, occupational groups therefore became more accountable for their work and were closely monitored through performance indicators. Managerial responsibilities increased as part of this shift and the quality of leadership became an important driver for improved school effectiveness (Beck, 2008). This change was viewed and articulated by some as de-professionalisation within education (Ball, 2003). Whilst there was some acknowledgement of crossover between organisational and professional boundaries (Evetts, 2006), Noordegraaf (2011) suggested that these viewpoints described a relationship that was incompatible and dichotomous. It was invariably viewed that professional occupational roles were weakened or restricted by organisations (Hoggett, 2000) and were therefore, not compatible with each other.

Although Bernstein did not write directly about the professions, he did theorise how professions with weak knowledge claims find it difficult to resist the ORF (education being one). While worried that this may emasculate the ORF within education, Bernstein did not represent teachers as passively accepting the ORF. Beck and Young (2005:127) draw on his metaphor of a coin to describe the way in which professionals could move between an 'inward' (moral and ethical commitment to practice) and 'outward' (external performance management commitment to practice) justification of work (Beck and Young, 2005). While Bernstein did suggest agency on the part of teachers, he also warned of the implications of the encroachment of the ORF on teachers' professional role and identity. More recent theorists of professional work have taken a more positive approach to changes in professional work, of which Noordegraaf (2007) is most prominent.

Alternative readings have therefore suggested that 're-professionalisation' has taken place (Whitty, 2000; Noordegraaf, 2007), where professional roles have simply altered and adapted to change. Instead of being passive victims, professionals are able to alter or resist government encroachments at the macro and micro-level. This was recognised in the work of Bernstein (2000). Noordegraaf (2011:1351) continues this conversation by describing organised professionalism, where professional practices 'embody organisational logics' and professionals take up organising roles and capacities in order to face changing work circumstances. Moving away from over-simplified dualisms of 'occupational versus organisational' and 'managers versus professionals' Noordegraaf (2011:1357) describes the 'changes that affect professional services' and the 'mechanisms and methods for dealing with change' as part of his understanding of organised professionalism. Whilst recognising the introduction of organisational reforms as a change to professional services practices, these are viewed as part of wider societal changes in an attempt to support the rise of multi-problems (Huotari, 2008) and multi-agency work (Edwards et al, 2009). Also, multi-problem youngsters and families are often recognised in relation to difficulties and challenges associated with health, social care and education. These 'multi-problems' can no longer be supported through specialised professionals (Noordegraaf, 2011) and the involvement of multi-agency or inter-professional services therefore increase (Adler et al, 2008). Professional services become altered by new service and social realities and according to Noordegraaf (2011:1365) 'professionalism needs to be organised, also by professionals' who become more management-minded.

A hybrid or organised professional identity is therefore established by the merging of different and sometimes opposing values and qualities (Harrison, 1993). With dual responsibilities incorporated into the work these include how work is coordinated, how authority is established, and what values are at stake (Noordegraaf, 2013). This hybrid understanding of professionalism is also described within an educational context (Connolly, Hadfield et al, 2018; Machin, 2018), and is seen as a movement away from

the earlier deterministic de-professionalisation argument. This hybridity also highlights the agency that teachers still hold within these new managerial orientated educational settings, where they are able to resist, endorse and subvert these new organisational logics. A further discussion of how this is achieved at the micro-level of practice is described shortly through a focus on policy enactment.

The recognition of hybridity within professional work is a key element of the later work of Evetts (2011) where she assessed how competing conceptions of professional practice are drawn on by professions and professional organisations. Organisational professionalism uses control through responsibility and decision-making processes in a hierarchical and managerial, top-down process. This involves increased levels of standardised work relying on 'externalised forms of regulation and accountability measures such as target-setting and performance review' (Evetts, 2011: 787). Occupational professionalism as an idealised professionalism centres on a shared authority base, with trust developed between practitioners and clients. Professional autonomy and discretion are exercised and through training and socialisation 'strong occupational identities and work cultures' are created (Evetts, 2011:787). In terms of controls, these are managed through 'codes of professional ethics' by the practitioners.

The use of both organisational and occupational professionalism in practice has been described within the literature in relation to head teachers in schools (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). Where head teachers are given greater autonomy and responsibility, they are increasingly required to take on numerous roles, away from traditional leadership practices of schooling, such as curriculum development and teaching. Overseeing areas including accounting and budgeting and human resources work, it is suggested that these increased levels of responsibility and autonomy, which holds head teachers more accountable for success and failure, results in a heightened sense of risk and anxiety for them (Collet-Sabe, 2017; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). A hybrid professional role can therefore be both a mixture of an

organisational and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2011) or a multi-agency professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2013), which draws on a mixture of professional services and expertise.

The increased perceptions of risk described above in relation to head teachers have also been described in social work. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were concerns that social work had moved away from its relational practice focus (Parton, 1996; Ruch, 2005; Hennessey, 2011). Amidst heightened levels of anxiety due to the inherently complex and uncertain nature of human relationship work, the social work profession increased its bureaucratic and procedural responses in order to alleviate concerns and manage risks in children's services (Spratt and Houston, 1999; Horlick-Jones, 2005; Munro, 2011; Holland, 2014). This was linked and coincided with heightened concerns of risk in society more broadly (Beck, 1992).

Amidst these changes to social work, there was also disquiet about the loss of direct relational work with families, due to the increased levels of bureaucracy, performance management and accountability, which was also seen in education (Broadhurst et al, 2010). However, criticisms of this procedural approach, in addition to highly publicised serious cases in the profession including the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), resulted in reviews and recommendations that shifted the direction of practice back towards more direct relational work with children and families (Munro, 2011). It was felt that such an approach was crucial for supporting the safety of children. In relation to this crisis in the social work profession, Holland (2014:386) suggested that 'this may become the first high-profile child murder that has led to a relaxation of regulation in an attempt to free professionals to concentrate on spending more time in direct engagement with families.'

Relationship-based practices and child-centred approaches to working with children and young people have historically been an integral part of social work (Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962; Hennessey, 2011) and have become

evident once more within the social work profession (see Holland, 2010; Ruch et al, 2017). Although similarities between PRU and social work practices exist in terms of the relational aspects of the profession, these recent changes within social work are paradoxical to the changing educational landscape in Wales. Here, policy reforms appear to be moving practice in the opposite direction within PRUs, towards a more managerialist and bureaucratic form of working (Smith and Connolly, 2019). This is because of the time lag for policies to have an impact on PRUs, which are only now experiencing the effects of the accountability agenda that preceded the Donaldson (2015) reforms. Whilst the Donaldson (2015) reforms are currently moving Wales towards a more progressive agenda in mainstream schools through the new curriculum, they have not yet been introduced into PRUs.

### *Pedagogy*

Basil Bernstein (2000) used the term official pedagogic discourse to explain how states, through the uses of policy, curriculum, examination and inspection, shape certain kinds of relationships between governments and different groups of people within the field of education, such as teachers and local administrators. It is this official pedagogic discourse which provides these groups with varying degrees of status and agency in terms of using different types of pedagogic discourse, knowledge and practice (Bourne, 2008). The official pedagogic discourse is therefore responsible for shaping the curriculum and transforming knowledge into classroom talk (Singh, 2002). This in turn influences change in teachers' roles and identities (Bernstein, 2000; Bourne, 2008; Barrett, 2009).

Through his conceptualisation of official pedagogic discourse, Bernstein (2000) proposed to bring together the macro-levels of government and policy with micro-levels of curriculum and classroom practices. He did this by paying attention to the diverse actions and consciousness of teachers and pupils towards it (Bourne, 2008). According to Bernstein (2000) and others more recently (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006; Barrett, 2009; Connolly, Milton et

al, 2018), the education system and pedagogy has progressively become organised, shaped and controlled via the state and the official recontextualising field (ORF) at the macro-level, instead of through the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF) at the micro-level. The autonomy and agency within an education system can be judged as Fitz et al (2006) argue, by the ability of the PRF to reframe and reshape the ORF. Previously, teachers and educators have been privileged to a relatively substantial degree of autonomy when it comes to classroom practices through the PRF. Increasingly however, these practices have become regulated through managerialism, measures of accountability, and a more tightly regulated curriculum (Barrett, 2009; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) embedded within the official ORF.

This interplay between the ORF and PRF is drawn upon by Ivinson and Duveen (2006) who describe the competing beliefs and views on the purpose of education, between the state and the individual at the ORF and PRF levels. These result in different and competing understandings of educational practice and knowledge. Where a greater degree of agency is available for individuals (privileging the PRF over the ORF), this results in a weakened classification and framing of the curriculum (Bernstein, 1990) and relationships between teachers and pupils. This produces a recontextualising of knowledge which is relatively open to negotiation and different points of view (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006:109). This is a 'competence model' (Bernstein, 2000) of official pedagogic discourse. In organisations where the ORF dominates the official pedagogic discourse it is characterised by a strong classification and framing of the curriculum (Bernstein, 2000) and relationships between teachers and pupils (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). Here, 'the transmission rather than the negotiation of knowledge is paramount' (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006:109). This is a 'performance model' (Bernstein, 2000) of official pedagogic discourse.

Bernstein (2000) viewed the 'competence model' and 'performance model' as two types of recontextualised knowledge that were situated at either ends of the spectrum in terms of pedagogic choice, practice, or the content

(classification) of education, and the control, process and transmission of educational knowledge (framing) (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006).

Classification relates to the *what* of educational knowledge, whilst framing relates to the *how* (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein (1981:345) therefore described how framing establishes the message of educational transmission through ‘the control on communicative practices (selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria) in pedagogical relations.’ Whereas classification establishes the boundaries or limits of a knowledge, the framing ‘provides us with the form of the realisation of that discourse’ (Bernstein, 2000:27). Where framing is strong, the transmitter (teacher) has explicit regulation over the transmission of knowledge. By contrast, a weak framing provides the acquirer (pupil) with a greater degree of autonomy over the regulation of knowledge, the pacing of the transmission and ‘thus what counts as legitimate practice (Bernstein, 1981:345).

Within a classroom therefore, we could anticipate viewing practices that were closely aligned towards one end of the ‘competence/performance’ spectrum and the framing rules which accompany these models (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). Competence approaches are less-hierarchical than performance practices, where ‘competencies are intrinsically creative, informally, tacitly acquired in non-formal interactions’ (Bernstein, 2000:55). In contrast, performance approaches rely on practices which shape behaviour through hierarchical social structures (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). Within the weakly classified and framed ‘competence model’, instructions are implicit, and teachers are ‘less able to appeal to criteria derived from specialist discourses in their efforts to control children’ (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006:111). Pupils’ behaviour and work within the classroom are likely to be viewed as part of their inner competence. Within the ‘performance model’ however, classroom instruction is mainly explicit. Here, an expectation is placed on children to ‘reproduce rather than reconstruct knowledge’ with success placed on reproducing specialist criteria, rather than the production of personal or original work (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). Due to the explicit nature of the ‘performance model’,

pupils can more easily be classified into successful and less successful pupils. A comparison of the two models is provided in Table 3:

*Table 3: Recontextualised knowledge*

	Competence models	Performance models
Categories: Space Time Discourse	Weakly classified	Strongly classified
Evaluation orientation	Presences	Absences
Control	Implicit	Explicit
Pedagogic text	Acquirer	Performance
Autonomy	High	Low
Economy	High cost	Low cost

Adapted from Bernstein, 2000:58

'Competence models' are viewed as more empowering and therapeutic in comparison with 'performance models', which are more instrumental and closely aligned with serving economic objectives (Bernstein, 2000).

Whereas 'competence models' rely to a greater degree on group or project work, 'performance models' place a greater emphasis on specific outputs and the acquisition of specialised skills. Evaluation therefore relies on highlighting what is missing or not acquired within a 'performance model', whilst what is present and available to a teacher (a pupil's production of work) within a 'competence model' is evaluated in its entirety. 'Competence models' are therefore less susceptible to public scrutiny and accountability, whilst in 'performance models', outputs can be more easily measured, with pupils graded and stratified (Bernstein, 2000). The economic cost is high within a 'competence model', as teachers are required to design resources and invest considerable time in evaluation and the discussion of project development. 'Performance models' in contrast, have a lower economic impact. There is less investment in time for teachers as the evaluation of outputs is more straightforward and explicit. The 'performance model' however, is open to greater external controls than the 'competence model'.

As part of his conceptualisation of official pedagogic discourse, Bernstein (2000:77) also discussed the ways in which pedagogic identities were changing, using the example of different university institutions as his unit of analysis. His framework on identity was also, however, intended for use in identifying individual identities (Power, 2006:106). Bernstein (2000) describes three fundamental identity constructions including: decentred, retrospective and prospective, all of which were built on different resources. Of interest and relevance to this study are those which Bernstein identified with the 'competence' and 'performance models' of official pedagogic discourse: specifically, the decentred identities, including instrumental (market) and therapeutic identities. For Bernstein (2000:69), both 'competence' and 'performance models' fall into the decentred category, which are constructed through local resources. 'Competence models' are strongly associated with therapeutic control and identities that are constructed through introjection (therapeutic identities), whilst 'performance models' are associated with economic control and identities constructed through projection (instrumental identities). Acknowledging how identities are fluid and not fixed, these identities could be seen to relate to Bernstein's metaphor of the coin (Beck and Young, 2005) and the ways in which professionals can move between different inward (moral and ethical commitments) and outward (external performance management commitments) justifications of work.

With these identity constructions in mind, and in relation to the different models of official pedagogic discourse once more, Bernstein (2000) described the ways in which 'competence' and 'performance models' shifted over time, in terms of their dominance over the official pedagogic discourse. These shifts were dependent on the dominant ideology of the day. According to Ivinson and Duveen (2006:112), Bernstein's (2000) theory of pedagogic discourse:

*...allows macro relations (social structures) to be recovered from micro interaction (classroom practice) and vice versa. Thus, it provides the rules which link descriptions of the surface structure of classroom organisation to models of social relations. Children will be controlled in*

*different ways according to which model dominates in a specific classroom.*

The models of pedagogy provided by Bernstein will therefore be used to support this study in describing the connection between micro-level practice and professional recontextualisation within the PRU and wider macro-level factors embedded within the ORF. Of particular interest is how changes within Welsh policy have impacted upon the structure and pedagogic practice within a Welsh PRU. Bernstein (2000) highlighted how mechanisms of accountability introduced within the English education system had resulted in an emboldened ORF and subsequent enervation of the PRF. Since devolution in Wales however, the picture has been more nuanced (see chapter two), with a growing gap appearing between the education systems of England and Wales (Power, 2016). With ambitions for a progressive education system in Wales (Power, 2016) and movement away from the market-driven approaches found in England, this new Welsh education system involved a retrenchment from some of the excessive accountability mechanisms through which the ORF in England was operationalised. There was, however, a move away from this approach identified with the 'second phase' of education policy-making in Wales (Egan, 2017). Here, elements of accountability were introduced (see Andrews, 2011) through national testing and the banding of secondary schools. While Wales was never a 'high accountability' system, there have been suggestions that it is now entering a 'third wave' (Egan, 2017) through further educational reforms (Donaldson, 2015). As discussed earlier, these ongoing reforms which involve the restructuring of the Welsh curriculum, promise increased flexibility and agency for teachers in delivering the curriculum (Power et al, 2018), and aim to foster and animate the PRF within Wales.

During these times of change in Wales, Welsh PRUs have largely been beyond the purview of the ORF and the tools of audit and accountability - as were other PRUs across the UK (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). This has enabled the therapeutic form of pedagogy found within PRUs to flourish.

This is not to say that academic learning and outcomes are not important within PRUs (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014), but that in general, PRUs, like other forms of alternative provision (Munn and Lloyd, 2005; Burton, 2007), tend to view emotional wellbeing and the development of social 'life skills' as equally important. This is highlighted through provision which has traditionally focused on nurturing and flexible programmes of learning, which provide pupils with some level of control over the learning process (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). In this sense we could say that the pedagogic frameworks and classroom practices within PRUs have traditionally been aligned towards the 'competence' end of the pedagogic framework (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006), with weaker framing and less-hierarchical relationships between pupils and staff. However, driven by a concern for the outcomes of disadvantaged learners, PRUs have increasingly come under scrutiny in England (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015), and more recently in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017; Smith and Connolly, 2019). This suggests that a movement is taking place towards the ORF within the PRU system.

With a resurgent level of performance monitoring and accountability, the PRU pedagogic framework could therefore be said to be moving towards the performance end of the spectrum (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006), with stronger framing and more explicit classroom instruction. The work of Bernstein (2000) will allow this study to consider how wider policy changes have reframed practice and the professional roles of PRU workers in Wales.

### *Policy enactment*

Whilst policy changes take place within the education system, understanding the agency of professionals is key to an enactment approach to policy analysis. Archer (2003) uses an ecological view of agency to understand how agency is achieved under certain ecological conditions. As a relational process, agency combines the individual's capacity to act with certain contingencies from their immediate environment. In this way,

professionals can be enabled and constrained by their social and political environment (Priestley et al, 2012). These understandings of agency can be applied to professional teachers and their schooling environments in PRUs, considering the role of policy and how Welsh education changes (Welsh Government, 2017a) impact the teachers' work and identity. The approach to enactment drawn on in this study (Ball et al, 2011, 2012) illustrates how policy application is a process contingent on context, where policy is not simply 'delivered' but goes through a process of interpretation, translation and enactment (Ball et al, 2012). Here, the agency of individual actors is understood to be a central part of the complex, interpretative enactment of policy.

Similarly, within the enactment of policy in social work practices, individuals are acknowledged as having professional discretion when it comes to interpreting new policy initiatives (Lipsky, 1980). In describing his work on street-level bureaucracy, Lipsky (1980) viewed discretion as inevitable within daily practices, due to the necessity of practice for professionals who were confronted with carrying out highly complex policy initiatives as part of their work within public service organisations, often with limited resources at their disposal. Drawing on the work of Lipsky (1980), other studies concerned with social work practice have also highlighted the ways in which professionals are responsible for the delivery of policy on the front line (Evans and Harris, 2004), identifying the various ways in which professional discretion can both support public policy delivery (Ellis et al, 1999) and resist or subvert it (Baldwin, 2000).

Rather than being passive receivers of policy, practitioners are instead enactors or interpreters of policy (Bowe et al, 1992:22), particularly when there is an animated PRF (Bernstein, 2000). Bowe and others (1992:22) describe how 'Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own.' Therefore, those who create policy texts are unable to control the meaning and interpretation of their texts by professionals within educational settings. These interpretations of policy will be different for

each individual, who have their own individual histories, values and experiences that support them in making sense of particular policy discourses, within particular contexts (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). Policy texts and their implementation are consequently not simply enforced. They are interpreted, enacted and resisted differently by individual teachers within the daily micro-politics of their work, constantly changing within different contexts and at different times (Bowe et al, 1992).

Policy enactment theory in education can be seen to move beyond a simple linear understanding of policy implementation as a 'top down' or 'bottom up' process (Ball et al 2012:6). It acknowledges the social agency of teachers (Ball, 1993) who are the 'key agents' involved in the interpretation of policies through their daily routines (Spillane, 1999). Some of the contextual factors of enactment (Ball et al, 2012) are now outlined, in order to support an understanding of how policy might be enacted differently within different educational contexts.

The enactment of education policies within school and PRU settings involves processes of both interpretation and translation (Ball et al, 2011), whereby interpretation requires making sense of policy texts and translation involves the acting out of policy texts (Ball et al, 2012). This process of acting out policy can include and be witnessed through the communication of policy between staff, the symbolic artefacts found along school corridors and classrooms walls, the structure of a lesson, meetings, and so on (Braun et al, 2011). Using context in this way provides researchers with an opportunity to explore the complexities of what is actually happening within these settings, in relation to new policy requirements and their enactment (Singh et al, 2014). According to Ball et al (2012:21) there are four interconnected 'contextual dimensions' that are central to understanding how policy enactment is shaped. These include:

- *Situated contexts (locale, school histories and intakes)*
- *Professional contexts (values, teacher commitments and experiences and 'policy management' in schools)*

- *Material contexts (staffing, budgets, buildings, technology, infrastructure)*
- *External contexts (degree and quality of LA support; pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities)*

These contextual school factors, which are often ignored in research literature, account for the ways in which policy enactment is resisted against, acted upon and enabled (Ball et al, 2012). Situated contexts referring to location and intake consider the physical locations of buildings, the socio-economic climate of a geographical area and the sorts of pupils likely to attend as a result (Braun et al, 2011). Over time, these recurring factors such as intake, can come to define a school or PRU, whilst staff can define themselves by it (Ball et al, 2012:24). The point here is that context is always 'active' and 'can lead to certain patterns of emphasis and de-emphasis'.

The context of professional culture deals with the sorts of values and principles that staff display within their working routines. Developed over time, professional cultures and attitudes can respond to policy in different ways, sometimes competing and clashing with each other over how policies should be understood (Ball et al, 2012). These policy actors may have different values that inform their interpretations of policy, which are dependent upon different kinds of roles that exist in education settings, such as, teaching assistants, therapeutic staff and teachers. Differences in interpretation may also be varied and determined by the sorts of departments that exist. Finally, material contexts such as the physical make-up of a building, its layout and the spaces afforded to pupils and staff within it, can also inform the ways in which policy is enacted (Ball et al, 2012). Building layouts can for instance, determine the amount of interaction that takes place between staff from different departments, if multiple staffrooms are available (Ball et al 2012:30).

It is important to remember that these contexts are specific, malleable and shifting constantly, due to the nature of different interpretations, and the priorities given to certain policies at any one time. The interpretations and priorities that are given to policies can also solidify and normalise certain policies, and marginalise others (Maguire, 2007). This normalising can allow policies to become absolved from educational issues, seen only as part of the solution, rather than as part of the problem (Ball, 1997). This policy-neutral stance risks disguising any ‘unintended impacts that aspects of policy can have in educational settings’ (Maguire, 2007:110). At the same time, it is important to remember that numerous policy initiatives are active at any one time within education settings, which can also complement or contradict each other (Maguire, 2007).

#### *Liminality as a concept from anthropology*

The original use of liminality was derived from Van Gennep (1960) who used the term to refer to the tribal rites of passage or period of transition that tribes’ people traverse. This transition was made up of three stages including separation from society; the interim or liminal stage of marginalisation, during which the transition of the person or ‘liminar’ was between states and ambiguous; and finally, reintroduction to society, when the liminar arrives with a new status or identity. These liminal stages are viewed to be an emotionally challenging period for those involved (Turner, 1969), creating a sense of uncertainty and a loss of status within the interim stage of marginalisation.

Turner (1969) expanded on the work of Van Gennep (1960) and further developed the theory within the liminal phase, viewing the liminar as ‘interstructural’, neither here nor there within society and thus socially overlooked or invisible. As such the ability to categorise the liminar became difficult (Turner, 1969). During these periods the liminar has time to reflect on society, which helps them to transform their identity before reintroduction, when they take on new responsibilities. Liminality can

therefore be viewed as the reconstruction of identity as it 'significantly disrupt[s] one's internal sense of self' (Noble and Walker, 1997:31). These anthropological understandings of liminality are therefore transitory, as individuals experience 'in-between' and temporary states (Van Gennep, 1960). Drawing on these original understandings of liminality, authors have developed more contemporary viewpoints, highlighting how liminality can also have permanency through a state that is 'persistently ambiguous' (Ybema et al, 2011:22). In this sense, those who experience liminality can be permanently on the margins or 'in-between' states.

### *Liminality and space*

The work of Van Gennep (1960) also viewed liminal spaces as physical constructs and recognised certain thresholds such as doorways as significant (Thomassen, 2009). This liminal space can share parts of two dominant spaces, but it is not fully part of either (Dale and Burrell, 2008), becoming the 'dangerous and polluting' margin or borderland (Hetherington, 1997). Viewed as crossing points which are elusive or intangible (Nisbet, 1969) for the liminal, these spaces signify part of the uncertain and anxious journey towards reintegration (Preston-Whyte, 2004). Liminal spaces can therefore be understood as physical, social constructs and the work of Auge (1995:77) makes connection to these when describing the 'non-places' of airports and motorways. These spaces were identified by Auge (1995) as places where we only momentarily spend time, as transitory or temporary spaces. Others have identified certain physical spaces as in-between states, such as the beach (Shields, 1991), which represents a liminal space between sea and land. These spaces therefore do not fit the mould of usual social or cultural restrictions.

As this section highlights, there are similarities between the physical and figurative understandings of liminality, as both are in-between states where boundaries become blurred. Inhabiting an in-between and undefined space momentarily may bring with it therefore, an experience of feeling undefined,

as the liminar inhabits ‘transitory dwelling places’ (Shortt, 2015:655). Although liminal spaces can be viewed as uncertain non-spaces (Auge, 1995), Shortt (2015:655) argues for more nuance when considering the physical liminal space, recognising that these can also be ‘lived’ dwelling experiences for individuals in the workplace, who work ‘between the dominant spaces and the liminal spaces of organisational life’.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to the professional roles of PRU teachers, connecting these to the relevant concepts of social pedagogy and an ethic of care to describe the ways in which practice is carried out within these educational settings. The chapter also outlined how the PRU role is closely aligned to the social work profession as another caring occupation. As practices which rely on being able to develop close relational bonds with clients, the chapter described how emotional work of this nature draws on both the personal and professional emotions of workers, which need to be appropriately managed. The third part of the chapter outlined the main theoretical concepts that this study draws upon in order to inform the empirical findings described in later chapters of this thesis. The next chapter provides a discussion of the research design and methods used as part of the research.

## **Chapter four: Research Design and Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used and the methodological approach taken during the study, which enabled the gathering of data, the subsequent analysis, and the discussion of the data. The choices made in relation to these methods are justified by considering their appropriateness to the aims of the study and their compatibility with the research context and participants. As the chapter will highlight, the approach taken complements the exploratory nature of the study described at the outset of this thesis. Specifically, this thesis will focus on four overarching research questions:

1. How have policy changes been enacted within this PRU?
2. What are the professional roles and identities of staff working within the PRU?
3. What are the young people's experiences within the PRU?
4. What policy changes could be enacted to improve the experience of those working and studying in the PRU?

The chapter begins by outlining the ontological and epistemological approach underpinning this study, before moving on to a discussion of the research design. The ethnographic approaches used are then described, and the ways in which these were managed during the study, before I move on to discuss the participatory methods used with the pupils. The approach to data analysis is then outlined before finally, the ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed. These sections of the chapter provide an in-depth account of my own positionality during the study and the difficulties which can present themselves in studies of this nature. In doing so, I provide an open account about the 'messiness' of ethnographic research (Mannay and Morgan, 2015). The chapter concludes with a consideration of future research in this area.

## **Methodological Stance**

As the research questions above illustrate, my ontological position is a relativist one, which views reality as being socially constructed (Punch, 2005). With a focus on the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and social interactions, the research is not therefore interested in assessing some objective truth as in a positivist or objectivist position, where facts can be collected from the social world (May, 2001). Rather, I am interested in the subjective perceptions of participants and have therefore followed the epistemological position of constructivism, where knowledge is viewed as being constantly created through the interactions between people (Gray, 2014). This tradition holds that meaning is created in multiple ways by multiple people who interpret the world differently (Gray, 2014). From this position, no single understanding of the world is more valid than another and it acknowledges how different versions of reality are out there to be understood (Punch, 2005).

Having identified my epistemological position, I viewed an ethnographic theoretical perspective as the most appropriate way to study the PRU as it would allow me to research the subjective meaning-making of the participants within the PRU (Mason, 2002). In researching the practices and lived experiences of participants in the PRU, various forms of data such as conversations and social interactions needed to be captured through a suitable selection of research methods. Qualitative methods that are closely associated with ethnography including interviews and observations were therefore viewed as the most appropriate methods for this study, as they are suitable for capturing both what people say and what they do (Tucker, 2012). Additionally, qualitative methods have been identified as a useful way of placing the lived experiences of young people at the centre of research (see Christensen and James, 2000; Holland et al, 2008) and were therefore regarded as particularly valuable methods for exploring young people's experiences of the PRU.

### *The ethnographic tradition: A research design*

Apart from being the most practical method for getting close to the nature of social reality (Hammersley, 2002) the ethnographic tradition was also pertinent to this study because of its philosophical underpinnings that are compatible with constructivism (Blumer, 1969). The ethnographic tradition also regards social reality as being constructed by those people who inhabit a particular space or community, through their own interpretations and actions (Hammersley, 2002). As with constructivism, no single representation of reality is superior or truer than another ‘...because these worlds constitute reality for the people concerned’ (Hammersley, 2002:67).

An ethnographic study (Ybema et al, 2009), where culture and people are researched from the subjective position of those being researched attempts to create a vivid picture of a particular culture or group, their values and practices (Creswell, 2009). In this sense, an ethnography seeks to provide insights and a representation of the participants’ worldview by spending a prolonged period of time immersed within the field of study (Denscombe, 2014). This immersion allows for the study of the everyday and the non-normal - activities of participants or aspects of a specific culture which may not occur on a regular basis. This enables the research to bring a new perspective on the ordinary, taken-for-granted and everyday behaviour (Denscombe, 2014).

With an interest in the interplay between individuals and the structures they inhabit (see Berger and Luckman, 1991), I selected ethnographic methods as a useful approach for understanding the complexities of social events. Their capacity to produce a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of these complexities is a particularly central feature of ethnographic work. As Denzin (1989:83) notes, such approaches:

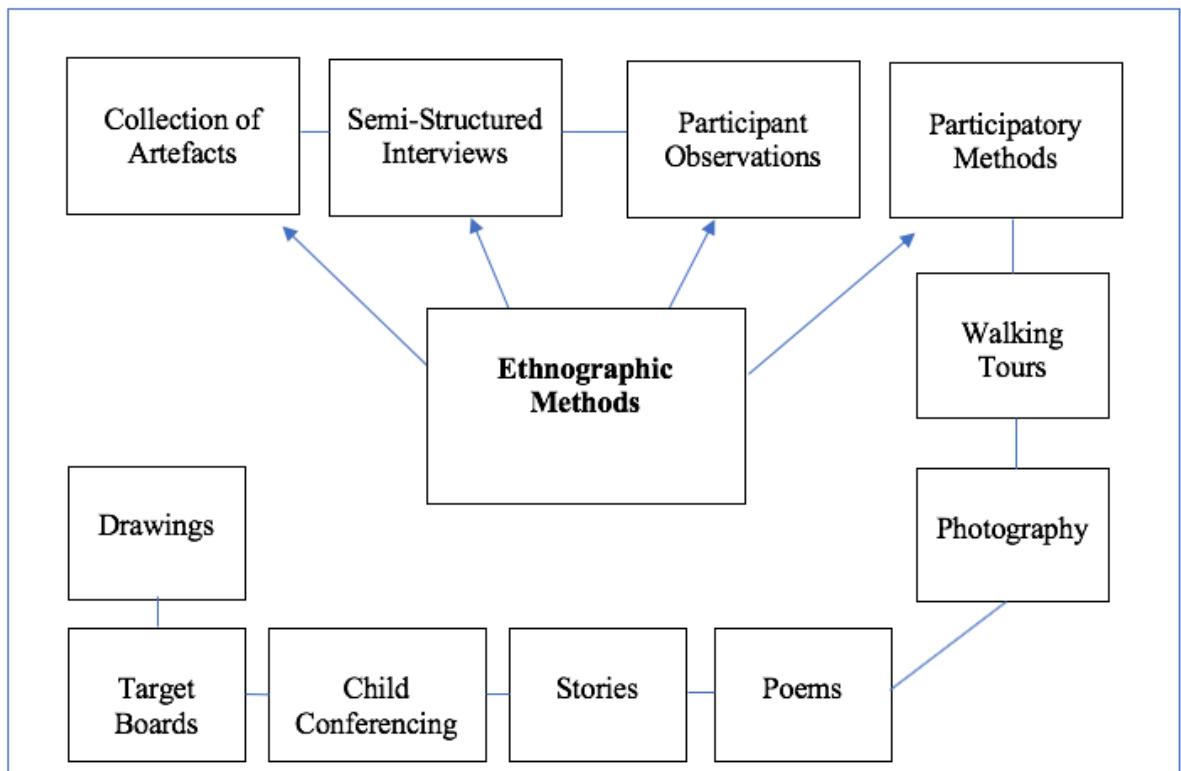
*...capture and record the voices of lived experience. It contextualises experience. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents details, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another.*

Ethnographic studies are therefore able to develop a detailed account of a particular social reality by acknowledging and describing the interactions that take place between individuals and the social structures or context they inhabit. For the purposes of my own study, I was interested in contextualising the experiences of staff and pupils within the structural confines of the PRU setting. Whilst I wanted to understand how the participants interacted with each other as part of their PRU experience, I was also interested in the physical space of the PRU itself and the role this played in shaping the PRU context and the participants' experiences (Delamont, 2014). There have been few educational studies that consider the physical space of a PRU (McGregor and Mills, 2012) and having been fortunate enough to carry out research in this PRU for one academic year, I felt this was a useful opportunity to explore space, which requires access for an extended period of time (Delamont, 2014). Through spending a prolonged amount of time within the field I would therefore be able to provide a detailed account of the setting and its spaces.

In order to explore the PRU and the people within it in detail, I chose a single case study design which views the case as a bounded unit, or single entity (Merriam, 1988). As I was interested in studying the PRU in its entirety rather than a specific aspect of the PRU, my approach could also be described as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). Characterised not as a method but as an object of particular interest to the researcher, the case study is chosen and then interpreted, usually through the use of qualitative methods (Stake, 1995). By focusing on the PRU as one unique case in this way, the study was concerned with elucidating the specific features of that case (Bryman, 2001).

Being interested in the cultural interactions taking place within the PRU, it was therefore necessary to use a qualitative approach in the research, where participants can be engaged with and observed within the PRU environment in order to understand how they make sense of their social worlds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The numerous research methods used within the research are outlined in Figure 2 below:

*Figure 2. Overview of research methods used*



The single case study approach usefully lends itself to multiple research methods which supported my aims of providing a rich and in-depth analysis of the setting. By carrying out an array of research methods and incorporating them through an analysis process of triangulation, where findings from the different methods are cross referenced and verified with one another, I could strengthen the overall findings, and improve the confidence within them (Bryman, 2001).

The case study selection was carefully considered over several months, which involved travel to and from a number of potential sites, and conversations with staff at those sites. The final selection developed through the management of practicalities, in terms of timing and the feasibility of access, with the new teacher in charge being particularly responsive to my research requests, as well as the setting's suitability for the focus of my research. Whilst I will describe the PRU setting as accurately as possible throughout the thesis, some of the features and specific details of the setting will be left out or altered in order to protect the identity of the PRU and the

staff and pupils inside it. Careful consideration was needed in order to retain the integrity of the data and not lose or distort the important findings gleaned from the research, whilst also preserving the anonymity of the location, the setting and the people in it.

### *Entering the field*

After reviewing several different PRUs in Wales I decided to approach the one which would ultimately be selected. I initially contacted the new teacher in charge (the equivalent of a head teacher in a mainstream school) via email, explaining my research interests and personal background in youth work. After a brief email exchange, we arranged an initial meeting to discuss my research further. Whilst gaining access to a research site is often described as a difficult task (Walford, 1999), I was fortunate because the teacher in charge was very receptive towards my research ideas, which included carrying out ethnographic methods within the PRU and so she was happy for me to commence the research. The teacher in charge responded to my queries quickly, and the initial phase of the research project was therefore agreed in a timely manner. Whilst the teacher in charge was responsive to my requests, I also presented the research study in a way that provided some benefits to the PRU. A report would be written up about the research for the PRU at the end of the study, and I would also offer volunteering support during the school day as a way of engaging initially with the setting and its practices. Given my background in youth work this seemed like a sensible way of developing some initial relationships with staff and pupils within the setting, but I was also aware of the ethical concerns this dual researcher/volunteer role could raise, as this chapter will highlight.

As an ethnographic study that involved access over an extended period of time, I was also aware that any agreements made could easily be denied or changed due to unforeseen circumstances during the study period. As such, I treated access and its negotiation as a continuous process (Walford, 1999). Also, when access has been granted for an ethnographic study, in practice

this can always transpire into a greater or lesser degree of access (Delamont, 2002). In this study, whilst I was free to carry out my research throughout the whole PRU, it became clear over time that some limitations would inevitably remain. For instance, a key fob used to open doors throughout the PRU was only available to me intermittently during the study due to their high demand. In addition, the key fob that I was granted would only open certain doors. I was not therefore free to roam, on occasions becoming largely dependent on the goodwill of staff to allow me access to various parts of the building. Gaining access to these areas within the PRU was a matter of continuous negotiation. What is more, some private spaces remained private, such as one-to-one counselling sessions with pupils and the weekly staff meetings. Having limited access to certain spaces and activities highlighted the degree of power and control which the PRU, and in particular, the teacher in charge as the central gatekeeper, had in this research relationship. They ultimately decided what would and would not be available to me during the study. I was aware that full access in the setting would be problematic, particularly with my status as an 'outsider' researcher (Bondy, 2013) who was not a familiar presence in the PRU. Whilst I was faced with some access limitations initially, I reminded myself how this could change over time and that not all studies start at the pace of the researcher (Delamont, 2002).

With this in mind, the teacher in charge agreed that I could begin to attend the PRU as a volunteer for one full day a week, supporting various classes and shadowing teachers, acting as an informal teaching assistant. As a volunteer I followed the PRU's volunteering procedures, completing a Disclosure and Barring Service<sup>7</sup> (DBS) check prior to taking up my role and reading through all the PRU literature which both volunteers and staff received as part of their induction. As part of my volunteering role it was also understood that I would be carrying out parts of my research. Aware of my dual role in the setting and the ethical considerations which

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<sup>7</sup> A DBS check is criminal record check which prevents unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, such as children. It therefore supports employers in making safer recruitment decisions.

accompanied this, I made a conscious effort to be open about my research purpose whenever asked and explained my role to everyone I met. This openness was only to a degree, however. For instance, I did not share any of my diary entries with the pupils or staff, and when asked about my writings would simply explain how I was writing about the daily practices and routines. I also did not want to be too open about my research intentions with the participants, as this could risk biasing them into telling me what they thought I wanted to hear (Barron, 1999). I made a conscious effort to continually negotiate my level of openness with the participants therefore, as it could be an integral way of gaining access/or not, to certain meetings and individuals (Bondy, 2013). Following an initial 10 week period, it was agreed that I and the teacher in charge would meet again to review the plan, developing it where necessary to include further research methods.

Overall, I spent 50 days in the PRU over one academic year, usually attending once a week, although this would sometimes increase, depending on particular parts of the research which had been scheduled, such as interviews with staff, or extra support I had offered as a volunteer. Whilst it was initially agreed that I would volunteer on a Thursday for 10 weeks, following this period I began to change the days as agreed and negotiated with the staff and pupils. This ensured that each day of the schooling week was observed, when different lessons and activities took place, such as the weekly assembly on a Wednesday. I also made every attempt to attend days which staff and pupils or I deemed as important, such as the end of term shows and various days out. Once I had built a greater degree of rapport and trust with the staff and pupils, I began to introduce other aspects of the research, such as staff interviews and the participatory methods. Having developed closer relationships by this point, it was hoped that research participants would be more open and responsive to my research, providing richer data for analysis (Darlington and Scott, 2002).

This lengthy familiarisation period allowed me to gain an understanding of the setting and its routines, which enabled me to better plan and hence carry out the research. For instance, I attended four hours of 'wellbeing'

sessions on a Thursday with a group of pupils. After observing the lessons for a couple of weeks I was able to identify these classes as the most appropriate ones for carrying out participatory methods. The classroom was large and informal, with beanbags dotted around and access to resources such as crayons and paper. I spoke with the staff about using this time for research at a later date, which they were very keen to introduce.

## **Ethnographic Methods**

With the intentions of the research study described above I decided to use the 'typical package' of methods used by educational ethnographers (Delamont, 2002:121) which includes the collection of documents, interviews and observations.

### *Collection of documents*

A variety of documents from the setting were collected during the study, including information from display boards within the PRU and hard copies of documents from referral meetings and the staffroom, such as the staff handbook. All of the documents were contemporary and covered a range of public/private sources as identified by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). Documents are, as Atkinson and Coffey (2004) point out, routinely created, used and depended on within organisational cultures, which can therefore offer insights into these practices as pieces of data, such as what an organisation's priorities and agendas might be (Barker and Alldred, 2012). The collection of documents from the institutional setting was important as I was interested in how Welsh Government policy was being enacted within the PRU setting. As another form of data, they usefully contributed to my understanding of the PRU's culture and the official discourse of the PRU.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

The use of interviews in research supports the assumption that knowledge can be created and co-constructed through and between individuals in conversation (Kvale, 1996). In this sense both the interviewee and interviewer travel together through conversation to make sense of their own interpretations of the world (Cohen et al, 2018). The study used a non-probability sampling approach where participants are chosen intentionally, based on specific characteristics (Bradford and Cullen, 2012). In total 14 staff agreed to take part in the interviews, covering a range of demographics. I felt that this was important because I wanted to gain a range of experiences and perceptions from staff in different roles and with different PRU histories and experiences.

I decided to use a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix one) as this would allow for a more informal, conversation like discussion. Whilst maintaining some structure in the questions being asked, I could also ask follow-up questions where necessary, giving participants an opportunity to extend their responses to questions (Cohen et al, 2018). This allowed me to gain a richer, conversational account from the interviewees, which helped me to glean a greater understanding of their perceptions and thought processes (Priede et al, 2014). Interviews are useful in this regard and they can also allow for an in-depth exploration of the participants meanings, by closely interrogating the data during the analysis process (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

There are ongoing methodological debates within the research community however, about how informative the data provided by interviewees can actually be, in relation to gaining access to ‘real lives’ (Silverman, 2001) or ‘private experiences’ (Atkinson et al, 2003). As mentioned above, I take the view that meanings are constructed in the context of the conversation between interviewer and interviewee and thus the interviewer isn’t simply excavating ‘realities’ or ‘truths’ from the minds of the participants. Thus, whilst I am interested in the ‘real lives’ of these people, I mean by this the interpretations of their lives and experiences, which they construct in the

context of the interview. Indeed, incorporating observations of the participants alongside their interviews meant that their accounts of the social world could be ‘enriched’. As Atkinson et al (2003:116-117) suggest:

*If we wish to understand the forms of life and the types of social action in a given social setting, then we surely cannot escape the kind of engagement that is implied by participant observation...we certainly cannot rely solely on data generated by interviews...*

Using a number of research methods in this way therefore allowed me to gain a richer understanding of the teachers ‘social realities’ inside the PRU. The interviews with staff lasted between 40 to 90 minutes, which I arranged on an ad-hoc and opportunistic basis with each teacher, in order to fit around their working day. Being flexible in arranging the interviews also meant that I often had to reschedule interviews at the last minute, or spontaneously walk into an interview at a moment’s notice as an unexpected opportunity arose:

*I travelled in especially today to carry out the interview that's been re-arranged a few times now. When I arrived, the teacher sounded dreadful and could hardly speak, she was full of a cold. She was ready to start but I suggested we should postpone, and she agreed instantly.*  
(Field diary, 8.2.17)

All of the interviews were carried out in settings selected by staff members, usually within familiar classroom surroundings, in order to ensure a degree of comfort for the participants, although one interview was carried out within the staffroom. Due to the busy working nature of the setting and with the majority of interviews carried out within classroom spaces, many of the interviews were interrupted by staff members or pupils with various daily queries and requests for help, such as asking for key fobs or information about lesson content. The interviews were audio recorded and participants were provided with background information and consent forms prior to the interviews, which outlined issues of anonymity within the research and their right to withdraw from the research at any point. The semi-structured interviews included an introduction, where participants were eased into the

process by providing background information about themselves, such as name, job title and years of service. The interviews then covered the following areas:

- The PRU Context (aims and objectives of the PRU and typical challenges)
- Teaching and Outcomes (Skills required to work in the setting; aims for lessons; a typical day)
- The Pupils (typical needs of the young people; relationships)
- Conclusions (what works well; likes and dislikes; and changes in staff roles)

With the semi-structured approach taken, I treated the interviews as informal conversations (Bradford and Cullen, 2012), covering the above themes via a check list of questions. However, if interesting themes arose through discussion, these were followed up and discussed. As mentioned earlier, due to the amount of time that I had spent in the PRU as a volunteer prior to the interviews, there was generally a strong rapport between myself and the participants who had come to learn about my own interests and background, as I had theirs. Being open in this way and using a semi-structured approach allowed the interviews to resemble a ‘flowing conversation’ where I too felt at ease, feeling able to comfortably ‘probe for the most relevant information’ (Choak, 2012:92). In turn, the interviewees felt comfortable about disclosing information that may not have otherwise been forthcoming (Rapley, 2004), helping to strengthen the validity of the work.

#### *Participant observations*

As I have already outlined, participant observations were viewed as a helpful research method for this study. In a similar vein to Delamont (2012) I felt that what people *do* in the setting was just as important, if not more so, as what people *say*. Initially signing up as a volunteer to support my access to the field, I supported staff within the classroom, and my role as

participant took precedent over the observer role. Monti (1992) suggests that there can be an ongoing struggle for the researcher in the field, between the emphasis which is placed on both observation and participation. I initially made a conscious effort to support the PRU as a volunteer first and foremost, in order to lay the foundations for future research, remaining mindful of the ways in which access can easily be reversed. During these early stages of the research I decided to volunteer with one class of pupils for a few weeks, before supporting another class of pupils for a similar period. In doing so, I could become familiar with each of the classes' routines and build relationships with each group of pupils. This approach also allowed me to observe a lot of the classrooms and the teaching staff practices within them each day, as the pupils moved around the building for their lessons.

Over time and as I became more familiar and comfortable with the setting, I began to move more freely between classes as I saw fit and write more frequently within my fieldwork diary, whilst remaining aware of the appropriateness of these actions. As time progressed, I would sometimes observe from a distance if there were enough support staff present or stay out of the lessons altogether. In these moments I could write up notes in my field diary and engage in the other daily practices of the PRU. Whilst the majority of my time was spent in classroom situations observing and engaging with staff and pupils, over time I was also therefore able to 'drift' (that is, move freely between people and spaces), chatting informally with people in the corridors and office doorways and gaining a greater insight into the PRU culture.

Regularly attending the setting in my dual role, whilst allowing greater freedom for me to 'roam the building' did also raise ethical issues for me, when there was confusion about my dual role and I was asked to intervene in classroom situations. These ethical concerns around my positionality in the PRU are discussed shortly. As described, I collected fieldnotes by hand in my notebook, sometimes during lessons and also during quiet moments in the corridors or staffroom. When it was appropriate, such as during breaks

and lunchtimes, I would also use my mobile phone to make notes, which were later written up, and the notes on my phone deleted. During less appropriate times for both my notebook and mobile phone, I would commit fieldnotes to memory, writing these up at the earliest opportunity.

### *Participatory methods*

Participatory methods have become a useful way in which to conduct research and create data with young people, in order to understand their perspectives on lived experiences. In recent years there has been a burgeoning amount of research which positions the views and experiences of children and young people at the centre (McGregor and Mills, 2012; Pithouse and Rees, 2015). Participatory techniques are one such approach, where young people are able to choose the ways in which they share their experiences (Valentine, 1999; Mannay, Staples, and Edwards, 2017).

Methodological approaches such as these acknowledge the shifts that have taken place in relation to our understandings of childhood in western societies. These shifts appeared most clearly through the new guidelines set out within the UNCRC Act of 1989. Within this Act, and of relevance to the discussion here, emphasis was placed on the importance of giving every child and young person the right to be heard (United Nations, 1989).

Children are to be viewed as responsible individuals in their own right, who should be treated respectfully, as equals with adults, and who have access to rights in relation to decisions affecting their lives (Wyness, 2015).

As discussed in the literature review, Wales has been at the forefront of enshrining children's rights into national legislation through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (2011), which includes prioritising the improvement of educational achievement and wellbeing for all learners (McCluskey et al, 2015). Taking on the responsibilities set out within the UNCRC (1989) and being mindful of those barriers which continue to limit its realisation, researchers have begun to explore the ways in which children and young people are afforded greater agency (James and

James, 2004). However, it is important to recognise they are often denied it (Christensen and James, 2000) through various contexts in which they are viewed as passive and powerless. How this agency is enacted or restricted can therefore be dependent on the social contexts in which lives are lived. A focus on space and place in research (Holloway and Valentine, 2000) is another way to develop insights into the agency afforded young people, as we can develop an understanding of how everyday environments are engaged in and negotiated (Holland et al, 2008:79). As Delamont (2014:30) makes clear:

*...places and spaces are an important aspect of the research, because they are part and, usually an important part, of the informants' identity, sense of self and their social world.*

Through the use of participatory methods therefore, which aimed to capture the lived experience of the pupils, this would include an acknowledgement of the PRU's physical space, and the role this played in their social world.

### *The mosaic approach*

The mosaic approach, developed by Clarke and Moss (2001), is a participatory framework which offers a variety of research methods that young people can choose from to engage in research. Focused on collecting the lived experiences of participants, these methods include visual methods such as drawing and photography which can act as prompts for the elicitation of conversations with participants, as well as vocal methods including interviews and walking tours where informal conversations are facilitated and recorded. Having several creative and informal methods available through the mosaic approach has proven to be a useful technique for engaging vulnerable groups of young people in research, as it gives young people some freedom to choose methods of their preference (Quarmby, 2014). Although the pupils did not design the research, following this approach gave them some control over how they could share their PRU experiences with me (Kendrick et al, 2008). In total four participants

including three females and one male provided consent to take part in the participatory research.

Following the mosaic approach framework, a range of research methods were made available for the young people to choose from in the PRU, which could be flexible and inclusive for their individual needs. For instance, while some of the pupils were eager to talk to me, those that were particularly socially anxious, enjoyed making drawings and taking photographs about their experiences, that could then be used as prompts to discuss their experiences more informally:

*Figure 3. Collection of participatory work*

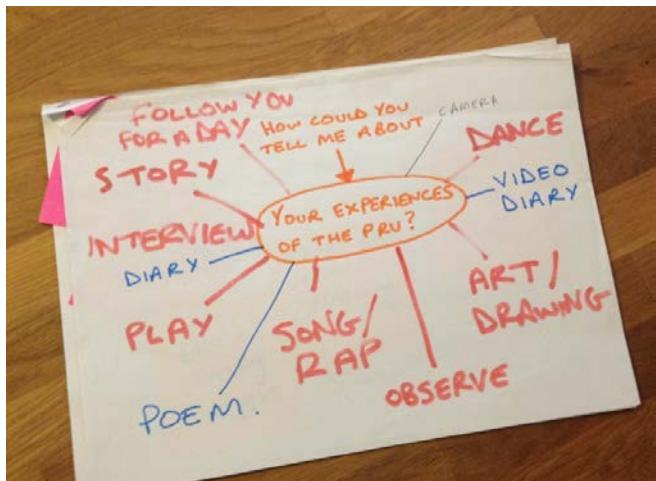


(Image blurred to ensure the anonymity of the participants)

The data above was collected with the young people as part of the study. The participants were asked to share their positive and negative experiences of the PRU and to choose from a selection of methods to help them express these experiences. (These methods are discussed in detail below). The picture usefully demonstrates how successful the creative methods approach was for engaging these young people in the research process. I was concerned that the young people who struggled with social anxiety and low levels of confidence would not have an opportunity to take part. But by giving them the freedom to choose their own methods and create data at their own pace within an informal environment, the pupils felt comfortable enough to share their PRU experiences.

Without placing a limit on the number and types of methods that could be utilised as part of the mosaic approach, participants were able to choose a variety of methods, or indeed develop their own ways of creating data. I informally facilitated the sessions on a weekly basis within the wellbeing classroom, a familiar space for the young people. Initially, the group gathered around a large table and discussed the ways in which they could share their experiences of the PRU. These were then written down collectively (see Figure 4 below) and placed in the centre of the table, which the participants could then refer back to when choosing the methods they were going to use:

*Figure 4. Initial planning exercise*



Over the forthcoming weeks the group selected different methods to create their own data. By providing the participants with a choice in relation to the methods they could use, this reinforced the methodological stance taken which underpins this research. This stance recognises that young people are social actors in their own right, supporting the movement 'away from adult-centric processes' (Holland et al, 2008:19). It is to a discussion of these research methods that the chapter now turns.

### *Drawing*

Including methods that are task-orientated, such as drawing, are a useful way for young participants to create data which can then be used as a prompt to promote informal discussion. Such activities allow for the reduction of eye contact between the participant and the researcher as the drawings become the focal point of conversation. Reducing the need for eye contact can be important for research projects which involve children and young people, as it can help to keep the experience informal and relaxed (Corbett, 1998). Allowing the data to be generated and led by the participant in this way also ensures that the participant is not influenced by some pre-determined ideas from the researcher (Mannay, 2016). Through processes such as these, I was able to fight the familiarity I had in relation to my own experiences of education settings. Similar to the work of Mannay (2016), these tasks allowed me to learn about participants' lives and their perspectives of the educational environment which may not have materialised through my own pre-determined enquiries. For instance, one pupil's drawing of a pot noodle led to a discussion of a lunchtime experience between the participant and their friends, which offered further insights into the places they enjoyed being in at these times.

### *Stories and poems*

Some of the pupils also chose to write about their PRU experiences through the creation of short stories, poems and passages on their opinions about the practices at the PRU. One of the young people requested to read their story out loud to the group, which resulted in follow up questions being asked of the participant. Where this was not possible, I would make a conscious effort to go around the group, asking the participants to show me what they had created and to explain their stories and poems to me. At these times I took some additional fieldnotes based on our discussions. In this way, the created materials, along with these additional informal interviews were used as data during the analysis process.

### *Child conferencing*

Talking to participants in a more formal context was also available to the young people as a research approach. Referred to by Clarke and Moss (2001) as 'child conferencing' participants could share their experiences of the PRU by discussing and answering 14 questions which I had set, about what they enjoyed or disliked about the setting. The final question was open-ended, providing the participants with an opportunity to add anything else deemed as important to them. All of the participants took part in this activity, which along with the data from the other methods described here, were analysed together to look for recurring themes.

### *Walking tours and cameras*

Walking tours and the use of cameras were another method that the young people could choose from and use as part of the research. Similar to a 'walking interview' (Jones et al, 2008; Evans and Jones, 2011), the walking tour involves in-depth interviewing and the observing of participants as they take the researcher on a guided tour through their lived experiences of a particular place. Interviews on the move, mobile methods or 'go alongs' have become a useful approach within the Social Sciences (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019). They have been regarded as highly valuable tools for developing researchers' understandings of participants' lived experiences (Ross et al, 2009; Mannay, 2016) as they allow the social and physical dimensions of space and place to be illuminated (Lefebvre, 2000; O'Neill and Roberts, 2019).

In this case the participants took me to the people and places within the PRU which they associated with positive experiences and I used this approach as another way to generate informal conversations with the young people, recording our conversations as we went along, which were then later transcribed. Supporting the broader ethnographic observations which I carried out in relation to the PRU space, these tours also allowed me to further consider the ways in which the PRU space was understood and made sense of by the participants. As part of this process I asked spontaneous

questions based on the spaces and people that the young people decided to take me to. This again allowed me to move away from any pre-determined ideas I may have had and offered richer insights into the pupils' lived experiences of the PRU (Mannay, 2016). For instance, telling me how much they liked art classes and then taking me to the room itself, allowed me to observe the art room environment. Subsequent engagement between the pupils and art teacher in this room added further context for understanding why this room and the teacher were important to them.

Coupled with this approach, the participants were also invited to take disposable cameras along with them on the tours, to photograph the areas of the PRU which were important to them. Photography is another useful way of engaging with the lived experiences of participants (Batsleer, 2011), including young people as they transition through school (Cohen, 1997), and the pictures were used as prompts to elicit conversation about why the photos were taken. Both the photography and the walking tour methods enabled dialogue to be subject-led by the participants, who were not restricted by some predetermined research questions posed by the researcher. A strength of this approach therefore, was the way in which it provided an opportunity for the participants to take the lead, allowing me as the researcher to observe and ask questions about the participants' lives, that again may not have arisen through more conventional, researcher led approaches (see Mannay, 2010). Disposable cameras were used so that the photographs could be easily developed, which I could then ask additional questions about, to develop my understanding of their meaning.

### *Target board*

Another activity-based research method which some of the young people selected was the target board. The young people were asked to write down words related to their experiences of the PRU on separate pieces of paper. They were then asked to place these on to a 'target board', with the words that had the greatest importance to them placed at the centre of the board. This method acts as a ranking exercise whereby participants are able to

communicate their feelings about a particular issue or subject (in this case, their views on the PRU). Through the creation of a visual target board artefact, the method also enables participants to reflect on the things that matter the most to them (Quarmby, 2014), as the target board can be used as a prompt by the researcher in follow up elicitation interviews. Two pupils chose to use the target board in my study, highlighting what they enjoyed the most about the PRU environment. This is one example of the way in which the mosaic approach gave the young people some freedom in selecting the research methods they wanted to use to share their experiences.

The mosaic approach was useful for the PRU context as it created a space where the young people could generate data on their own terms, in a collaborative and enjoyable way, which placed them as the experts in their own lives. In addition, upon completion of the project, the findings generated from the work with the young people were written up into a short report, to be presented to the staff and pupils at the PRU. In this way, the views of the pupils will be listened to and acted upon, where appropriate, in an attempt to overcome some of the barriers inherently associated with the implementation of the UNCRC, in terms of Article 12 and the right for young people to be heard (see Lundy, 2007).

Whilst the approach provided a creative space for the unearthing of lived experiences that may not have surfaced through more conventional research techniques, the limitations of this approach must also be acknowledged and reflected upon. I certainly did not intend to make claims about the fool-proof nature of the participatory approach (Gallagher and Gallagher, 2008), where the empowerment of young people is automatically assumed. Participatory methods can certainly reduce the hierarchies that exist between adults and young people and provide an opportunity for marginalised voices to be heard, but hierarchies can never be completely removed (Shor and Freire, 1987; Gallagher 2008). Indeed, power is continuously negotiated and reordered within interactions between adults, children and researchers (Christensen and James, 2000; Renold et al, 2008)

and so there are no straightforward ways of accessing the ‘voice’ of young participants. Reflecting on this research approach therefore becomes necessary, in order to support the validity of the project, and discourage any overblown claims concerning the authenticity of the findings (Gillies and Robinson, 2010).

#### *Reflections on the participatory approach*

The use of the mosaic approach enabled the young participants to take some ownership over the research approach. However, I acknowledged from the outset that the research was not fully participatory, given that I determined the focus of the research. Nevertheless, by providing a reflective and honest account of the successes and difficulties associated with the participatory methods used in my study here, this can help to develop understanding and future planning for those researchers who are interested in using participatory methods in their research (P. Smith, 2019).

The participatory methods were, as described, carried out during one of the timetabled wellbeing lessons at the PRU. Taking place over three consecutive weeks there were many successes and challenges to this approach. Firstly, staff decided when the sessions could take place, often at impromptu moments, giving me little time to prepare all the necessary resources, meaning activities could sometimes feel hurried and unrehearsed. The pupils chose how they wanted to share their experiences of the PRU with me and began to create their research independently during these lessons, whilst I worked with other members of staff to facilitate and support the process when called upon. I was aware that the young people were being asked to create research about their experiences of the PRU in the presence of staff. Whilst this concerned me because I was mindful that the young people might not be as forthcoming, particularly in relation to things they didn’t like about the PRU, it was the only option available at the time. I was also aware that whilst staff did a good job of encouraging and supporting the young people in creating their data, there were also moments where staff directed and made suggestions to the participants

about what to include. Over all, however, the methods did enable the pupils to communicate some of their negative experiences about the PRU. Through the range of methods that were made available, I felt reassured that research data could still emerge from these activities which had not been steered by adult voices, such as through the pupil observations and the informal interviews.

As I was mindful that I might be an ‘intrusive presence’ during the data production phase of the project, I decided to take a step back, in order to give the pupils the opportunity to take the initiative in shaping the direction of the activities. This was most important during the walking tour of the PRU, where the young people asked to show me around the building. However, in taking a step back, I had created space for ‘the ‘intrusive presence’ of significant others’ (Mannay, 2013:136). The teacher and teaching assistant who accompanied us on the tour offered suggestions to the young people, about places we could visit, which inhibited the voices of the young people. In addition, I had originally conceived the walking tours to be a one-to-one activity with each pupil. As a group activity, this meant that some young people’s voices were marginalised by dominant others (Gallagher, 2008) and due to time constraints, I was unable to carry out additional tours with the pupils, which could have generated additional insights into their experiences. These challenges highlight the power imbalances that can exist in research with young people, and how the actions of well-intentioned adults can serve to control the young people and decision-making. It is therefore important to be reflective during participatory research, recognising that power relations will always exist in research (Mannay, 2016). We should not assume as researchers, that the voices of young people can be captured outside of these power dynamics (Arnot and Reay, 2007), acknowledging that to some degree, participants’ voices are moulded within the research process. Whilst some voices may have been marginalised through this group activity, touring as a group did, however, provide opportunity for greater communication amongst those

who took part in the group tour, in ways that the planned one-to-one tours would not have done.

Another area of difficulty was the signed consent procedure. A number of young people were unable to have a voice in the final research analysis because consent forms were not returned. Forms were sent home with the young people but out of 10 only four were returned. I therefore lost 60 percent of the data. This created an ethical concern for me as I became aware of how the pupils' voices were being constrained. This concern around missing voices is taken up once more within the ethical section of the chapter.

#### *Concluding remarks on the mosaic approach*

This section has highlighted how using creative methods such as these enabled the creation of rich data, which could have been more difficult to obtain through traditional research methods. Certainly, some young people's voices were marginalised, despite the attempts made to create an inclusive environment in which all voices could be heard. Furthermore, the context in which the research took place meant that the presence of staff was unavoidable, due to the nature of practice, which involved close supervision and care of the pupils. Nevertheless, the creative methods used to generate data were felt to be hugely valuable for working with the young people, whose voices are routinely marginalised and who regularly have decisions made for them. In this context, enabling the young people freedom to pick and choose methods of their preference was felt to be crucial for supporting the young people's agency and voice to be heard.

It is important to acknowledge then, that participatory methods do not take place in a vacuum, away from other (often adult) voices (Mannay, 2016). Being mindful about whose story is being told within research is necessary (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003). I made attempts to overcome such concerns by developing multiple ways in which the participants could share their experiences, such as through follow up discussions away from staff

members. Another important consideration to make when evaluating how participatory a piece of research has been, is to understand to what degree the research has resulted in change. Truly listening to young people also encompasses acting on what is said where possible (Lundy, 2007). For this reason and as described at the start of this section, I intend to provide a short report to the PRU at the end of this research, outlining the key findings from the young people, as well as attending the PRU's pupil council where the participants work can be discussed and used to make suggestions for change.

This section has provided a reflexive account on the participatory methods I undertook as part of the study, highlighting the difficulties involved in carrying out meaningful participatory methods, particularly when research projects are restricted by time, relying on impromptu moments of opportunity (Mannay and Morgan, 2015). Whilst the limitations are acknowledged, it was through a reflection of these limitations that I was able to adapt and amend the research process thereby overcoming some of the difficulties.

I believe that the messiness involved in carrying out participatory methods needs to be shared in reflexive ways through our writing. Doing so highlights the differences that exist between participatory studies. It also develops our understanding in relation to what extent our work is indeed participatory, or only partially so. As researchers, we should acknowledge the power relations that exist within participatory studies between young people, adults and researchers, to better understand the contextual ways in which the voices of young participants can remain silenced (Arnot and Reay, 2007). In doing so, this can open up inventive ways of overcoming such imbalances in our research and reduce concerns that participatory research can sometimes be viewed as merely tokenistic and missing the point (Batsleer, 2011).

## **Data Analysis**

The study followed a qualitative framework to data management, which involved the collation of data into categories which could then be further examined, following the six phases of a thematic analysis approach (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). This included: 1. Becoming familiar with my data, both through the reading and re-reading of my observational fieldnotes and participatory data, and through the transcribing of interview data, where notes could be taken about initial ideas and themes; 2. Generating initial codes systematically across all of the data and collating the data accordingly; 3. Searching for themes across these coding groups and gathering the data together for each theme; 4. Reviewing themes to make sure they work and creating a thematic 'map' of the analysis; 5. Defining and naming themes through a continuous refinement of each theme and developing a clear definition of the themes; 6. Producing the report which allows for the final opportunity of analysis of the selected extracts used. The use of these phases was not simply carried out in a linear fashion during the thematic analysis approach but involved movement back and forth between data generation and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006:87).

In terms of generating the initial data with staff, the semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio recording device, before being transcribed verbatim, to reduce bias. With a manageable number of interviews ( $n=14$ ) a manual approach to data management was selected to analyse the data, rather than using IT packages such as NVivo. Computer packages have been identified as a useful way to manage data, enhancing the transparency of analysis (Flick, 2009). However, whilst these programmes allow for the ordering and management of data, they do not analyse it (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Conscious of 'staying close' to the data (Mannay, 2012) I decided to use a manual, hands-on and inductive approach to data analysis, which would enable me to keep the accounts of participants present, something which computer packages can diminish, through excessive categorisation (Mannay, 2012). One follow-up interview was also carried out with the teacher in charge several months after the data

collection period had finished. This enabled me to ask some final pertinent questions in relation to my initial findings and to capture additional information about the young participants' educational trajectories.

Analysis of the interviews was carried out from a neutral position, allowing for the emergence of key themes from the text (Seidman, 1998). During the process of interpreting the data I was aware of my own subjectivity, which supported my approach, and thus aimed to diminish any preconceived ideas I might have about the potential findings. The observations of staff practices and subsequent fieldnotes were also written up and analysed alongside the interview texts, through an in-depth reading and re-reading of the text in order to get close to the data and develop an overall framework of themes. By connecting the appropriate interview codes and themes with my own observational coding and also noting any disconnections between the data, I was able to draw conclusions on the validity of the work.

In a similar vein, during the analysis of the participatory methods with young people, I engaged with the data from a neutral position and where possible, clarified my interpretations with the young people, to check if my interpretations had reflected their original experiences. All of the informal conversation data recorded during the discussion of the visual artefacts created by the young people was analysed alongside the recorded conversations from the walking tour of the PRU and the completed questionnaires, stories and poems created by the young people.

All of the analysis was completed through an inductive lens, in keeping with the epistemological position taken, where analysis is data-driven and not pre-determined by a set of theoretical positions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As a flexible approach, thematic analysis was particularly useful for engaging with the multiple methods used, as it allows for a 'rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:78). The coding did not therefore just reduce the data to some general themes but was a process which allowed the data to be transformed and reconceptualised 'opening up more diverse analytical possibilities' and

questions about the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:29). In this sense through analysis and coding I was able to go beyond the data to unearth other emerging themes, theories and frameworks (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

To achieve this the analytical process involved the initial reduction of data into specific categories or themes, from which these themes of data could then be expanded to create new interpretations (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Through reflection during analysis I viewed the coding process as a way of providing new context to the data (Tesch, 1990). For instance, as the empirical chapters will highlight, a theme emerged within the staff interviews which was defined by their accounts of their professional focus on both wellbeing and academic learning. Yet it was through reflection and the re-reading of these grouped pieces of data on wellbeing and academic learning that a new context emerged which highlighted how staff always fore fronted the wellbeing aspects of their work within these descriptions. A strong theme that emerged for the young people was the value they placed on supportive relationships with the teachers in the setting. By reading across all the different types of data generated with the young people in relation to these relationships, I was able to develop an understanding of why they valued them so much. What emerged was the importance they placed on less-hierarchical and respectful relationships between pupils and staff, which, as I will discuss later, was an important feature of their experiences in the PRU.

## **Ethical Considerations and Limitations**

### *Information sheets and consent forms*

All of the participants were provided with information sheets (see appendix two) which detailed the purpose of the research project, prior to taking part in the research. These documents were talked through with the participants, highlighting their right to withdraw from the research project at any point. Participants were also provided with consent forms (see appendix three)

which they signed once they had read through the research aims and background details. Two sets of forms were produced, one for the staff and one for the pupils. Different forms were used to ensure that the language was suitable and accessible for each group of participants. It was also important to acknowledge on the pupils' forms, and in person with them, that whilst I would uphold their confidentiality, if they were to disclose information that could put themselves or others in harm, I would need to share this with the appropriate professionals.

Ethical approval was gained from the Ethics Committee based within the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. I also followed the ethical guidelines set out by the Economic and Social Research Council (2016) (ESRC), the funding body for this research project and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). My approved ethics form acknowledged that research methods were being carried out with vulnerable young people who could also display outwardly aggressive emotions. For these reasons and in addition to the DBS check, measures were taken to ensure that the research remained sensitive towards the needs of the young people and the safeguarding of them and myself. For instance, the topics being covered within the research focused on the pupils general experiences of the PRU itself and were therefore viewed as a low risk when it came to potentially upsetting subjects being raised.

As noted earlier in relation to consent, 60 percent of the data collected with the young people could not be used in this study, as only four out of 10 pupils were able to provide signed consent forms from their parents or guardians. I had been aware of the difficulties that could appear around trying to gain consent from guardians, which is why my approved ethics form had an opt out option, rather than a signed consent requirement. However, during my initial meetings with the PRU, the teacher in charge expressed her preference for signed consent from guardians. I was very disappointed that several pupils' voices remained missing from the research as a result, and this served as a useful reminder of the multiple ways in

which young people's agency and autonomy can be restricted, often being dependent on the decisions and actions of adults in their lives. I acknowledge my own part in this, as I could have worked harder at pursuing the teacher in charge to give her permission for the use of the participants work, or alternatively, to agree with the opt out option. However, as my first major study I felt uncomfortable in pushing my own agenda too much once access had been granted. This highlights the tensions and nuances involved once more, in negotiating access within prolonged studies of this nature.

These difficulties I faced with gaining the consent from parents, reflected wider societal debates within traditional approaches to childhood and children's rights, which prioritise the protection of the child. As described within the literature review, whilst contemporary understandings of childhood, enshrined within the UNCRC, understand children as agents in their own lives, children are still also viewed as passive and in need of protection (Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2007). Again, as the literature review highlighted, vulnerable groups of children tend to fall into this latter construction, where highly intensified notions of risk construct children as vulnerable or innocent and in need of protection (Ruiz-Casares et al, 2016; Connolly and Haughton, 2017). Ruiz-Casares et al (2016) describe how children's participation, particularly of those deemed as in need of protection, requires closer attention to ensure that participation is not merely rhetoric. They suggest that this can be achieved through meaningful engagement with young people, which allows us to understand and appreciate their lived realities, so that we can respond appropriately. A failure to do this when issues related to a child's own protection and wellbeing is being discussed, can have the adverse effect of increasing the child's fears and anxieties. This can reduce the likelihood of being able to engage with the child in the future, in practices which aim to understand their lived experiences (Ruiz-Casares, 2016:6).

Within this study, it became apparent that many of the young people were deemed as in need of protection, which could inadvertently reduce their opportunity for meaningful engagement. Multiple levels of protection were

in place for the young people, from the necessity of signed consent forms to the levels of close support that staff provided in the PRU, which meant pupils rarely had moments of privacy. Whilst much of this protection may have been rightly justified for the pupils, some of whom had made attempts on their own lives, it still highlights the tensions that continue to exist within our understandings of children's rights in relation to agency and protection.

### *Reflections on positionality*

I have made attempts so far within this chapter to offer a reflexive account of the research methods used, in order to offer some transparency in relation to the difficulties that can accompany in-depth ethnographic studies of this nature. Being reflexive was important, as I needed to remain conscious of any potential biases, values and prejudices that I myself might bring to the study, which could impact on the interactions with research participants and the research findings (Gormally and Coburn, 2014). I therefore had to make some decisions about the position I would adopt during my study of the PRU.

As described earlier, due to my volunteering role which acted as an incentive for allowing my research to take place in the PRU, my role was going to be predominantly one of participant observer. With my research interests in both the staff and the young people, I had to carefully consider the ways in which I would be perceived by them. I wanted to foster trusting relationships with both groups and from an ethical position, I wanted these relationships to be as non-hierarchical as possible. I recognised that this desire was going to be difficult as a volunteer who was also a white, middle class adult. The role was essentially that of a classroom assistant, meaning that on occasions some degree of authority over the pupils was likely to occur, such as encouraging them to complete tasks in lessons. Indeed, Fine and Glassner (1979) argue that regardless of context, a level of authority or power will always reside with the adult who carries out ethnographic research with young people. To compensate, Fine and Glassner (1979)

suggest that researchers can adopt the position of friend. For my own study I chose to take the role of youth worker-as researcher, viewing this as similar to the researcher positions of the least-teacher and least-adult roles described shortly (Boyle, 1999). Drawing on my own youth work values and practice, which placed an emphasis on supportive, respectful and equal relationships with others, I felt that this would enable me to engage in a consistent manner with both pupils and staff, using reflection outside the research setting to support my management of this.

Adopting such a role does not diminish the problems that a researcher may still be faced with however; for example choosing whether to intervene in a situation that arises in the research field, where some degree of responsible authority may need to be exercised by the researcher. For instance, if there is the risk of harm towards a young research participant. Whilst I did not personally encounter any such episode there were instances where I felt uneasy about my role within the PRU. One such example was when a pupil began to confide in me about their personal difficulties at home and in school. This pupil also told me that they hardly ever opened-up to staff like they had done with me. There was nothing of detail in our conversation which required me to pass on information to the PRU, such as a child protection issues or concern. Nevertheless, it was an occasion where I felt I had clearly moved beyond the researcher role and into my youth worker role, and this presented some challenges. Whilst the pupil may have valued the experience and I felt as though I had acted in accordance with my personal values as a youth worker, it momentarily blurred my researcher position. I was mindful that in a matter of months I would be leaving the setting and thus would sever a relationship which this pupil was beginning to form with me. This presented me with conflicting feelings of, on the one hand, wanting to support the pupil and provide them with space and an opportunity to chat with me, whilst also not wanting them to depend upon me, only for this relationship to be broken once I left.

There are also problems with researcher positionality in schools for those with a dual interest in the lived worlds of teachers and pupils. For instance,

some ethnographers will adopt the position of teacher in order to get close to teaching practices (Burgess, 1983), which can then create additional barriers in getting close to the routines and experiences of pupils, once the research shifts its focus (Lacey, 1976). To overcome this difficulty in her own research, Boyle (1999) adopted two researcher positions. The least-teacher role occurred within classrooms, where informal dress was worn and any actions, which required teacher authority, including pupil's requests, were directed towards the official teaching staff. The least-adult role took place during break times, where Boyle would play with the young people, if invited. Whilst acknowledging the presence of teacher and adult qualities in order to engage with staff, these roles were also an attempt to create some distance from traditional perceptions of teachers and adults, so that engagement with young people could also occur.

In considering my own position therefore, I too wanted to engage with teachers and pupils in a way which would not compromise either relationship. Taking inspiration from Boyle (1999) and acknowledging my own personal background I made the decision to adopt the youth worker-as researcher role within the research field. As a qualified youth worker this was a position which I already identified with and had experience of using. In this way I could position myself as distinct from the teaching staff in the PRU, whilst still acknowledging some degree of authority, in an informal capacity. It would also allow me to engage with the young people in a way that was in keeping with my own values as a youth worker, which also aligned with the approach taken to the study, where research would be conducted *with* young people, who were respected as individuals and as equals with adults.

As Gormally and Coburn (2014:878) attest 'having prior youth work experience can...provide an excellent skills base for communicating with young people'. Adopting the values of youth work would therefore help me to engage with the young people and place their lives and experiences at the centre of the work (Gormally and Coburn, 2014). Being asked to support pupils experiencing behavioural difficulties and running classes briefly

when teachers had to attend to other emergencies were however, beyond my researcher/volunteer position in the setting. Being immersed in the setting for a prolonged period of time was always going to create some blurring of my researcher position within it, but keeping a field diary and through my own reflections I was able to manage and accept my own personal role within the PRU culture for the duration of the study.

The work of Moser (2008) suggests that we should not ignore the roles that our personalities can have in the research, as they can play an important part in its development and outcomes. I believe that by adopting this researcher position, which drew on my personal strengths as a youth worker and my own personality as an approachable, calming and comical character, I was able to gain closer insights into the lived worlds of my participants. Indeed, some of the findings from the participatory research with young people highlighted these close relationships that had been formed, as I appeared in their research outputs:

*Figure 5. Photo taken as part of the walking tour*



During the walking tour of the PRU the pupils asked if they could take a photo of me as part of their data collection. The young people had been initially asked to take me to the places which they valued the most in the PRU, and to take photos of things that were important to them. Their photos had included pictures of staff and specific places in the PRU prior to this. My name also appeared in some of the artwork which the pupils created and poems that they had written. These pieces of data highlighted to me the ways in which the pupils perceived our relationship as a positive one. By

adopting my own informal and approachable personality into my youth worker-as researcher position, I was able to develop positive connections with the young people relatively quickly:

*Just before lunch one pupil says 'Miss, we don't want Phil to go, we like Phil...will you be here for a while'?*

(Field diary, 17.11.16)

*Some pupils are already here, sat around on the couches with one of the staff members present. They remembered me with one pupil saying, 'I've been waiting for your arrival all week' and in response another saying 'Oh yeah, he's funny<sup>8</sup> him'...*

(Field diary, 24.11.16)

Both of these comments occurred within the first two visits to the PRU and I was genuinely surprised how quickly some of the pupils began to relate to me. Whilst I was eager to develop good relationships with the young people for the purpose of creating rich research data, I also believe that my approach was genuinely founded and consistent with my own personal commitments. I had a genuine interest in these young people's lives, which also supported the development of research relationships.

I was also conscious that my time in the PRU was temporary. This was an ethical dilemma for me and was a conflicting experience, knowing that I was developing relationships with young people who may have attachment issues due to experiencing difficult relationship breakdowns and family lives (Taylor, 2012; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014). For this reason, I ensured that from the very beginning of the study I was clear about my research intentions and the likely end date of the project. I would continue to remind the young people of this throughout the project so that the participants were under no illusions as to my intentions. I was therefore reassured when one of the young people referred to me as 'the man with a

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<sup>8</sup> I believe they meant funny in a positive way, as in I made them laugh.

'notepad' in the song he created for the study. This was a position which I intended to create, particularly with the young people.

I certainly wanted to build relationships with the pupils and staff and be a participant observer who was seen as a volunteer. But I also wanted to create researcher distance, ensuring that staff and pupils were under no illusion as to my main intentions. Having a little blue book on display from time to time ensured they were reminded of my research throughout the visits. The visibility of this book was still carefully managed however, and was used sparingly. For instance, if a particularly interesting incident took place, I would not immediately grab my book and start writing. I wanted everyone to feel at ease with my presence in their space, but to be under no illusions as to my role as a volunteer who was also carrying out research.

Acknowledging my own position within the research field and how to manage this for the duration of the study was therefore an integral part of the project. It had to be carefully considered and adjusted where appropriate in order to meet both the needs of the PRU practice itself, and the needs of the young people. As with any ethnographic study however, there were ethical issues around consent and anonymity that I constantly had to consider, as I have made reference to throughout this chapter.

Not having the consent of everyone in the PRU also brought its own ethical difficulties. I did not enter the PRU as a covert researcher however and made sure that everyone was aware of my intentions whilst in the PRU. When observing practices therefore, I would only include conversations and field-notes in relation to those participants who had given their consent for the study. There will always be difficult ethical entanglements of this nature within ethnographic studies, which become challenging to separate or isolate from one another (Mills, 2003). In taking the approach I did, I was attempting to take seriously my personal research accountability (Mills and Morton, 2013), working through these ethical dilemmas as they arose, often unpredictably, through the research process.

### *Limitations: Missing voices*

Whilst I have described the ways in which voices were marginalised during the participatory research process, there was another group of young people within the PRU who were not offered the opportunity to take part in any participatory methods. These young people were those within the 'behaviour side'<sup>9</sup> and whilst they do appear within the thesis, careful consideration had to be given as to how these young people were represented. Especially when it was I who would be interpreting their experiences. Generally, there were between three and five pupils in the behaviour side on a given day, although many of these pupils only attended the PRU on a part-time basis, spending half of the week in a mainstream setting. Although time was spent in this part of the PRU in a youth-worker-as-researcher capacity, opportunities for participatory research did not transpire. This was in part due to limitations of time in terms of the study's requirements, as well as the restrictions faced within the PRU itself.

The curriculum in the behaviour side had no dedicated informal Wellbeing lessons for the whole group and the sessions that did take place tended to be one-to-one. Without disturbing parts of the taught curriculum therefore, no other times appeared feasible for participatory work. I did not want to intrude on the young people's lunchtimes, and there were no after-school clubs that could be utilised. In addition, due to the differing nature of practice in the behaviour side, pupils usually attended for a lesser amount of time, compared with pupils in the nurture side of the provision. With a greater focus on reintegration to mainstream schooling in the behaviour side, usually through a maximum six-week turnaround programme, there was less time available to build trusting relationships with the pupils; a necessary process that I felt was needed before any participatory research could take place.

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<sup>9</sup> The terms 'behaviour' and 'nurture' side were chosen to refer to two specific areas within the PRU where different groups of learners were taught. These terms reflect the emphasis that teachers and pupils placed on these areas, which are discussed in more detail within the analysis chapters.

This created concerns for me as a researcher, as a similar opportunity for young people to share their personal experiences did not materialise in the behaviour side of the PRU. Becoming conscious and concerned about the ways in which the first-hand experiences of those young people in the behaviour side were missing, I decided to reflect on and analyse again, the material which I had gained about these young people as part of the ethnographic study. I was concerned about how these young people might be represented within the thesis, now that their own voices were missing. As with the rest of the thesis, I wanted to provide an in-depth account of the setting and the people there, in order to create a 'feel' of the setting that was realistic and persuasive (Baronne, 1995:64-5). However, in convincing the reader that I'd 'been there' (Geertz, 1973) I was also concerned that my descriptions of the behaviour pupils would risk 'othering' them, as Sikes (2005:88) suggests, by 'imputing negative difference between me/us and others/them'.

I therefore make attempts throughout the thesis to acknowledge the pupils from the behavioural side of the PRU, in order to portray as honestly as possible, my own interpretations of these young people, alongside insights from their peers and the PRU teaching staff. If participatory research methods had been introduced to these pupils, the study may have developed a more nuanced understanding of their lived experiences, which could have been contrasted with the accounts of other participants. Future studies in this area would therefore look for creative ways of including these pupils to a greater extent in the research process.

Although I did consider not using any of the fieldnotes related to these young people due to the concerns with how they might be represented, I felt that this would have silenced them even further. Institutions such as prisons, mental health hospitals and special schools such as PRUs on the whole, are beyond society's everyday experiences and as such 'they are more at risk of having highly-coloured myths developed and told about them' (Sikes, 2005:91). Conscious of this, I felt that despite the lack of participatory methods with the behaviour pupils, through my in-depth

analysis of the setting, I would be able to speak beyond these myths and offer something that could in Sikes (2005:91) words ‘counter tales based in and on ignorance’.

Providing a space in this study for a collective exploration of the young people from the behaviour side was also ethically sound, meeting the requirements set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). This part of the research was not interested in an investigation of individual actors’ experiences per se, but rather, with how this collective group of young people were understood and engaged with, as part of the PRU’s daily routines by those participants who had actively given consent. In doing so, a partial insight could be gained into this group of young people, and the routines that they experienced in the PRU.

By carefully considering the way in which these pupils’ encounters with others could be shared within this study through close analysis and reflections of the data, I feel I have been able to shed some light on the behaviour pupils lived PRU experiences and the part they played in the broader PRU activities more generally. In doing so, a more nuanced understanding of these young people is provided that goes some way towards countering the often over emphasised stereotype of behaviour pupils, where they are described simply as ‘troublesome’ or a ‘threat’ (Bessant, 1993).

#### *Limitations: Methodological design*

Qualitative inquiry has long received criticism for its apparent lack of generalisability of its findings (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). However, this study’s findings did not intend to be generalisable. Instead, it aimed to illuminate the specificities, the intricacies and nuances in the daily experiences of staff and pupils in this PRU. That said however, in illuminating these we can glean important insights about the experiences of staff and pupils in PRUs more generally. The findings from this thesis can therefore support current debates around PRU provision more broadly.

They can also be used for future research in this area which looks to understand and develop PRU practice and inform educational policy. By focusing on one single case, the research has provided depth over breadth in relation to PRU practices from one institutional context (Yin, 2014). Being personally immersed in the research field for an academic year it was important that steps were taken to reduce accusations of observer bias or generalisation. In this chapter I believe I have addressed some of these concerns, by openly expressing the ways in which my researcher positionality and reflections on the research process were managed.

Guba and Lincoln (1989:245) also offer insights into discussions around validity and reliability by referring to the concept of 'trustworthiness' as a form of rigour. Authenticity for Guba and Lincoln can occur through fairness – 'the extent to which different constructions and their underlying value structures are solicited and honoured'. By identifying a broad range of participants from within the PRU, which included both teaching staff and pupils, and by engaging them in the research process, this enabled a degree of fairness within the study.

By using a broad range of qualitative methods, I have also been able to generate rich data, taking a rigorous approach to data management and establishing validity within the findings.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has provided an overview and justification for the methodological approach adopted for this study, outlining the qualitative methods chosen and used, and the subsequent process followed for the analysis of the empirical data. The ethical implications for research of this nature were also acknowledged and considered, including an open discussion of the limitations.

As the first empirical chapter, chapter five introduces the PRU, its practices and routines, and the participants who took part in the study.

## **Chapter five: Entering the PRU: Referrals, Routines and Wider Practice**

### **Introduction**

In Wales at the time of writing there were 31 PRUs supporting young people in a variety of ways through different types of provision including single site provision; provision across several sites; peripatetic provision (particularly in rural areas); ‘e-learning’ provision and hospital or home provision (Estyn, 2015:3). Interested in focusing on a single bounded case, the PRU selected for this study therefore offered provision within one main building. As an amalgamation of a number of separate provisions in the local area, the PRU had recently become one of only a few Portfolio<sup>10</sup> PRUs in Wales, supporting at the time of writing, a total of 66 pupils aged between seven and 16 years old. As a relatively new approach to PRU provision and with a new teacher in charge (the equivalent to a head teacher in mainstream schooling), the case study was selected in part because of its Portfolio and contemporary status. Interested in understanding how new policy initiatives in Wales were reframing PRU practice, I wanted to select a new type of provision where these policies would be reflected. As a Portfolio, the PRU was predominantly divided into a ‘nurture’ side and a ‘behaviour’ side, as this chapter will discuss. Firstly, it is important to set out the process by which young people were moved into the PRU from a mainstream school.

### **Referral Meetings**

Decisions about which pupils could attend the PRU were made via referral panel meetings. These meetings were generally the first point at which staff became aware of individual pupils, through a referral document (see appendix four) usually submitted via the referring school, but also on occasion, by parents or guardians of the pupils. The document outlines

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<sup>10</sup> A Portfolio PRU is a type of PRU which brings together several different provisions, supporting pupils with a variety of mental health and/or physical difficulties.

specific criteria that must be met before the PRU panel will consider the referral of any young person. To begin with, it is essential that the form is completed with all supporting evidence included. This includes general demographic information and the reason(s) for referral. Any identified special educational needs (SEN) and health/medical needs must also be identified. One section of the form is completed by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) of the referring school, endorsed by the headteacher, which asks for an overview of the pupil's home life, social skills, and attendance at school. Any specific diagnosis or conditions can also be included here, again, with supporting documentation required. A criteria checklist at the end of the referral document must be completed, with relevant reports attached for the boxes that are ticked. These include any pupil involvement with educational psychologists; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); social services or Youth Inclusion and Support, and any strategies or interventions that have been used in the past. Finally, any evidence relating to academic abilities and attainment is included, before space is provided for information from parents/carers. The last box is for any other information, including the view of the child.

Within work of this nature, which seeks to enhance and protect the wellbeing of young people in relation to their education, this systematic process could be viewed as part of the increased preoccupation with procedures and audit trails at the expense of professional discretion (Holland, 2014), in order to support and back up any actions taken. It is also telling that the opinions of the child are hidden within the final 'any other information' box at the end of the form. The absence of the pupils and their voices was noticeable within these meetings and the future direction of their education was therefore reliant on this referral process.

Two meetings took place each month in the PRU. One for those young people who it was deemed displayed their emotions externally (the behaviour side) and another for internally displayed emotions (the nurture side). It was up to the referring school or parent/guardian to choose which panel a pupil was referred to. The meetings were usually attended by up to

10 people, each covering a range of expertise, including staff from the PRU and those from the broader local authority, in areas such as mental health, behavioural psychology and social services. The table below highlights the professionals that were present at a typical meeting:

*Table 4. List of typical attendees at a referral meeting.*

Attendee	Occupation
1.	Teacher in charge at PRU
2.	Leader of nurture side (PRU)
3.	Educational Psychologist from local authority
4.	CAMHS Consultant
5.	Education Welfare Service
6.	Social Services
7.	Parenting Officer (PRU)
8.	School Support Officer
9.	Behaviour Support Team from local authority
10.	Representatives: Primary/Secondary school

This inter-professional approach to referral meetings, which has been recommended as a successful way to manage referrals within the new policy guidelines (Welsh Government, 2017a) emphasises the hybrid multi-agency nature of the professional role in PRUs (Noordegraaf, 2011), where expertise and knowledge from a number of different professions are necessary in order to support young people with multiple complex needs.

As a Portfolio PRU the setting catered for young people experiencing a variety of complex SEBMH difficulties, which were often coupled with complex social needs (McCluskey et al, 2013) as identified within the written reports which were read out to help the panel make decisions:

*...Another professional has been involved and she said there is definitely something underlying, they need an educational psychologist involved in order to progress...he's become a recluse now, he won't even leave the house to go outside the door. Mum is a huge concern with the social worker. He said, 'if you make me go back to the mainstream school I was at, I am going to kill myself'. And there's a history of family mental health issues. Dad is a schizophrenic...he's got PPN's [police protection notices] as well, for assault on a family member. (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 5.4.17)*

The above fieldnote highlights the kind of needs that pupils entering the PRU had, which also included difficult relationships with family members, who could be facing their own challenges. Due to the often-complex nature of the referring pupils' lives, it was essential that a broad range of professionals were present at the meetings.

At the start of each meeting a new list of referred pupils were discussed initially, followed by a review of any on-going cases and an update on current pupils at the PRU, in relation to their progress and/or difficulties. Certain criteria had to be met for a referral to be accepted and if any of the items on the checklist were missing, the document would be marked accordingly and sent back, requesting further information:

*'The next pupil's consent is missing [from guardians], only verbal agreement according to notes. We can't accept it...to be considered at the next panel meeting if consent arrived.' (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 11.1.17)*

Checking for the necessary signatures was the initial screening phase of the referral process. Those cases that made it through were then discussed in more detail, usually beginning with a member of the team narrating some of the background information to the group:

*...difficult to deal with, difficult to bond with others...reverted to violence when he has been unable to express himself verbally...feeling extremely low...*

*...attachment difficulties, self-harm, and suicide attempts...behaviour, emotional and physical outbursts... (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 6.4.17)*

These descriptions of different pupils within the opening paragraphs of the documents, along with various medical notes and opinions from referring schools, were the only sources of knowledge which the panel could use to try and understand the kinds of pupils they might be supporting. Initially the panel would check the form to see how many programmes of support or initiatives (if any) had already been implemented by the school or other providers in the local authority. If there was general agreement that further support work was possible and would be more beneficial than movement into the PRU, the panel would provide such recommendations.

Alternatively, if the panel felt that all support programmes had been exhausted and been ineffective, this could also result in recommendations which suggested the PRU might not be the best option, with other specialist provisions becoming a possibility. The panel also had to factor in the amount of time a move into the PRU might take, and what impact (both positive and negative) a movement could have on the child:

*...He finds it difficult to deal with pupils due to his language disorder, and more recently has reverted to violence when he has been unable to express himself verbally. These issues have led to him feeling extremely low, refusing to attend school...he has threatened suicide several times...*

*[continued discussion....]*

*I mean we're not the long-term solution...but that doesn't help him in crisis now.*

*But what he's got at the moment isn't working, we need a clearer picture of what's going on.*

*Could we say back to the school, an assessment and period of observation here in the PRU? So not a long-term placement...*

*The only issue is what we do after that period then, if we identify this isn't the right provision, it will be difficult to reintegrate back into mainstream, but then in the absence of anything else I think it would be a good starting point... (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 6.4.17)*

The dialogue above provides an insight into the process the panel would go through, referring to the information within the document and sounding out

each other's opinions on what might be the best type of action in a given situation, in terms of meeting the immediate needs of the pupil.

Whilst the panel tried to make the best judgment in each case, it was not until a child was actually in the setting, that staff could gain a better idea of how well the child would adjust to the setting; what level of support was appropriate or necessary; and what the dynamic would be like with other pupils. And although two distinct sides of the PRU existed, the complex nature of each pupil's difficulties meant that there were not always straightforward answers about where a pupil would be best placed:

*'...In the notes it describes how the pupil can be both polite but also very obstructive, so you just don't know...Difficult to know where she should go...' [the panel referring to which side of the PRU the pupil would be best placed in] (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 11.1.17)*

This comment highlights some of the difficulties that could occur within the PRU, which was organised into two distinct halves. Understandably, pupils did not always fit neatly into these 'nurture' and 'behaviour' categories. Having levels of ambiguity such as this in the referral meetings could result in inter-professional disagreements about the most appropriate placement for a child:

*They applied to the nurture panel, who said it appeared it was more of a behaviour profile...but everything points to nurture...*

*If the behaviour tag is mentioned at all it's not theirs...but in nine cases out of 10 there will be an element of behaviour... (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 5.4.17)*

The comments above outline the different views that both referral panel meeting teams had about a particular case. The behaviour team felt that the nurture team was too hasty to discount pupils from their provision if any mention of behaviour appeared in the referral notes. As the following discussion will show, when uncertainty like this persisted, the staff had to use their tacit knowledge to try and make informed decisions. In the case

above, the label of ‘behaviour’ appears to be problematic in the description of a pupil, as it discounts them from a nurture provision, which the behaviour team feel the pupil would benefit from. The data outlines how the dual behaviour/nurture model being employed in the PRU could be quite simplistic and therefore problematic for some pupils, when allocating a place.

Building up a working assumption collectively was therefore an approach that the teams used, drawing on tacit knowledge beyond the document:

*...Helen knows this pupil, and has a lot of information as well, so there's probably quite a lot to be unpicked... (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 6.4.17)*

*Leader of behaviour area: My concern is...we are full at the moment...and this case seems similar to another pupil who we had to take out of provision...because they didn't suit the mix of pupils... (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 10.5.17)*

Those staff who worked within the PRU on a daily basis were more aware of the inner workings of the setting in terms of what kinds of pupils were already attending, and they used this to help the group make decisions about the likely appropriateness of new pupils in this environment, ‘seems similar to another pupil’ who it didn’t work out for ‘they didn’t suit the mix of pupils’. The comment above also suggests that resources and capacity could have an impact on the decision-making process – ‘My concern is...we are full at the moment’.

The dynamics at play between certain pupils and the capabilities of the unit to support additional young people became crucial factors within the decision-making process, therefore. For this reason, when uncertainty remained in relation to whether a new referral could be accepted or not, the expertise would be located within the PRU staff present at the meeting. They became the ‘holders of knowledge’ within the group (Parker, 2017:161) who were able to control proceedings due to their knowledge of the PRU’s internal environment:

*Helen: We haven't got room for him...with those others waiting it's full...possible anxiety means it wouldn't be suitable for him...it'd be quite an intimidating environment for him with the current pupils we have... (Fieldnotes from the behaviour panel meeting, 11.1.17)*

*Leader of nurture area: Very challenging behaviour...something to do with setting off an aerosol canister...that would go down a storm with our lot wouldn't it? All those anxious pupils... (Fieldnotes from the nurture panel meeting, 6.4.17)*

Both of these comments highlight how PRU staff were able to draw on their current knowledge of the PRU in order to justify their decision-making process and take control of proceedings 'we haven't got room for him' 'it wouldn't be suitable' 'all those anxious pupils'. In each of these different cases there were concerns about how well the pupil would mix within the current group in the PRU.

The referral meetings were a challenging process for all involved, not least because many of the young people being discussed had complex social needs. It was difficult not to be affected by some of the stories and experiences that many young people had already had to deal with in their lives. On occasions, the personal emotions of staff would spill over into the meetings:

*...Mum has been a victim of violence by her ex...very chaotic home life...It's all home issues bless him, I'll have him. (Fieldnotes from referral meeting, 5.4.17)*

The comment above highlights once more the difficulties that many pupils could be facing in their lives, which helps to justify the traditional therapeutic and nurturing approach taken by PRU providers (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014).

For the staff involved, attempting to understand complex individual cases and the best course of action for each pupil was by no means straightforward. Using procedural checklists and tacit and expert knowledge from the setting as part of a multi-agency team of experts, provided the greatest opportunity for making sense of these referral requests. These

documents provided an initial snapshot into the extremely challenging lives of young people and whilst they did not by any means do justice to the whole story of each pupil, whose opinion and insight largely remained absent from the process, they nevertheless served as the PRU's initial gateway into these young people's education and personal histories. It was from here that staff then tried to find the best solution and support mechanism for each child, which could include entry into the PRU.

## Overview of the PRU

The PRU employed a total of 35 staff, the majority of whom were on a part-time and/or short-term contract. 85 percent of the staff were female, whilst 15 percent were male. The roles ranged from traditional teaching positions in subjects like English and Maths, classroom assistants, and therapeutic roles, such as family support officers and counsellors. The staff were aged between 19 and 65 years of age and their years of service at the PRU ranged from between three months and 18 years. The 14 teaching staff who agreed to participate in the research are listed below:

*Table 5. Details of staff participants.*

Gender	Staff role	Years of service
Female	Support assistant	3 months
Female	Science teacher	3 months
Female	BTEC/Vocational teacher	18 years
Female	Special support assistant	2 years
Female	Special support officer	5 years
Male	English teacher	9 years
Female	Parent support officer	6 years
Female	Trainee therapeutic practitioner	9 months
Female	Cover supervisor	11 years
Female	Applied Drama teacher	1 year
Female	English and Maths teacher	4 years

Male	PE and IT teacher	1 year
Female	Teacher in charge	1 and half years
Female	Maths teacher	12 years

(Although pseudonyms have been provided for these participants, they have been left out of this table to ensure that anonymity is maintained).

66 pupils were enrolled in the PRU at the beginning of the study, although on a typical day, there were usually between 15 and 25 pupils on site. In total 10 pupils carried out participatory research methods. These pupils were all based in the nurture side of the provision and whilst 10 pupils took part in the research, only four were able to gain consent from their parents or guardians. Three of the participants provided their own pseudonyms whilst Claire asked me to create one for her:

*Table 6. Details of young participants.*

Pseudonym	Gender	Aged	Period of time at PRU
Ragnar	Male	14	2 years
Jane	Female	13	5 months
Flossy	Female	14	3 and a half years
Claire	Female	12	1 month

A detailed discussion of the young people's experiences is provided within chapter seven.

The staff handbook described the expectations and goals of the PRU, detailing the daily routine and the overarching core goals that everybody was to aim for, setting the tone for the provision. The daily routine began with a morning briefing for the staff before the pupils arrived. This allowed the teacher in charge to provide an overview of any ongoing issues, new pupil arrivals and wider plans for the PRU. Within the handbook the structure of the schooling day is outlined, in terms of lesson and break times. The PRU day was typical to that found in mainstream provision, with

four, 50-minute lessons scheduled in the morning and a 15-minute break in the middle. Lunchtime lasted for 50 minutes, and two further lessons followed in the afternoon. At the start of the day staff were encouraged to meet and greet pupils and keep a track of any concerns by recording these in the internal computer database. The handbook outlined how staff were expected to be good role models, modelling good behaviour and rewarding pupils when this was recognised. Initiatives to support the wellbeing of staff were also described. Half-termly wellbeing events took place for staff, which included singing workshops and afternoon tea events. The emotional costs of the professional work were therefore recognised by the PRU, which will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

The PRU's policies were under review at the time of the research but the handbook also detailed the PRU's focus on attendance, teaching, learning, marking and feedback. Monitoring attendance was seen as crucial for learning success, and a monthly 100 percent award prize was given out to pupils in assembly. Teaching and learning were expected to follow a format which included a range of activities with written or verbal feedback provided for the learners, with a 'persistent focus on raising standards and improving pupil outcomes'. Baseline tests were used when pupils first arrived at the PRU including numeracy and literature, which supported the PRU in developing individual education plans for each learner. These plans were reviewed every term and included targets for learning and behaviour/wellbeing. The handbook also detailed the PRU's safeguarding procedures and rules for signing in visitors. Finally, a list of current staff is provided in the handbook, which concludes with the PRU's overall values. In summary (to maintain anonymity) the PRU strived to develop staff and pupils' knowledge and social abilities, to develop equality, respect and inclusion and the ability to see things through during challenging times.

According to the PRU's most recent inspection from Estyn, the PRU had achieved an adequate/good performance. The majority of pupils were going on to further education or training, although there were some areas for improvement. In discussing the inspection, the teacher in charge described

how the physical environment and ambience of the setting was also important to her and Estyn:

*...plus, there's that little bit you can't define as well, which Estyn weirdly keep calling 'a whiff of the salon', I don't know where that's come from. The first whiff of the salon. So, when they first came on the prowl up and down the corridor, they felt confident about the first whiff of the salon...It's a feeling. And it is something that's not tangible, and the most hackneyed word ever is ethos isn't it. What do you feel when you go in... (Helen)*

This positive attribute of the setting was not something tangible but a feeling that could be created within the PRU. The 'whiff of the salon' was the overall ambience, created through positive staff attitudes and the organisation of the PRU. All these things helped to make the pupils' feel comfortable in their surroundings and aided in the PRU's social learning objectives. As a new volunteer/researcher in the PRU this environment was also something that I would pick up on during my early impressions of the setting as I arrived for the first time:

*My first day of research at the PRU. After driving for an hour, through a couple of small villages I turn right, following a sign for the industrial estate where the PRU is situated. A few more minutes pass by and I arrive at the end of the road, a cul-de-sac where the car park is situated, just in time for the start of the schooling day. Driving is the best option as there is no public transport nearby. This is clear as I sit in my car getting all my things together. The car park is already full of staff cars, whilst a number of taxis and minibuses file in, dropping off the pupils, who are greeted by some of the staff. As I walk towards the main reception entrance I look around, beyond the rooftops of the industrial estate out onto the hills. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

This very first field note from my research is a useful place to start, as it captures my first impressions of the PRU and its location. Having read about how PRUs in Wales had been on the margins in the policy literature (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014), I was immediately struck by the location of the PRU building itself, which was also on the margins of the local area, literally at the end of a road on the edges of an industrial estate and isolated from public view. It was important for me to recognise these

situated contexts such as the physical location of the building, to better understand how they might define the PRU and the teachers' enactment of policy (Ball et al, 2012). How this enactment occurred would also be defined by the kinds of pupils who attended the PRU (Ball et al, 2012). Besides my own arrival to the PRU, the arrival of pupils into the setting, both for the first time and on a daily basis, was something which the staff felt had to managed carefully.

## Arrivals into the PRU

*I think the most important thing is checking these children are OK when they're coming through the door in the morning...they've got so many other thoughts in their heads, concerns you know...so we talk about what the evening's been like, what the day's going to be like, if there's any...any sort of difficulties going on. That's the time to talk.*  
*(Tanya)*

Arrivals into the PRU ranged in frequency. Weeks would go by without any new pupils arriving, whilst at other times numerous pupils would arrive all in one week. Young people in the care system could be fast-tracked into the setting, which sometimes meant that staff were not fully prepared for their arrival. For others, there could have been a duration of home schooling before a place became free. Duration in the PRU would vary. Some of the pupils attended for part of the week, spending the rest of the time in mainstream provision, whilst others could be there for a full term or school year. Managing the arrivals of pupils on a daily basis was a key routine for staff as part of their daily practice. A settling-in period and practices of checking in with pupils were regularly observed at the start of the day. This offered a predictable routine to the young people. The teachers understood that for many of the young people education was often the last thing on their minds - 'they've got so many other thoughts in their heads'. Giving pupils time to talk at the start of the day could help to settle them in:

*I arrived and some pupils are already in with one of the teaching assistants chatting on the couches in the corridor, about how they're*

*allowed out at lunchtime now to go to the café down the road – the chips aren't very good though. They have daily tutorial now which is a relaxed, fun session. They work through various questions on the board together, joking as they go along with the teacher, trying to answer the questions: famous quotes; working out the punchline to a joke; a riddle; an anagram with a clue; a Maths question; name the country from a picture of a flag. While they work through this a register is taken and lunchtime food orders are taken. Tea and toast are brought in for those pupils who would like some. (Field diary, 1.12.16)*

This field note highlights the less formal and familiar relationships that existed in the PRU. Through the use of engaging and fun activities in the morning, staff and nurture pupils were able to get along in a way that did not represent a hierarchical teacher/pupil relationship. Despite using this kind of approach to support the wellbeing needs of the pupils at the start of the day, learning was still taking place here. These activities therefore provided a useful example of how teachers used social pedagogy in their daily practices, where care and education were seen as combined tasks (Cameron et al, 2011). This less formal and caring approach was reinforced through the provision of tea and toast for the pupils, which they had at their desks whilst discussing the various questions. These morning tutorial times were a useful example of how living and learning were unified in order to support the overall development of the learners (Petrie et al, 2006). Building meaningful relationships with pupils took time and the pupils needed time to adjust to their new surroundings, particularly with the heightened levels of difficulties and anxieties they experienced.

Staff therefore recognised that arrivals were important at the start of the day for the pupils and having an experience which felt welcoming, relaxed and fun, could help to settle them in for the day ahead. Many of the pupils were in a time of transition personally, likely to be only spending a short number of weeks at the PRU, or at most one or two academic years. Pupils were regularly preparing for re-integration or referral onto another form of schooling, adding to the temporal and transitional feel of the PRU:

*The pupils are all talking with the girl who is on her last day today, she's about to move back into a mainstream school. 'How are you*

*feeling about it?' I'm glad to be going back but also sad to be leaving as well, I'll miss you all and I'm a bit nervous.' She says she'll get detention if she uses her phone in the new school, or chews gum. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

Movements in and out of the PRU were regularly on the minds of the pupils. They would talk together about how it felt and what it would be like. This pupil describes the uncertainty that she had, feeling both happy and nervous about the move and unsure about the new rules that she would have to adapt to. The pupil also describes feelings of loss associated with the move 'I'll miss you all' which the remaining pupils would have to experience as well. As a transitory and liminal space, feelings of loss could therefore be a regular occurrence.

For this reason, whilst the PRU felt welcoming and communal, it also felt like a transitional or temporary place due to the number of referrals taking place in and out of the setting. This kind of short-term work was also evident for the staff. Although many of the teachers had worked in the setting for a long period of time, they also had to manage these emotional challenges, including feelings of loss. Staff turnover was also high, which added to this transitional environment. Whilst stress or long-term sickness could be a reason for this, a high number of temporary staff were also employed during my time there, which added to this transitional environment. Experiencing newcomers and change on a weekly basis was therefore not unusual:

*There are a lot of new faces when I first arrive, mostly staff. There are two teaching assistants I haven't met before, one who's standing in for the usual teaching assistant for a couple of days whilst she's on a first aid training workshop. (Field diary, 12.1.17)*

Creating a familiar and welcoming environment for the pupils in the PRU could be challenging with these regular transitions taking place. Nevertheless, it was an important aim given that these learners had disengaged with schooling and could find change difficult to cope with. The students' first encounter with the PRU therefore had to be carefully managed by the teachers:

*During the day, a couple of pupils came to visit the PRU with their parents, just for five or 10 minutes at a time. They sat in on the Drama class and watched the session, laughing a lot at the improvised acting and puppet making. They spoke to the head of the 'nurture' area in the corridor briefly before they left. (Field diary, 26.1.17)*

*Some of the staff have gone outside to meet a new pupil, to walk with her into the building. (Field diary, 12.1.17)*

*During Drama, a pupil comes in who's not been in for a few weeks. 'Yes, he's back!' says Ragnar. He only stays for two lessons until lunchtime. It must be an easing back in period. (Field diary, 9.2.17)*

Managing this process appropriately every day increased the likelihood of pupils attending the following day. This was important as attendance was one of the key priorities for the PRU, as noted in the staff handbook. By ensuring that all the pupils were settled and comfortable, staff felt they were preparing pupils in the best possible way for the learning day ahead:

*So, when one of them comes in, in a really angry mood in the morning, knowing ways you can work around that pupil. Even though our job is to teach academic subjects, we have to take these children first, make sure they're in a good place, in order for them to learn anything.*  
*(Sarah)*

As a daily activity then, this was often the first routine of the day experienced by the young people. Staff would welcome them and try to make them feel comfortable in their surroundings. This was part of the PRU's social and therapeutic learning, which was viewed as necessary before any academic learning could take place. The teachers prioritised the social and wellbeing needs of the learners firstly therefore, being responsive to these before any of their other objectives, such as academic learning. This order of priorities fits with social pedagogy or an ethic of care approach once more (Tronto, 1994; Cooper, 2007). Staff recognised that learners had to be 'in a good place' for academic learning to take place. This first occupational task of the day for staff was therefore one which prioritised the social and wellbeing needs of the learners.

## The Material Context of the PRU

*Creating the ‘whiff of the salon’*

For young people in the PRU this was a period of change and uncertainty, as they moved away from familiar education settings into an unfamiliar PRU space. With this level of unfamiliarity and the PRU's understandings of the pupils' backgrounds and the importance that was placed on making the young people feel settled and comfortable, it was unsurprising that the PRU worked hard at creating a welcoming environment:

*The PRU appeared to be just like any other school, red bricked with a small courtyard at the front which led on to some double doors and an open plan reception area. I was greeted at the reception desk and asked to sign in on a computer screen, which printed a name badge out for me. The receptionist phoned through to the teacher in charge and I took a seat in the small waiting area in front of a display walls with certificates on them. These included awards that the PRU had gained in areas such as 'achievement for all', 'celebrating a commitment to equality', and a 'Welsh Network of Health School Schemes' award. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

*Figure 6. Reception display wall*



(Image blurred to ensure the anonymity of the PRU)

This was a useful place to position the awards board as it helped to form a positive first impression to visitors about the PRU. It provided some details about their achievements in this setting, and along with the reception area, which had wooden floors and potted plants dotted around, it felt like a welcoming and comfortable space to be in. The physical building and the

creation of a positive and welcoming environment was important for Helen, the teacher in charge:

*...it was an absolute pig sty. I walked in and was thinking 'oh shit, I don't want to work in here it's disgusting.' And then they said they were moving, so I thought 'oh that sounds hopeful'...you go in to some schools and it feels edgy, and you hear a window smash in the distance, and a scream or something and some schools feel warm and friendly, the children open the door, it's well organised, well presented and staff say 'oh hello, good morning' even if they didn't know you. That's what I want it to look like here. (Helen)*

In describing her own experiences of previous school buildings Helen could draw on these to understand the negative feelings that could be associated with first impressions of a school building. Even she was apprehensive about staying in a setting that came across as disorganised 'it was an absolute pig sty...oh shit, I don't want to work in here...'. People being kind to each other in a well-presented setting provided the 'warm and friendly' atmosphere or 'whiff of the salon' that she was aiming for. In doing so, the hope was that young people would want to come and spend time in the setting. This approach was evident on my first day in the PRU:

*Helen came and collected me from the reception and gave me a tour of the PRU. She opened some double doors activated by a key fob, and showed me the main classrooms and staff areas, introducing me to various teachers and pupils as we went along. Everyone welcomed me warmly, some shook my hand and others smiled as we passed by. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

As the above field note highlights, the staff were very welcoming to me on the first day and I anticipated their fears of feeling inspected, which I tried to reassure them about by explaining my research interests. It was apparent that this 'whiff of the salon' goal was being achieved in the PRU for both pupils and staff:

*The first class is wellbeing and four of the nurture pupils begin working on a new exercise book about feelings and perceptions of self. The group talk about how talkative they are now. They were much quieter in mainstream school but talk here. I ask them why they think that is.*

*'It's because I'm more confident now, because I feel more comfortable here' says one pupil. 'I enjoy coming in and seeing everybody, it just feels friendly and safe.' (Field diary, 12.1.17)*

*In Drama the group do really well, and most are engaged. Even those who choose to sit out still seem engaged, sat at the side of the room watching and laughing a lot. The teacher checks in with them for advice about what to do next and on how they think it is going. They show the routine to the new deputy head. He says how he's only been here a week and already he's seen more smiling and laughter than in a whole year at his old school. (Field diary, 19.1.17)*

Both of these fieldnotes capture something of this positive atmosphere that had been created in the PRU, which had led to improvements in self-confidence for some of the learners, who were now more willing and able to engage with others socially '*...I'm more confident now, because I'm more comfortable here...I enjoy coming in and seeing everybody*'. Feeling '*friendly and safe*' as a place was a testament to the hard work of the staff who aimed for this environment through their approach to the start of the day. They would always be respectful and understanding of the pupils' needs. The final comment above highlights this as pupils were able to sit out of certain tasks if they didn't feel comfortable. Even in these situations though, the teacher would continue to make attempts to include them, by checking in and asking for their feedback. This sense of joy was clearly evident to the new deputy head who recognised how different this environment was to his previous school.

As staff were aware of the harrowing home lives which young people in the PRU could be facing (see the referral section of this chapter), they felt that it was important that children were happy whilst in the PRU environment each day. The backgrounds and social needs that pupils brought with them into the PRU were therefore part of the PRU's situated context (Ball et al, 2012), which defined the PRU's purpose and informed its practice. The approach taken by staff in relation to arrivals and the start of the day was therefore a central part of the professional role, which acknowledged the social needs of the pupils. Staff recognised that the PRU had to be a

welcoming place where learners felt comfortable and wanted to be, if they stood any chance of supporting and re-engaging pupils in learning.

#### *The structural division of the PRU*

A positive environment was therefore one of the core goals of the PRU, which was achieved through the close and less formal relationships of staff and pupils. The physical building itself also played a part in creating the right environment for the pupils. Consisting of various classroom spaces including wellbeing and common rooms, a number of offices and a staff room, the setting, as highlighted through the referral meetings, was mainly divided into two halves - the behaviour side (for those pupils who predominantly displayed their emotions externally) and the nurture side (for those pupils who predominantly displayed their emotions internally):

*I was left to shadow a year 10 group for the day and the teacher gave me some quick background information about the general difficulties that the pupils were likely to be facing. This included social anxiety, suicidal thoughts, selective muteness and school phobias. They talked to me about the calming approach taken to practice. It was felt that working in this side of the setting would be more appropriate for my first day, as I might not come back if I went into the 'wild west'. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

The above field note from my first day in the setting highlights how the PRU was organised into two distinct halves. Staff perceived these in contrasting ways and created a picture of an unruly and difficult 'wild west' (behaviour side), given their fears that I would not come back after experiencing some time there. On the other side descriptions were provided to me about the vulnerable nature of the pupils and the need for calming spaces. It immediately felt like the pupils had been categorised, perhaps unwittingly, into the 'at risk' vulnerable learners and the 'a risk' behavioural learners. The actual experience of spending time in the behaviour side was, however, very different to what I had envisaged. Whilst outbursts of aggression were likely to happen at some point during the week, there were also long periods

of positive engagement with the pupils where rapport was developed through encouragement and support:

*At break time I sit in the common room (with pool table, board games, and couches) ...Today I'm with two pupils in my group and there are four pupils in the other group...Apparently a lot of pupils have national tests in their mainstream schools today so the numbers are lower than usual. I play a game of Jenga with a pupil and we also have a game of pool, doubles, taking it in turns to have a shot. Everyone gets on well today. (Field diary, 10.5.17)*

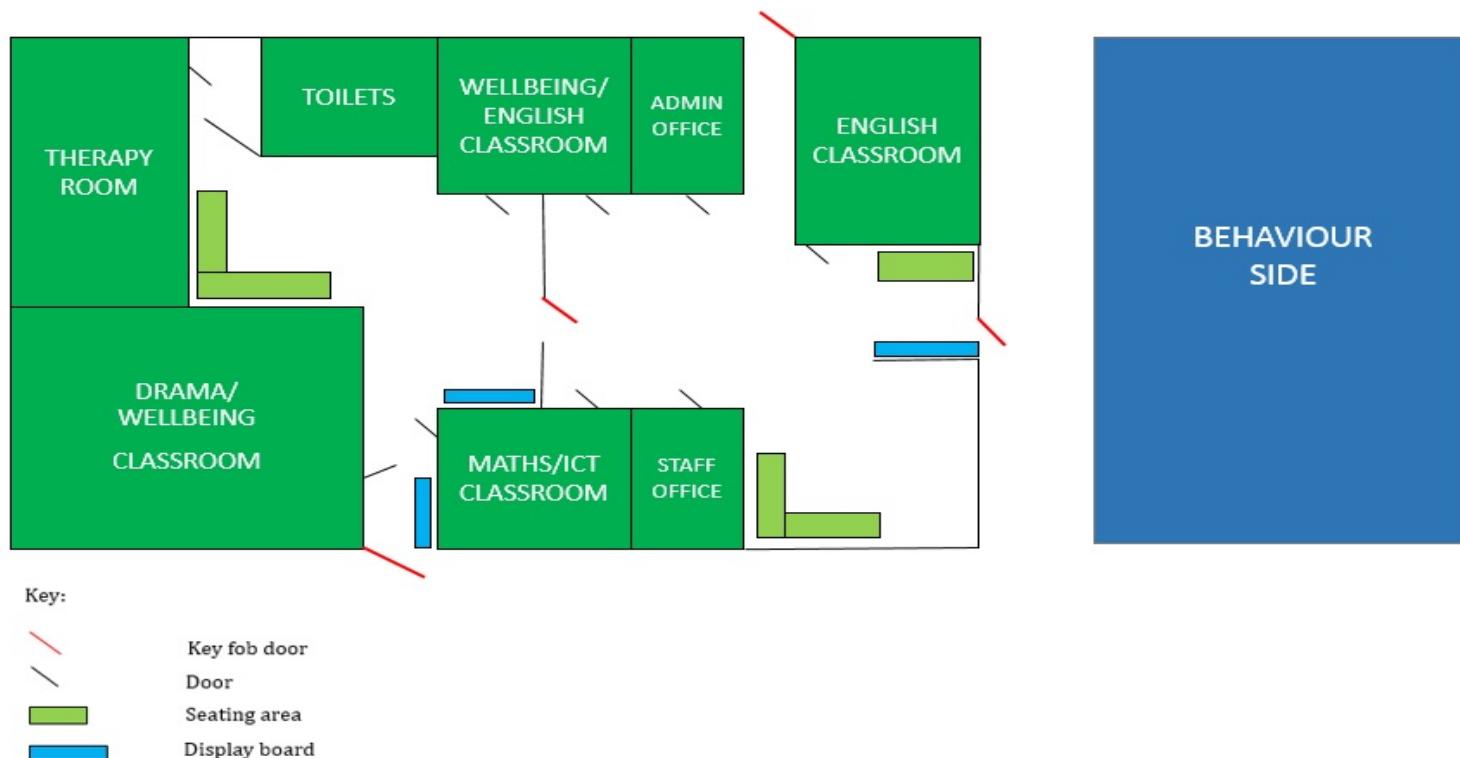
The pupils interacted and engaged positively with each other for the majority of the time, managing to take turns at a game of pool, and coping well when they lost in various games. It was apparent however that staff had to work much harder at keeping these pupils engaged and focused during lesson times, compared with those in the nurture side. Many of the pupils had short attention spans and coupled with low levels of confidence they could quickly give up on tasks when they became more challenging. Lessons in the behaviour side therefore tended to involve short exercises, with lots of verbal encouragement from the staff:

*In Maths the pupils are telling the time with plastic clocks, completing a few pages of tasks in their Maths books...they are encouraged constantly 'you can do this' and are quick at giving up...particularly when they see how many questions are left to answer... some getting frustrated with themselves... (Field diary, 3.5.17)*

The young people in the behaviour side were facing the same kind of struggles as those in the nurture side when it came to their learning in academic subject areas. When the behaviour pupils were faced with these challenges however, they were more likely to revert to physical outbursts and would often make attempts to leave the classroom. For this reason, the space in the behaviour side was more tightly controlled in comparison to the nurture side. The physical layout of the building, which was predominantly split between these two halves, highlights some of the differences:

The layout and of the PRU was organised accordingly in relation to these nurture and behaviour groupings. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 below highlight this divide:

*Figure 7. Layout of the nurture side (not to scale).*



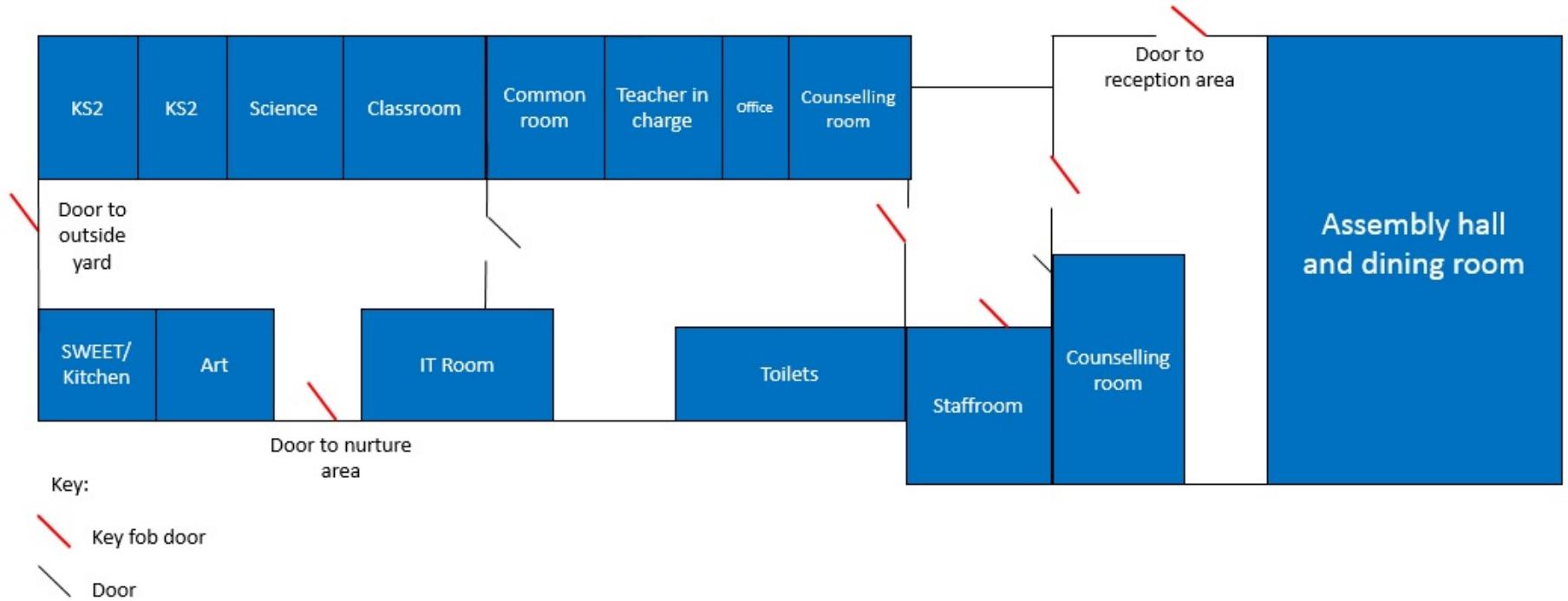


Figure 8. Layout of the behaviour side (not to scale)

Although the diagrams of the PRU are not to scale, they still provide insights into how the two halves of the PRU differed from one another. There was a sense that a clear divide existed within the PRU between these two sides of the building, which was exemplified during the fieldwork process when I moved over from the nurture side to the behaviour side:

*A pupil came up and spoke to me in the corridor today. He thought I had left as he hadn't seen me for a while. When I explained that I'd been working with pupils in the other side of the provision he said, 'oh, you're over there now are you, traitor. Is it hard work?' he asked (Field diary, 26.4.17)*

The pupil was joking about me being a traitor of course and we laughed about it together in that moment, but nevertheless there was a sense of an 'us and them' culture in the PRU. He was also surprised when I explained that it was fine working with the pupils and that I had been enjoying it. This sense that it would be hard work was part of the perceived unruly nature of the behaviour side.

The amount of freedom to move around the building was limited for the pupils in the behaviour side of the provision. As the diagrams of the PRU layout highlight, there were more locked doors in the behaviour side and classrooms tended to be much smaller than those found in the nurture side. Greater flexibility with the locked doors could also be seen in the nurture side, where pupils were able to bypass one of the locked doors by walking through the Maths classroom. There were no such options available for those in the behaviour side. The pupils tended to be taught in their own halves of the PRU, although there was some crossover. Where possible though this was reduced. For instance, the Maths teacher's room was located in the nurture side of the building, but she would bring her resources with her to the behaviour side of the building when behaviour pupils had a Maths lesson. Whilst this meant that behaviour pupils were not entering the nurture side, it also allowed the Maths teacher to teach in a smaller environment. There was a sense that the behaviour side was unrulier and more uncertain, hence the need for greater control and confinement, particularly with the staff descriptions of the 'wild west'.

The environment of the nurture and behaviour sides of the PRU reflected the kinds of pupil needs the PRU felt they were likely to be working with on a daily basis. As already mentioned, the classrooms in the behaviour side were much smaller in comparison with the classrooms in the nurture side of the building, and apart from a small games room, there were no other spaces where pupils could hang out (see Figure 8). With the high ratio of staff to pupils (often two:three in the behaviour side) this meant that pupils were personally monitored for the majority of the day (see Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). This level of surveillance was a recognised part of the role, which pupils were also aware of:

*Helen walks past the IT room and glances in. One of the pupils says, 'some people are patrolling the area, making sure the city is safe.' (Field diary, 7.6.17)*

The use of the word 'patrolling' here suggests a view of guarding and surveillance which the pupil felt the staff were carrying out to maintain some level of order. The comment also highlights how the PRU prioritised its wellbeing aims with staff checking in to make sure pupils were 'safe'.

In contrast, the space in the nurture side of the provision had a couple of open plan areas where seating was available in the corridors (see Figure 7). Groups of pupils would often sit in these areas before the schooling day began and use them during break times. The ratio of staff to pupils could also be much lower (often two for every eight pupils). Whilst the pupils were also under a certain level of surveillance by the staff, this was less pronounced, and movement was allowed, for instance when pupils took lunch orders down to the reception area in the morning.

Within one of the large wellbeing rooms there were also bean bags and a small kitchen area. In addition, the display boards on the corridors and classroom walls of the behaviour side mainly showcased the work of pupils and practical materials related to the lessons. The nurture displays in contrast would include wellbeing boards, highlighting various therapeutic support, values to uphold and notions of family (see Figure 9 below). This was most markedly seen in the

family tree display - a giant painting of a tree which included photographs of the nurture pupils on each branch, along with their dates of birth.

*Figure 9. Display board highlighting pupil beliefs and staff support*



This display board was created by the young people, highlighting what they wanted to gain from the PRU and how the staff could help them with this. As a group the pupils believed that 'we are a family' who want to achieve and 'respect pupils and staff'. For the staff to help them the pupils outlined how staff needed to be 'patient' 'make the class comfortable' 'think about how we feel' and 'understand our problems'. The wellbeing room was the largest room in the nurture side, and it appeared to be the central hub of the area. Pupils would spend their breaks and lunchtimes in this area and additional display boards emphasised the therapeutic focus of the environment, and what the space meant to pupils:

*Figure 10. Display board highlighting what the PRU meant to the pupils*



Pupils in the nurture side wrote down how the setting was a place where they could rebuild their 'confidence', a place which was 'loving' and a place which provided 'support' and gave them 'hope' and 'friendship'. This loving and caring environment was captured at various points throughout the research in the nurture side:

*The teacher walks into the classroom with a large beaming smile asking the class 'how are my children today?' (Field diary, 2.2.17)*

*As I walk into the tutorial a few of the pupils and staff are playing a hand clapping game and it keeps speeding up, faster and faster. Other pupils and staff are standing around watching it and everyone is laughing. (Field diary, 16.3.17)*

Both quotes capture how the environment was geared towards the wishes set out by the pupils on the notice boards through the actions of staff, which centred on caring and less formal relationships. Referring to the pupils as 'my children' and having fun and playing games together enabled the pupils to feel comfortable and safe in the PRU.

All of these display boards, along with these kinds of daily interactions, added to the welcoming environment which was felt within the nurture side of the PRU, where pupils would address many of the staff by their first names and did not need to wear a school uniform. In the behaviour side pupils wore school uniforms and were not on first name terms with staff. Due to the nature of the provision's aims, which only provided short-term schooling for pupils at Key Stage Two and Three in the behaviour side, staff described these rules as necessary. The rules were viewed as an essential part of practice as staff were helping to prepare these young people for entry back into mainstream provision.

#### *Outdoor spaces*

There were two main outdoor spaces where pupils could go during the schooling day. A small courtyard at the back of the nurture area had outdoor seating and a recently installed flower bed and herb garden, which Barbara would encourage pupils to help maintain on their breaks and lunchtimes. There

was also a large yard where the majority of pupils spent their breaks and lunchtimes, often playing football or basketball, and sitting in groups for a chat. Pupils from the behaviour side were less often seen in the yard but when they were there, staff would always be with them. Staff took it in turns to oversee breaks and lunches in the yard area and I would often spend time playing football with the pupils out there. Further descriptions of these outdoor spaces are provided in chapter seven by the young people.

### *Control and agency*

Whilst the setting felt less formal in relation to the staff/pupil interactions, it was still a functioning school that required levels of hierarchy and control within it. To support this control, particularly in relation to pupil movement around the building and in between the two main halves of the PRU, locked key fob doors (as highlighted in Figures 7 and 8) could only be opened by staff. By having a degree of control in this way, the teachers were able to know where pupils were for the majority of the schooling day. Whilst the PRU had a relaxed and welcoming environment, these locked doors jarred with this, and echoed with previous connotations of PRUs as resembling prisons (Solomon, 2011; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015). Controlling and limiting the degree to which pupils could move freely around the PRU in this way supported the PRU in knowing where pupils were, as a form of ‘personal monitoring’ and surveillance (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015:628). However, an alternative reading could also be gained from the locked doors in the PRU. Due to the Portfolio nature of the PRU some of the pupils viewed these doors in a positive way, feeling more secure and safe because of them.

The PRU therefore offered a contrasting educational experience to the young people in each half of the PRU although in each side, relationships between staff and pupils were less-hierarchical than in mainstream school. This relaxed environment was also part of a highly controlling physical space however, which could restrict the agency of pupils through the design of the locked door system. These levels of control along with the small number of young people

attending the site meant that pupils had fewer opportunities to find and spend time in their own private spaces during the schooling day.

## Curriculum

Whilst there was a strong focus on the social learning needs of the pupils, the PRU was also going through a transition, with an increased focus on academic learning noticeable as part of recent policy changes (Welsh Government, 2017a). The curriculum provided a useful barometer of these changes. The curriculum on offer in the nurture side of the provision highlighted the PRU's focus on both supporting the academic learning and wellbeing needs of pupils. From a total of 32 lessons per week, half were dedicated to the more traditional learning subjects, such as Maths and Science, whilst the other half were dedicated to therapeutic and creative subjects such as Art, Drama and Wellbeing lessons. Figure 11 below highlights a weekly timetable:

*Figure 11. A typical week of subjects in the nurture side of the provision*

Week 2									
2Mon		2Tue		2Wed		2Thu		2Fri	
CK 09:15	35 10:00	RT 09:15	34 10:00	JC1 09:15	46 10:00	TR 09:15	35 10:00	LG 09:15	28 10:00
Maths		Social		Art		WB		Eng (CP)	
MM 10:00	35 10:45	LH 10:00	60 10:45	JC1 10:00	46 10:45	TR 10:00	35 10:45	LG 10:00	28 10:45
Art		Social		Pe		WB		WB (CP)	
JC1 11:00	46 11:45	LH 11:00	60 11:45	CK, Sports Hall 11:00	34 11:45	TR 11:00	35 11:45	CP 11:00	43 11:45
Art		Pe		Maths		WB		WB (CP)	
JC1 11:45	46 12:30	CK, Sports Hall 11:45	34 12:30	TR 11:45	35 12:30	TR 11:45	35 12:30	CP 11:45	43 12:30
Social		Social		Eng (CP)		Social		Maths	
MM 12:20	25 14:10	MM 12:20	25 14:10	MIC 12:20	45 14:10	LH 12:20	60 14:10	RT 12:20	34 14:10
Social		Social		Eng (CP)		Social		Maths	
MM 14:10	25 15:00	MM 14:10	25 15:00	MIC 14:10	45 15:00	LH 14:10	60 15:00	RT 14:10	34 15:00

Topics such as Succeeding with Education, Employment and Training (SWEET) on a Monday and Tuesday afternoon focused on personal and social development, where pupils built up a portfolio of work related to topics such as money management and strategies for setting and achieving their own personal goals. Four lessons of Wellbeing on a Thursday morning focused on therapeutic practices, where pupils would talk through recent achievements and struggles

as part of a group activity for the first two lessons, followed by two lessons of Drama. The curriculum was therefore evenly split between academic learning and social, therapeutic learning, which highlighted the dual or hybrid aims of the setting. The primary aims were to support both the social and academic learning needs of the pupils. As later chapters will show, achieving these dual aims as a PRU created tensions within the teacher/pupil relationships, particularly during the more academically focused subjects. During the research period, additional Science lessons were also added to the timetable in an effort to offer further support to learners within this core subject. This again highlights the importance of acknowledging the situated context of the PRU, in relation to how work was organised and delivered, in response to the pupil intake. Aware of the academic difficulties faced by their cohort of pupils, and the need to improve their academic outcomes in line with the new external policy directives (Welsh Government, 2017a), these changes to the timetable demonstrated how context was an 'active' force which could initiate the PRU's policy enactment (Braun et al, 2011). By focusing on the dual aims of social and academic learning in the curriculum as well as the benchmark indicators, the curriculum was reduced to offering only a limited range of subjects. This echoed previous concerns held about the narrowing of the curriculum across PRUs in Wales (McCluskey et al, 2015). There was clearly a focus on Science Maths and English for instance, but no Geography, History or Religious Education.

The timetable on this wall was a symbolic artefact, which offered insights into how the PRU was interpreting and translating (Ball et al, 2012) the new policy requirements of the Welsh Government, by increasing the academic learning focus in the curriculum. It outlined therefore what was actually happening in the setting (Singh et al, 2014) with regards to implementing policy. These changes created tensions in the PRU, as teachers described how an increased focus on academic learning had resulted in the loss of more vocationally orientated subjects. As the next chapter will highlight, teachers felt conflicted about this new focus on academic learning which meant in their view, that some children missed out on beneficial social learning. Whilst this suggests that the PRU had lost some of the traditional therapeutic aims of alternative education

(Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014) the timetable here also highlights how the PRU was still maintaining some of its core Wellbeing lessons as part of its dual objectives.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This opening empirical chapter has introduced the PRU setting and its referral process. It introduced the PRU as a setting that was placed on the margins of an industrial estate and provided a detailed account of the referral meeting and the ways in which decisions took place within these meetings. The chapter described how the setting was divided between the nurture and behaviour sides of the PRU, the differences that existed between these sides, and the difficulties that this approach posed in terms of placing pupils into overly simplified categories during the referral panel meetings. Such categorisations could have negative consequences for the learners themselves. The narratives within the referral meetings also highlighted some of the complex needs and difficulties that PRU pupils are likely to have experienced in their lives. This helped to develop an understanding of the PRU context and why the staff were so conscious of the need to provide a friendly and supportive environment for their learners, particularly at the start of the school day. The staff handbook highlighted some of these concerns outlining how improved wellbeing and social learning was an important goal, including through the development of social abilities, equality and respect. Good behaviour, attendance and pupil outcomes more generally were also promoted in the PRU, and the timetable of lessons highlighted the mixture of social and academic learning that was available to the pupils.

In the following chapter I explore the professional practices of the staff more closely, in order to understand what kinds of professional roles exist in the PRU.

## **Chapter six: Education and Care: Professional Roles and Identities**

### **Introduction**

This chapter considers the professional role of staff within the PRU. It focuses on Helen's role as the teacher in charge firstly, followed by the teaching staff more broadly, drawing on their own accounts of their professional role and identity, as well as descriptive fieldnotes, to make sense of the professional roles that exist within the PRU. The chapter then moves into a consideration of the emotions within the PRU professional role.

As described in the previous chapter, the PRU was organised in a way which firstly supported the wellbeing needs of pupils. The PRU also resembled a traditional school setting in many respects, in relation to the timetabling of lessons which formed a 'typical' package of core subjects such as Maths, English and Science. However, there were many aspects of the PRU that made it different to a mainstream school, such as the flexible approach towards school rules and the informal layout that was found in some of the classrooms. The PRU staff were understandably offering something different to that of mainstream provision which had not worked for these pupils, who were facing multiple difficulties in their lives. Recognising that a central goal of the PRU provision was re-integration to a mainstream school however, meant that the PRU had to represent mainstream schooling on some levels, in order to help prepare pupils for the transition back to a more traditional form of education. The PRU was therefore both a school and not a school. It was a place in-between that resembled on some levels, the practices of both children's social work and youth work, where children are placed at the centre of practice (Batsleer and Davies, 2010). It involved caring and communicative work through respectful listening and dialogue, which helped the development of close relationships (Ruch et al, 2017). As a place that was physically located on the periphery of an industrial estate, and with the recognition by staff that they were often viewed by schools and society as 'dumping grounds' or 'holding grounds' for difficult

pupils, the PRU was a temporary, in-between and marginalised space (Turner, 1969).

Whilst chapter five considered the referral process, structure, and daily aims and routines of the PRU, chapter six focuses more specifically on the daily practices, by developing an understanding of the professional roles within the setting. The chapter examines the accounts of Helen and her teaching staff, illustrating how teachers view themselves as occupying a hybrid professional role. This incorporates both academic and social learning, in a way which closely aligns with many of the underlying tenets of social pedagogy (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011; Kyriacou, 2015).

By gaining an insight into the PRU's organisational priorities, the chapter highlights the ways in which Helen was beginning to incorporate a greater level of academic learning into the PRU's curriculum, with the aim of meeting various external accountability threshold requirements. As the data will show, this was sometimes at the expense of socially orientated subjects. The decision to restructure courses in this way is symptomatic of how external frameworks serve to alter academic leaders' professional role and identity (Beck and Young, 2005:189). The accounts of Helen and PRU staff highlight how the recontextualising of PRU provision embedded within Welsh Government policy has helped to alter teachers' professional role and identity in mainstream schooling generally (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) and in PRUs specifically (Smith and Connolly, 2019).

With the current educational reforms of Wales taking place, which are becoming more closely aligned with PRU policies, chapter six also considers this context in relation to the daily practices of PRU teaching staff and their perceptions of the working role.

## **Reforms in Education: Reframing the PRU Role**

In her role as the teacher in charge, Helen was responsible for interpreting policy directives from Estyn and the Welsh Government and was therefore an important recontextualising agent. Relatively new to the position in the PRU, Helen had been in the post for just over one academic year. As this section will highlight, her role involved having an increased awareness and concern for external performance management and data-driven decision-making processes as part of an organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), alongside a moral and more traditional PRU outlook which places the needs of the child first as part of an idealised occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011). Her professional identity therefore mirrored the metaphor of the professional coin (Bernstein, 2000) being both outward looking, to the external requirements of policy - an organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) and inward looking, to the idealised and moral focus of professionalism – an occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011). The tension between organisational and occupational understandings of professional practice are evident in both mainstream teaching and social work, and there is evidence within both professions in Wales, that there has been movement away from more organisationally-orientated understandings of professional work (Munro, 2011; Connolly, Hadfield et al, 2018). As described within chapter three however, for PRU professionals in Wales, it is suggested that the opposite is happening (Smith and Connolly, 2019). Although Welsh education may be moving into its ‘third wave’ of reforms, PRU’s remain behind in policy terms. As a result, they are only just beginning to experience the recontextualisation of policy reforms from the second phase of Welsh education– with movement towards an organisational professionalism.

As the leader of the PRU, Helen described her role as one that required an understanding of the strategic aims and vision for the setting, which were developed and upheld through the creation of internal policy documents, with the aim of delivering improvements. For her, the PRU’s aims and practices all needed to be closely aligned with the requirements of external organisations such as Estyn. She was aware of the power Estyn had, describing how they ‘first

come on the prowl' during inspection periods (see chapter five) which created a strong evocative image of the threat inspections can have to the success of a school in the views of staff:

*...I've got enough experience I think, to know what makes the provision you know, in inverted commas 'good' and all the aspects like care support and guidance, teaching and learning, all those things, getting pupils back to school, getting them qualifications, those are our priorities and those are the things that erm, our pay masters like Welsh Government, Estyn...those are the things they want us to do well. So....whatever we do every day, all those small things do add up to that bigger picture. (Helen)*

Helen's description provides insights into how her professional account of what is 'good' practice resonates with that of her 'paymasters'. In this way, she has a strong moral purpose and tacit professional knowledge of what good educational practice should look like externally, from Estyn and the Welsh Government. Care for pupils is also foregrounded within her discursive account, highlighting her moral commitment towards the social learning and wellbeing of PRU learners.

The problems associated with meeting external measures, however, were also mentioned by Helen. In relation to the academic achievement of her pupils, who were facing multiple challenges in their lives, Helen described the ways in which the performance indicators were flawed, in that they failed to take account of contextualised data, which went against the performance levels of PRUs:

*Level two threshold<sup>11</sup> is what I'll be judged on now in the summer, that'll be a big part of it. So that's how many GCSE's you got and at what grade. There's no measure in there for wellbeing...Last year there was a girl who got one B in Art. What an amazing achievement...she'd been sectioned, she'd got out of bed, she'd come in, she was sort of...looking after herself and...you know, sort of, being back on a stable mental health path and she got one GCSE at grade B. And her work was amazing, and it was commended by the examiners. Erm...doesn't make level one threshold doesn't make level two and the director said to me 'your results are always*

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<sup>11</sup> This is a number of qualifications equivalent in size to five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including two specific GCSEs: GCSE Maths and GCSE English or GCSE Welsh First Language. As well as these two GCSEs, it can include any level two qualification approved for teaching in Wales to learners who are 16 years old or younger.

*zero...' And I thought 'actually they're not always zero because [student name] is not a zero.' You know, and how dare you say that...I always have to fall out with people it feels like. But the point is...in that level two threshold Welsh Government are effectively saying 'I'm only interested in your exam results'...no one is measuring the number of children where we've pulled them back from the edge, do you know what I mean?...You know, some of them have thought about and have tried to commit suicide and things like that. And they have very disturbed lives because of mental health conditions...and there's no, you know I'd love them all to get five GCSE's, but the achievement is relative to the starting point. (Helen)*

Helen describes here how she feels the contextualised factors of the PRU pupils' lives were being ignored when it came to academic outcomes and performance. Although the pupils' wellbeing and social learning needs were monitored, due to their complex nature these were more difficult to track, certainly when it came to evidencing improvements. Tracking pupil trajectories from the PRU was particularly difficult for me as part of the research, as this data was never made readily available to observe. These difficulties in monitoring the wellbeing needs of pupils were acknowledged in the most recent report of PRU provision (Mills and Thomson, 2018). The comment also highlights once more how Helen cares for her pupils and the PRU setting, in wanting to ensure that the young people's achievements and those of the PRU, are properly recognised externally. Helen's comments could therefore be interpreted in two ways here. From Bernstein (2000) it could be seen as evidence of the encroachment of the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF); from Noordegraaf (2011) the emergence of a hybrid teacher in charge professional identity.

Many of the practices in the PRU were described in these internal and external ways by Helen:

*...there are key indicators...you record on sims...your attendance...there's a good indicator of engagement, your exclusion levels and your lesson observations and your work scrutiny...and we monitor that monthly. (Helen)*

These performance management systems that had been put in place by Helen related to an organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), where concerns are centred on meeting external performance measures. This new direction for the

PRU required the commitment of staff, which Helen recognised as another responsibility of her role. She understood that this focus in practice was new for many of the staff and that this transitional period could be a difficult one for some of them. It was therefore her responsibility to convey the positive outcomes of this change:

*And I thought, oh my god, where do I start? And you think, that's what I'll do, I'm going to have to say to them [staff] this is what we're going to do, and this is how we're going to do it, and you'll have to help me, and you'll enjoy it and it'll be worthwhile...Not everyone's comfortable with the level of accountability but the payoff is, if you prepare and you're planned and organised, you will have a better time with the kids and you'll enjoy it more... (Helen)*

Helen describes how she decided to implement change in the PRU, by taking the lead in her new role and by offering a vision to staff about the way forward. Asking the staff to help her in this endeavour and communicating messages about how this would result in optimistic working conditions for them, highlights the team commitment she was attempting to secure, which was necessary for the implementation of change. Helen was acting at the meso-level here, as a conduit for official recontextualisation. She understood how important it was to get the team of staff working together through collaboration but there was also a narrative of isolation and multi-tasking within her role:

*I am a lot of different things at the end of the day... It's really hard work...There's a lot to do...There are no departments and there are no middle leaders... So your ability to drive change, and delegate...is very limited. I deal with all the finance and the HR so...when people are off sick and coming back in, on maternity leave, discipline issues... It's quite often hard for me because there is nobody for me, I've got no deputy, I can't put everything on the senior staff...erm, I've got no mentor. (Helen)*

Helen describes her job role as multifaceted, including managing tasks such as HR issues, similar to findings of new education managerialism elsewhere (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). Helen also described an increasing sense of vulnerability and risk (Collet-Sabe, 2017; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) associated with her role in the PRU:

*I worked till about 7pm last night, and then just went home and worked again. ...you can't carry the worries around on your shoulders...you've got to put your game face on and you've got to keep everything going even when you're down to probably like three teachers, two support staff and erm, the caretaker and that's it...there isn't a lot of advice so you've got to be quite independent...and mentally resolute at times and think...I'm going to protect the children, I'm going to protect the staff... (Helen)*

The concerns and risks that Helen feels are highlighted here when she describes how these concerns can't be carried 'around on your shoulders'. Helen understands that as the leader of the PRU the responsibility to manage these challenges begins with her as 'you've got to keep everything going'. She feels that such a position requires resilience, independence and a great deal of personal investment and time which clearly encroaches on her personal life, working 'till about 7pm' before going home and working again. Her dedication to the role, which helps her to protect the staff and pupils' welfare, highlights once more her professional values and moral dedication to the professional role. This perception of leadership, in maintaining her game face, also draws on the heroic leadership style (Moller, 2012), where heads of schools are continuously 'on stage' in a public performance 'prescribed by the dominant culture and by the organisations for which they work' (Moller, 2012:454).

In another section of the interview whilst describing her daily practices, we see again how Helen was transitioning into a managerial role which focused on concerns with managerial systems, performance and outcomes:

*...sort of, the leadership things then are about, working with the Challenge Adviser or, developing year 10 and 11 provision, working with secondary heads, and on their agendas, things like that. And then there are bits of normal in between, where you have to do break duty, lunch duty. I don't teach anymore, I did try in the first year and I was always letting children down, having to come out of lessons to do various things, it just wasn't practical. And yeah so, there are usually a couple of meetings in there with staff as well, a lot with the senior leaders. Especially when you're in this phase of doing a lot of improvement. And erm, any sort of documents, policies, evidence, usually falls to me... (Helen)*

Helen perceived her role as one which was transitioning away from a professional focus on teaching and learning, because she was 'always letting

children down' due to her new commitments which involved 'doing a lot of improvement' and sorting 'documents, policies, evidence...'. Helen viewed her role as becoming more about managerial responsibilities. This passage of data also highlights once more the multiple layers of personnel within the management systems of Welsh education at the meso-level (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) which Helen had to work in, including the 'challenge advisor' and other 'senior leaders'.

The pressures associated with this new form of managerialism, which Helen acknowledged the staff were coming to terms with, were also played out within the pedagogic roles of the teachers. Staff were also accountable for the academic performance and outcomes of pupils as the head alludes to here, whilst discussing the challenges associated with staff resources:

*...I can't ask you in your teaching time to go somewhere else, to support a child, or do other things...you've probably missed a double lesson in your group then, that you will be held accountable for, for the grades. (Helen)*

This data highlights some of the tensions between the pastoral and academic and how they can play out in the teacher in charge and teachers' roles in the PRU. With an awareness of accountability and the grades of pupils that individual teachers were now becoming responsible for, the comment provides some insights into the ways in which grade accountability was reframing practice in the setting. This reframing could be at the expense of the pastoral - 'I can't ask you...to support a child or do other things' if it meant missing a lesson and potentially having a detrimental effect on academic grades. There were added pressures now on staff to meet grade targets for pupils then, as part of their professional competence. Responsibility also rested with the teachers when it came to meeting targets therefore, and teachers articulated the pressures associated with this as part of their occupational role:

*...we've got to evidence everything. It's even got to the stage now...they're tracking all the work they've [pupils] done out of the curriculum...have you done this, have you done that, have you got it in your book? And they're only going to measure on five things – two Maths, one English, two Science...I can't do it [half a GCSE]. Well I can do it, but it doesn't count*

*towards the school stats...the data they collect, they're going down the academic route. I mean, you're taking away the chance for children to learn vocationally. (Mary)*

Checking if pupils have 'got it in your book' and 'evidencing everything' enabled the PRU to be seen to perform. This comment above highlights how the focus on academic performance and accountability was shifting the kind of curriculum that was being made available to the learners at the PRU, again highlighting the way in which targets were beginning to reframe practice as part of the ORF (Bernstein, 2000). In order to 'count towards the school stats' the PRU needed to focus on core subjects, often at the expense of vocational subjects, which this staff member felt was a lost opportunity for some pupils. This change in direction and focus for the role is similarly felt and captured in the reflections of this next teacher:

*It's incredibly different to how it used to be...they'd do their work and then they'd go out in the afternoon...I think there needs to be more of that. Since we've become a Portfolio where you're nine till three teaching all the time, there is a change...simply because we're teaching different kids and maximising that timetable to get as many lessons in as we can...it was more relaxed I suppose in the past...it's become far more rigid...you...feel it's about results...And we're becoming more like a mainstream school, with more subjects, more teaching staff...I think it's going that way. They talk about what level are they at, are they going to get five C grades at GCSE...we never really had that prior...it might have been there, but it was never really brought up. (John)*

This teacher again suggests a reframing of practice in the PRU, towards a more academically orientated focus where 'maximising the timetable' in favour of academic subjects was taking place., instead of 'go[ing] out in the afternoon' for more social learning activities. The teacher felt that there was now an emphasis on academic attainment, with staff expected to have an awareness of pupil performance 'what level are they at' highlighting how this was a focus of monitoring. The description highlights how John has acknowledged the way in which his role has changed as 'we never really had that prior' [a focus on academic performance]. The staff in the PRU therefore believed that their roles had been reframed, with the introduction of organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) into practice. Focusing on the academic grades of learners in the

PRU suggests that there had been a movement away from the traditional therapeutic and social pedagogic practice of PRUs, which resonates with the work of Thomson and Pennacchia (2015).

The pressure to meet academic learning outcomes at GCSE level for the pupils was often articulated by staff who taught the threshold subjects of English, Maths and Science. However, they did describe their practice as being concerned about meeting these aims, alongside the caring work of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2006):

*...you sit in a meeting and somebody says to you 'this child here is not going to achieve their CATS...predicted grade' and I said 'well OK, but their...predicted grade is a C' 'oh yeah that's right, yeah yeah, well he's not going to get a C' and I said 'well I've taught him four times this year, four. I mean, why are we having this conversation, we're both intelligent people.' He doesn't suddenly become my kid, my pupil, because I've seen him four times, you know...it's becoming more to the fore, is the onus that is now being placed on academic achievement...it has to be about the wellbeing and the time that takes...means that academically...you haven't got the class time...yet the management team want academic results and they want the wellbeing and you kind of go, well hold on a minute... (John)*

John's description above outlines the ways in which this focus on accountability and the recontextualising of his professional practice was being resisted through the exertion of his agency within meetings. He questions the responsibility or ownership of pupil's individual academic grades that have been placed on him. He reasserts a strong social pedagogic approach, which foregrounds wellbeing within his professional identity where 'it has to be about the wellbeing and the time that takes'. Whilst describing an occupation which had a dual function of teaching and social pedagogy, as part of a newly recontextualised professional role, the teachers also recognised how this could be problematic, attempting to achieve both:

*One thing I dislike is that officially we are driven by results, erm...but unofficially it's about wellbeing. Erm, and those two things, it is a juggling game. (John)*

Here John describes the recontextualisation of the PRU profession which is being 'officially driven by results' as part of externally driven performance

metrics. At the same time, however, he continues to understand the role through his own professional values which prioritise the wellbeing of the pupils. As such, the hybrid work had become a ‘juggling game’ concerned with both sides of the metaphorical professional coin (Bernstein, 2000). With a greater degree of focus on academic achievement in the PRU and the added pressures this created for staff, there was also a risk that this pressure would be felt by the pupils, many of whom were already dealing with heightened levels of anxiety in their lives:

*...so that's a battle just trying to struggle with their anxiety towards Science... I think their experiences of mainstream school may have coloured it for a start, because I know from working in mainstream schools that English, Maths and Science are ‘push, push, push, push push, you've gotta make it, you've gotta succeed, you've gotta succeed, you've gotta succeed’ and that anxiety carries on... Science is difficult because there's an awful lot of it to get through in a very short amount of time and they're aware of that...that erm...lack of time. (Leanne)*

Leanne felt that this sense of pressure to succeed in Science had stemmed from the pupils’ experiences of mainstream school initially, which they had now brought with them into the PRU. Indeed, some of these anxieties towards core subjects did surface during the research with the young people, and this will be explored further during chapter seven. Leanne suggests that this pressure to succeed is increased by the short amount of time that is available to complete all of the work, of which the pupils are fully aware. Leanne perceives that this lack of time, which has often resulted from the pupils missing large amounts of schooling due to illness or the movement to the PRU itself, is exacerbated in the PRU, because of the balancing act between wellbeing and academic learning. Leanne echoes the points made by John, describing how the expectations placed on staff to raise the academic performance of PRU learners is limited, partly due to the lack of resources that are available to her:

*And they want to do like all kids, tons and tons of Science experiments and erm...I don't have a technician so I'm trying to do as many as I can, and I'm trying to get some stuff ordered erm...you know and I, hopefully by next year I'll have more facilities to do as many experiments as I can, to make it a bit more interesting, but you know, it's difficult to do that on your own [laughs]. (Leanne)*

Not being able to provide interesting lesson content to the pupils, due to the lack of resources, which included a lab technician, was one challenge that teachers in the PRU were faced with, in terms of being able to keep the pupils engaged in lessons. Leanne also viewed the PRU's dual focus on academic learning and wellbeing as problematic:

*...sometimes there is so much emphasis on the wellbeing that you haven't got the continuity of teaching every day, because they are taken out quite a lot for various things. Which they need...It is difficult...And when they're out all the time, for whatever reason, it becomes really difficult to catch up. And then they feel...it becomes like a negative loop. They feel anxious because they know they've missed work, so therefore they need more input from the wellbeing department because their anxiety levels are high, and so they then miss more lesson time. So, it's trying to break that cycle if you like, it's quite difficult. (Leanne)*

Time was limited in the PRU and the dual focus of wellbeing and academic learning could result in a negative loop of support for the learners, whose anxieties and levels of need were exacerbated by the pressures to achieve academically.

The PRU was going through a transitional phase. Academic achievement was becoming more central to the work of teachers, with greater emphasis being placed on evidencing and tracking the improvement of pupils. With the difficulties being faced by pupils in the PRU, there was a need for the academic performance data to be contextualised, to acknowledge the 'distance-travelled' by these learners. The changes to practice described by the staff were in line with recent policy directives which suggested a renewed focus on accountability mechanisms in PRUs, and a more traditional form of curriculum (Welsh Government, 2017a). Whilst these changes were recognised by the teachers, they still preferred the professional practice available to them in the PRU, compared with previous experiences of mainstream schooling:

*I just got a bit disengaged with mainstream education to be honest...I quickly realised it...wasn't what I thought it was...it was a lot about pupils being listed as numbers...and it just felt like a...data crunching machine...you couldn't build up the same relationships with the pupils...and you don't actually work with every pupil...every pupil is a*

*number, everyone has got to get a certain grade and to me, like that's not teaching, that's just like ticking boxes... (Rob)*

Again, pointing towards the child-centred approach of the PRU work which he values as part of his professional identity, Rob contrasts this with what he views as the de-professionalisation of teaching in mainstream schooling. Describing the 'data crunching machine' where 'every pupil is a number' and 'ticking boxes' Rob describes the recontextualisation of education once more (Bernstein, 2000) where increased levels of data management and accountability have reduced the moral underpinnings of the profession. Whilst the data so far suggests that the ORF (Bernstein, 2000) had appeared in the PRU, the teachers were still able to draw upon their moral professional values and agency, within a reconfigured hybrid role (Machin, 2018). Staff were therefore able to work as hybrid professionals (Noordegraaf, 2013; Croft et al, 2015) who managed to maintain the use of social pedagogy in their practice.

### **The Hybrid Professional Role: A Social Pedagogic Approach**

In the PRU staff performed a hybrid professional role (Noordegraaf, 2013; Croft et al, 2015) which prioritised the social or pastoral elements of teaching, within an occupationally orientated account of professional work (Evetts, 2011; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). Therefore, whilst these practices incorporated organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), involving the tracking of learners' academic performance, this was not at the expense of their moral commitment toward the social needs of learners. This was highlighted in the way that staff were able to prioritise the therapeutic and social learning needs of the pupils before the academic objectives:

*...the premise is so that these children are not sat at home, getting socially isolated. They are mixing with their peers...it's much better for them to be in amongst a school like setting...Still in a routine, getting out of the house... (Rachel)*

*...they've spent a long period of time at home...and by that point they're really broken down, they're stuck, and so are their parents. They don't see*

*any way out. [so what's a typical good day?] ...that they've managed a day in school. (Tanya)*

*The relationship is really important. Erm, cos you want the pupils coming in. A lot of the time the challenge is getting them through the door...and showing them actually that school is not that bad. (Rob)*

These core priorities which staff described in relation to both the nurture and behaviour pupils aligned with traditional practices from alternative school settings, which focus on social aspects of learning and therapeutic work (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). Staff recognised the challenges that these pupils and their parents faced in their lives such as being 'socially isolated' and 'broken down'. Consequently, any notions of successful PRU practice primarily related to concerns with the pupils' wellbeing. As the comments above show, staff wanted to keep the pupils 'safe' within an environment where they would feel comfortable about learning to the degree that they had 'managed a day in school'. Concentrating as they did on supporting the social aspects of pupils' lives, because many of them were 'broken down' and 'stuck', the staff articulated social pedagogy, where the child's overall development is supported (Petrie et al, 2006). Describing the need to offer a routine and helping to reduce social isolation for these young people, staff felt the PRU role offered more than academic learning to these pupils. Their work was also about providing stability, through positive relationships. There was some cross-over then with the central tenets of the 'Diamond Model' within social pedagogy (see Figure 1, page 47, chapter three).

The four core aims of this model, which intend to provide positive experiences to clients include: learning, relationships, wellbeing and empowerment. These cornerstones of social pedagogy were evident in the descriptions of staff as identified above. They emphasised the encouragement of learning - '...showing them...that school isn't that bad', the centrality of relationships - 'the relationship is really important', and a commitment towards improving the pupils' wellbeing, leading to empowerment - '...mixing with their peers...it's much better for them...Still in a routine, getting out of the house'.

The PRU offered an opportunity for social engagement and the experience of routines, which would aid the pupils' social learning, and their reintegration with schooling, further education and employment. As such, staff were carrying out important work which was aiding the development of these pupils through daily face-to-face interactions and relationships (Ruch et al, 2017). Providing a certain ambience, positive staff attitudes and a PRU which was well organised and supportive, was not something that could be easily recorded and evidenced but was an important aim of the PRU nevertheless.

### *Connections to social pedagogy*

All of these concerns point towards a practice of social pedagogy, which aims to support and address the social issues being faced by young people, through a friendly and welcoming shared living space (Cameron et al, 2011), that was child-centred (Cooper, 2007) and attentive to the needs of pupils:

*...a year 11 pupil...five months ago was a shaking wreck, crying, couldn't even enter a room. Wouldn't speak to me. And she will tell you immediately 'wow, this is what I needed, this is the place I needed, people to care, to take an interest, and that if I needed the help I'd get the help, immediately'. (John)*

*...sometimes you come in and you've got your planning and everything and...you've got a child who is upset, you know, wellbeing is very important here. So you just start talking...and maybe your plan has gone out of the window, but it's more important that the child is happy and safe, you know. (Sally)*

These accounts highlight how an ethic of care (Held, 2006) was also practiced with the pupils, where a genuine concern and attentiveness towards the social needs of pupils was prioritised over academic learning within an ethical framework (Sevenhuijsen, 2000). As Sally suggests, 'it's more important that the child is happy and safe' which again shares tenets of social pedagogy where happiness is valued (Cooper, 2007; Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). Showing a willingness and ability to throw lesson content 'out of the window' also provides a useful example of the flexibility that existed for teachers in the PRU

environment. Sally feels able to exercise her agency (Priestley et al, 2012; Connolly, Hadfield et al, 2018), resisting and interpreting policy (Ball et al, 2012) in her daily classroom practice.

By articulating how a pupil's confidence had improved as a result of the teacher's approach, and that 'this is what I needed' John also highlights how important these caring practices and experiences were to the pupils. Acts such as these provide an insight into the respect and responsiveness which staff offered to pupils in relation to their immediate social needs, and the prioritisation of these over external requirements. Staff felt they were achieving their professional goals if the pupils were happy, as in a social pedagogic approach (Cooper, 2007):

*A good day, is smiling happy pupils, pupils who will engage and communicate with you... (John)*

*...if everyone is relatively calm and happy that's good enough for me, you know... (Tirion)*

*Keeping them engaged and happy is more important to me at the start of the day than academic learning you know... (Barbara)*

#### *Mutual relationships: An extended family*

Staff also perceived the maintenance of positive reciprocal relationships with pupils as a necessary part of their work, built on trust and a concern or care for the pupil:

*...they've come from a background of loads of people letting them down...so you've got to always follow through on your promises...that child has to believe in me, and trust me, because they need to buy into the stuff I'm going to tell them that makes them better. And that starts with 'I follow through'. If I say they only have to come in until 11am on their first day, just because they look like they're doing well, we're not going to keep them till 12.30pm, they're going at 11am, end of. (Rachel)*

Rachel's description above provides an example of how staff built and maintained relationships with the young people, by being dependable and trustworthy 'you've got to always follow through on your promises'. She recognises how important this attachment built on trust is, as it is only then that the young people will become responsive or 'buy into the stuff' which will help to make them better. These understandings of how trustful relationships are built through dependable actions also connect with the practices of social work (Ruch et al, 2017) and the relational dimensions of youth work (Batsleer and Davies, 2010).

John views a positive, genuine relationship with the pupil as a central underpinning of PRU practice, positioning this at the forefront of his work:

*The main purpose is to provide a safe, comfortable environment in which to educate kids who need an alternative approach to mainstream... you gotta build a relationship with the pupil first...they've got to accept you...it's taking an interest you know, and I don't think you can feign that, I think you've got to be genuinely interested in these kids... (John)*

John articulates his therapeutic priorities by describing 'the main purpose is to provide a safe, comfortable environment' where education can then take place, and 'you gotta build a relationship with the pupil first'. He also describes the ways in which he feels positive relationships are developed, acknowledging that they need to be mutual 'they've got to accept you' and genuine 'it's taking an interest you know...you can't feign that'. These understandings of how relationships should be formed also echo those of social pedagogy and social work once more (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011; Kyriacou, 2015; Ruch et al, 2017).

A welcoming, flexible environment, which prioritised the wellbeing of pupils through a caring, mutually respectful relationship was therefore articulated by the staff in their descriptions and understandings of the professional PRU role. The PRU space was one where pupils' voices could be heard and listened to as equals, resembling the tenets of an ethic of care (Tronto, 1994) and the 'shared living space' of social pedagogy (Cameron et al, 2011:15):

*They need to feel good about themselves. It's really important, especially here...you want to show an interest in their lives...I'm lucky in a way cos I've got children of a similar age...and they'll mention things and I'll go 'ohhh, yeah you're listening to them are you [music group/band]' and they'll go 'how do you know that miss?' and I say 'well my son likes them' and they can talk more to you then...they like to hear about your family...obviously you can't divulge too much...but you tell them what your own children like. You don't want them to see you as a teacher all the time. But as someone they feel they can speak to. (Sally)*

Sally views her role here as more than a teacher, articulating a concern for pupil welfare and the enhancement of wellbeing by stating 'they need to feel good about themselves'. She believes that this can be achieved by showing 'an interest in their lives', connecting with pupils by positioning herself on occasions as a friend, by using her own personal life to connect and engage in conversation. By creating a less-hierarchical relationship in this way, Sally feels that the pupils will then view her 'as someone they feel they can speak to'. Being attentive and showing an interest in the pupils' lives was also described by Rob, who emphasised the need to be dependable:

*...pupils need attention...everyone wants your time and attention and they want to feel like you're there for them...I think attention to be honest just underpins every behaviour here...I think it always just boils down to that pupil wanting to be seen and wanting to be listened to and wanting to be heard...they just want your attention and want your time...So...emotionally it's just about showing the pupil that you're always going to be there and you're always going to try new things and try your best for them. (Rob)*

Rob feels that the young people's needs can be met by listening to them and allowing them to be heard. For him, the staff role was about providing consistent, unconditional support to the pupils. By showing the pupils that he'd 'always...be there', a sense of trust and safety would be provided to the pupils.

By practicing a form of social pedagogy, which facilitated reciprocal relationships in the PRU, this reciprocity was also therefore witnessed in the ways that young people acted towards the staff:

*A pupil hasn't had their morning toast yet, she asks the teacher if she can make toast and if the teacher wants a cup of tea. The teacher is in the*

*middle of discussing the lesson and handing out booklets and says 'yes ok, if you're quick, I'll have a tea, thanks'... (Field diary, 12.1.17)*

*I head into the year 10 nurture class for their first lesson of the day, which is a wellbeing class. Everyone sits around the tables in a circle facing inwards towards each other. Flossy is plaiting Tanya's hair. (Field diary, 16.3.17)*

These observations of daily routines in the classrooms highlighted the less formal relationships that existed between pupils and staff, and the respect which pupils could have for their teachers. In offering to make a cup of tea for the teacher and plaiting a teacher's hair, these physical acts provided insights into the care and friendships that existed, and the trust that young people willingly placed into these relationships. They also highlighted the ways in which these relationships were less-hierarchical, demonstrating more equality as in the approach found within social pedagogy (Cameron et al, 2011). The plaiting of a teacher's hair does also bring to the fore ideas of risk and physical contact within professional work settings with young people (Piper et al, 2006; Pithouse and Rees, 2015). That such relational engagement occurred in the PRU demonstrates how practice was less risk averse, in that staff were prepared to use physical contact as part of their caring approach within the PRU. The professional/personal boundary was therefore less clearly defined than in other professional contexts (Pithouse and Rees, 2015).

For the teachers, this relational and mutually caring living space was likened to an extended family, where pupils learned to care for one another. As part of their strong moral commitment towards the young people, staff felt that they had a duty of care to create a family environment, in order to compensate for what was lacking in the pupils' home lives:

*...give them nurture. Nurture I think, is the big thing...and a bit of consistency. Cos life outside of school is probably chaotic. (Mary)*

*...Usually there's something at home...it's what's happening in their home environment as well, which is a lot of the problem I think...I think they like the fact that they can call us by our names and we don't mind...it's almost like a family here... (Sally)*

These associations with a family again point towards the informal and less-hierarchical nature of the PRU provision which the staff viewed as an important element of their occupational role. By offering a safe, stable and nurturing environment the staff felt that this would improve the wellbeing and resilience of the young people. The daily practices of staff therefore involved acts of nurture and love, which also often included physical contact:

*A staff member walks over to a pupil and asks if she's ok  
'Nah, I don't want to be here today.' She gives her a hug... (Field diary, 2.2.17)*

These physical acts of kindness and care were another way in which staff were able to communicate with the pupils, to reassure and support them and signal their attentiveness and concern for their needs. Engagement such as this enabled the staff to support the physical and emotional development of the pupils (Powell, 2001). These PRU practices therefore stood in contrast to many other settings where children and young people are supported, which have in recent times become 'no touch' zones due to fears around misinterpretation (Pithouse and Rees, 2015).

### **An Emotional 'Labour of Love'**

Involved in daily routines which required the development of strong connections to pupils' lives, creating a family-like environment and subsequently a commitment to emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), this section reflects on the ways in which professionals can be supported within these highly charged emotional occupations. It does so by considering the PRU role in relation to the emotional work of the allied profession of social work, which draws on professional skills and techniques in order to manage professional/personal relationships within the work place (Ruch, 2010; Hennessey, 2011; O'Leary et al, 2013). It is also important to consider the positive experiences that can be gained from emotional work (Lazar and Guttmann, 2003) in what Kolb (2014:21) has termed 'moral wages'.

The ‘inner dedication’ (Bernstein, 2000) or moral commitment of professionals, I would argue, has traditionally been strongly associated with PRU teachers’ professional values, as part of the therapeutic work they carry out (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). This of course appears to be changing now within English PRUs. As Thomson and Pennacchia (2015) explain, within the high accountability system in England, the professional values traditionally associated with PRU staff have been challenged. As the previous section highlighted, this has been the case to a lesser extent in Wales, where PRUs have only recently come under the purview of accountability mechanisms which are much less dirigiste than in England. Nevertheless, as teachers began to practice in these hybrid professional roles, this could create tensions for them.

#### *A hybrid occupational role: Tensions in practice*

Staff believed that often, pupils’ experiences of traditional academic learning contributed to the reasons for their emotional difficulties and disengagement with mainstream schooling. Therefore, for those who worked within the threshold subject areas of English, Maths and Science, their roles would often involve some of the most critical interactions with pupils, in relation to meeting these dual roles of the profession. Re-engaging pupils with academic learning in the PRU could be fraught with dangers, as it was in these lessons, which I often observed, that pupils were most likely to disengage and resist co-operation with staff:

*The Science teacher wants to keep going with the next task but some pupils say, ‘wait I’m not done yet.’ One of the pupils is not listening to instructions and the teacher keeps asking them to listen and put things down. The pupil is still playing with the equipment, so the teacher takes all the equipment off him. ‘The problem is I ask you to do something and you ignore me, which is a shame.’ (Field diary, 2.217)*

*English is next and two of the pupils won’t go into the classroom, sitting on a couch outside the room. The TA tries to encourage them to go into the room ‘I don’t like it, what’s the point.’ Eventually one of them decides to go in but won’t do any work. The teacher after a few attempts to engage with the pupil and encourage them to try some work says, ‘ok we won’t rattle his cage, you’re choosing not to do any work, refusing to do any*

*work... You've got to rise above it sometimes mate.' 'I can't do the work' says the pupil 'but I know you can' says the teacher, 'I'll have to call home.'* (Field diary, 21.6.17)

Both observations highlight the ways in which conflict could arise between the staff and the pupils, when academic learning needed to take place and classroom instructions were more explicit. These subjects therefore appeared to be more closely orientated towards the 'performance model' end of the pedagogic spectrum (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). In Science, there is a sense of urgency from the teacher, who is making attempts to move the syllabus on, probably due to an awareness of having a limited timeframe for the completion of work: 'the Science teacher wants to keep going with the next task'. The act of 'playing with the equipment' or making attempts to disrupt the lesson was regularly witnessed in Science lessons for both the nurture and behaviour pupils, and was perhaps one of the ways in which they made attempts to disengage from the work, because they found it difficult, and/or lacked belief in their own ability. In their own ways, the pupils were actively resisting policy (Ball et al, 2012). For instance, the pupils' question the purpose of education, as one states in the second quote 'I don't like it, what's the point'. The following extract of dialogue from one Science lesson usefully captures many of these distracting techniques and pupil anxieties:

*When the register is done the Science teacher goes around the group asking them each for an answer. 'Miss, why has there been an increase in pulled pork?' 'I don't know, let's stick to this for now though.' Right then, let's go through this quick... 'So ..., if you look up you should see where each item should go in the table.' 'Oh, I thought it was nearly 3pm not 1.50pm' one pupil says. 'I want to go back to bed...let's jump out of the window' 'I want it to be 3pm, not 2pm,' 'I'm not going to pass the exam mind, don't get your hopes up...do we have to have Science?' Later on, the Science teacher says 'Oh, you're selling yourself short...you're saying you can't do GCSEs but you're talking in GCSE language now so well done.'* (Field diary, 12.1.17)

Again, we see the urgency that the teacher places on getting through the workload when she says 'right then, let's go through this quick' in relation to getting the pupils to complete tables in their exercise books. One pupil instantly voices their dislike for Science by highlighting their disappointment about the time and how much longer they need to be there 'Oh, I thought it was nearly

3pm, not 1.50pm'. This comment encourages other pupils to engage and highlight their boredom about the lesson 'I want to go back to bed' and how they might escape it 'let's jump out of the window'. The conversation then turns to some of the underlying reasons for their disinterest in the subject when they say, 'I'm not going to pass the exam mind, don't get your hopes up'. This pupil is aware of the push from the PRU for them to pass Science as one of the core subjects. Many of the pupils had low levels of confidence when it came to these subject areas and this doubt and uncertainty relates back to Leanne's comments earlier in the chapter, about the stresses that pupils could associate with the pressures to succeed educationally. As such, much of the staff time was spent trying to improve the pupils' self-confidence in the subject 'you're saying you can't do GCSEs but you're talking in GCSE language now so well done'.

These interactions highlight how the relationships between staff and pupils could quickly begin to resemble a more hierarchical and formal approach to schooling. With pressures to succeed and meet external accountability measures in subject areas, which formed key metrics for the PRU, classroom pedagogy could be reduced, increasing a sense of jeopardy in not succeeding for both teachers and pupils. With some pupils simply refusing to engage, this also created a difficult tension for staff in their hybrid role. External requirements expected an improved level of academic performance for learners, but in doing so, this also risked damaging the positive relationships which staff developed with the young people, and which they currently prioritised in their social pedagogic role. It is important to note here, that academic qualifications would indeed serve these pupils well in later life, but how this could be achieved in the PRU, without disrupting the relational aspects of practice, was not clear.

#### *Face-to-face interactions and the management of emotions*

As a Portfolio PRU, the staff were involved in daily face-to-face interactions where pupils could display a range of externalising and internalising emotions. This ranged from physical aggression and violence to acts of withdrawal and social seclusion. This uniquely structured type of provision required a

heightened awareness on the part of staff, in relation to the individual difficulties being displayed by the pupils. Having smaller class sizes and a much smaller cohort of pupils in the PRU more generally compared with a mainstream school supported staff with this. With intensified relationships the teachers and the pupils used a great deal of emotional investment during the schooling day:

*The staff are rallying around to get the young people engaged in a singing rehearsal for a Christmas carol concert...A couple of young people seem happy to take part but there is still a majority of discontent. Flossy is trying to encourage everyone to have a go. A bit of tension is building up in the classroom as the standoff continues. Those who are usually the most vocal are the quietest in this session, sitting in the corner they are clearly not keen to sing and when staff make attempts to engage them, they refuse, seeming embarrassed and angry when staff persist. The standoff is causing other pupils in the class to get upset, particularly Flossy who came up with the original idea to sing at an old people's home. Some of the pupils begin to argue. After around 20 minutes of discussion between various pupils and teachers, both in and out of the classroom, it is agreed that some mince pies will be baked by the pupils and given out at the home whilst one or two of the keen singers sing a couple of carols. By the end of the session the pupils all seem happy with the compromise and are getting on with each other again. (Field diary, 1.12.16)*

This field note usefully highlights the range of emotions that were experienced during a typical schooling day. As with most lessons, the teachers were drawing on their positive emotions in order to try and support and give confidence to the pupils. At the same time they had to remain calm as tensions built up between some of the pupils, using their negotiating skills and patience in order to find a solution that could please all of the young people. The experience itself also highlights how the pupils had to deal with and overcome negative emotions, and how confrontations were worked through at the PRU to find a solution. As the field note describes, this meant that a great deal of time (20 minutes in this instance) was often required to achieve an agreeable outcome, which relied on emotional investment by all parties. This approach is likely to be very different to the one found in mainstream schools, where the pupils will follow a prescribed syllabus and the teacher is 'in charge' in a more clearly defined and hierarchical teacher/pupil relationship (Cooper, 2007). In some of the lessons therefore, the approach was more closely orientated towards the

'competence' end of the pedagogic spectrum (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006), with teachers acting as facilitators, using implicit instruction.

Whilst staff were attempting to deal with the internal behaviours of the pupils in the above example, in relation to their confidence and fears of singing, it was very often the externalising behaviours of pupils which staff associated with the emotional stresses and costs of the profession:

*Another kind of challenge is, although not so much recently, is the really violent outburst that you can get...last year there were times you could have done dot-to-dot on my arm from the bruising. And that can be a real difficult challenge to kind of overcome, because when you sign up to do this job, you know it's a possibility that you'll get hurt. I knew that before I said I'd do it. But knowing it and actually facing it are two very different things...So the main challenge that we face is violent aspects. (Tirion)*

*...all of a sudden, the table's gone, the chairs gone, or...your leg is black and blue [laughs] from lashing out...and it can take...an hour on average to bring them back down. (Sarah)*

The physical pain which staff could feel was clearly one of the challenges of the work, causing upsetting emotions and where the bruising was so visible that a dot-to-dot picture could be created on Tirion's arm. Sarah's description of dealing with pupils' externalising behaviours also highlights the emotional investment that staff made during these times, again highlighting the amount of time that teachers needed to dedicate to addressing these situations. According to Sarah, such instances could 'take...an hour on average to bring them [the pupils] back down.' Whilst situations like this were not daily occurrences, they could be frequent:

*Towards the end of the interview, which we've carried out in the kitchen/home economics classroom, a pupil is heard kicking off outside, shouting and being followed up and down the corridor... He walks into our room and locks himself inside...whilst the staff look in through the window in the door. He's shouting at them to fuck off. He's clearly really angry, but not aggressive (at least physically) towards the staff...Barbara and I stay sat down and Barbara asks the pupil if he's met me before. The pupil just stares at us and doesn't say anything, staying in the corner of the room...'Come and sit down and have a cup of tea with us' Barbara says. After about 10 minutes the pupil lets himself out and he ends up locking himself in another room, which he then barricades with chairs and*

*tables...The staff remain calm and watch from the corridor, through the window. The whole incident runs across two lessons until lunchtime. (Field diary, 26.4.17)*

As this field note highlights, dealing with an angry pupil during the school day could take a long time to resolve. The approach taken by the staff here was to remain calm and measured in their response, never raising their voices or attempting to make demands of the pupil. Whilst they would occasionally try to engage in dialogue with the pupil, such as asking him if he would like to sit down or unlock the door, staff respected his wishes to be left alone, making no attempt to unlock the door themselves, which could have increased his anger.

Staff did have training for dealing with pupil behaviour through Team-Teach, a national training programme (Team Teach, 2019). However, the staff emphasised to me during my time in the PRU that despite their training, no amount of preparation could truly prepare someone emotionally for instances such as the one described above. It was only through experiencing these situations that staff became more confident in how to respond, acknowledging that over time, they came to learn and manage their own emotional state:

*Some people don't want to work with a behaviour kid, which I can understand. It's not that I like the challenge...it just doesn't faze me. But then that comes with experience because I can remember years ago, you think 'oh my gosh, what do we do?' 'This kid's kicking off and I don't know what to do.' So that was just not knowing. Now I know what to do, it doesn't bother me. I think that's what it is. (Barbara)*

Barbara understands that initially for somebody in this line of work, a pupil 'kicking off' can be a difficult situation, but that through experience, it no longer fazes her. Shortly after this incident had taken place Barbara also told me that 'you just have to let him ride it out'. Here, we catch glimpses of the way that staff built up their knowledge through direct experience in practice, understanding in this instance what the best approach for a particular pupil would be. Again here, time was devoted to the situation, and this investment of time might be something difficult to manage in a mainstream educational setting. This reference to 'learning on the job' was also discussed by John:

*...I often sit in the staffroom in the morning and a supply member of staff comes in and says 'right, how do I do this then?' and you try and help, but you kind of gotta find out for yourself, what kind of person are you for a start. (John)*

John also views the PRU role as one that is only suitable for a certain type of individual 'what kind of person are you for a start'. As staff you either had this quality or you did not:

*I think you've got to be really patient. You've got to be able to take things on the chin, and not take things personally...and you've just got to be a people person. (Tirion)*

*Oh, you need a lot of patience and a lot of resilience...you need to not be offended easily. (Mary)*

Such commitment was achievable because, for Tirion, the PRU professional had to be a 'people person' who was willing to 'take things on the chin'. In remaining patient, this was another way in which staff had to carefully manage and moderate their own emotions during their daily routines. However, this emotion management was not a surface level performance (Hochschild, 1983) but was viewed by the PRU teachers as a genuine personal act of care, as part of their moral dedication to the work:

*you've got to [invest emotionally], because the minute you stop doing that, you're going to stop making a difference, because children are cold to it, and children can feel that. They feel that, they know you care, and they know that you're wanting to help them, they really do. If there's any disingenuous emotion from you, they just wouldn't engage. (Rachel)*

Rachel echoes the sentiments of John, who emphasised the need for staff to be genuinely caring and be interested in these pupils' lives. Without this genuine emotional concern and investment in the pupil, Rachel felt 'you're going to stop making a difference' because the young people will be aware of 'any disingenuous emotion', resulting in the breakdown of the relationship.

### *Emotional attunement*

Understandably, the extreme experiences of physical anger and physical pain described earlier were emotionally draining for staff, regardless of how much experience they had of PRU work. Over time, however, they were able to develop their practice knowledge and through experiencing extreme emotional encounters with pupils, these episodes became a 'normal' part of their working conditions. Knowing what worked best for each pupil required a certain level of sensitivity towards the young people's personal and social backgrounds. This keen awareness or emotional attunement to pupils' needs (Held, 2006) could be seen as another form of emotional labour that staff experienced in their professional role. Achieving this child-centred work required a constant awareness of any signals that pupils could display, which indicated the beginning of an externalising or internalising behaviour. Staff engaged in flexible practices therefore, which required close monitoring and adjustment of their actions:

*Constantly trying to keep them calm and relaxed, and helping them to manage their own emotions, their anger emotions...so helping them to stay on track. Talking, positive feedback all the time, and keeping them going. It's just constant, there's no time for like any sort of...relax [laughs a lot] basically. (Sarah)*

Staff used levels of positive reinforcement such as praise to encourage the pupils to 'stay on track' in order to counter any negative emotions that pupils could be feeling. This practice was part of the PRU's strategy to support improvements in pupil behaviour. With 'positive feedback all the time' the approach resembled the 'catch them being good' (CBG) style of teaching commonly found within primary schools, where pupils feel that teachers are actively involved and interested in their work, positively reinforcing desirable behaviours (Montgomery, 1999). This work also highlights the connections between PRU practices and social work, where a strengths-based approach is often used (Pithouse and Rees, 2015). Having to consistently provide a level of positive emotional support towards the children was clearly demanding work for Sarah, who felt that within these face-to-face interactions there were no moments of rest. This strategy of close support whilst certainly present in the

nurture side, was most apparent in the behaviour side of the PRU, where pupils appeared to have shorter attention spans, and could quickly give up on tasks without positive feedback. Such work was clearly emotionally draining for Sarah, who describes how there was no time 'for any sort of...relax'.

The emotional investments of staff were noticeable across both sides of the PRU. In the behaviour side, the staff dealt with the visible external behaviours of the pupils, whilst the internalising behaviours of the nurture pupils were also emotionally challenging, as Tirion describes here:

*I'm used to children that will kick, and scream, throw things and swear at you, and all the rest, but at least you know what's going on. You know that they're having a difficulty. But when you've got somebody who is sat there perfectly quiet and happy, or so you think, but actually there are all kinds of things going on in their brain, there's no outwards show of that; that I find totally alien. Cos I'm used to a kid telling me to eff off. For staff I think it's the same sort of stress, but in a different way. Cos I wouldn't want to be responsible for somebody's emotional wellbeing, I know some of our children are quite fragile, and I'm not sure that I could pick up the signals...it's a very specific skillset, I'd find it too stressful...(Tirion)*

We see here how Tirion views both sides of the provision as stressful for staff but in different ways. She feels that she would be unable to 'pick up the signals' from learners in the nurture side, as it would be less obvious to know when a child was struggling emotionally. Interestingly, she does not view her own role in the behaviour side as one which is responsible for emotional wellbeing, suggesting that the behavioural pupils are viewed as less fragile than those in the nurture side. This kind of perception could again help to reinforce the over-simplistic categorisation of pupils in the PRU into the 'at risk' and 'a risk' groupings.

Whilst attunement to the pupils' needs and personal backgrounds occurred through the teachers' genuine child-centred commitment to practice, as part of their moral commitment, more formal mechanisms such as training were also provided. The PACE programme (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) was delivered to teachers in the PRU. This aimed to offer a feeling of safety to the pupils, through practices which closely resembled the ways in which a

parent connects with their child (Webber, 2017). Additionally, as part of the curriculum, particular lessons such as ‘circle time’ were used on a weekly basis. This involved individuals voluntarily sharing their personal feelings as part of a group. As a useful way to support the development of social and communication skills within the pupils (Montgomery, 1999), these sessions provided staff with another opportunity to develop closer relationships with the pupils. In doing so, these practices also provided further insights into the young people’s lives.

For the teachers, this level of emotional connectedness to the pupils was another important element of their work, which they felt was a distinguishing feature of the PRU professional identity:

*I think I'm a lot more patient now...I've learnt a lot more working here about the pupils and their needs...Whereas...I thought 'oh he's naughty'...I never, if someone had a bit of a tough background, I'd never think about what is making him naughty, whereas now I think a lot more about the pupil as a whole like. (Emily)*

Emily describes the ways in which the closeness of practice with the pupils in the setting had afforded her a greater appreciation of the pupils’ lives, compared with previous experiences of just thinking ‘he’s naughty’. Emily feels a heightened level of sensitivity towards the pupils’ social context, which had been made available to her through the PRU’s training and child-centred approach, as well as her genuine interest and concern for her pupils.

The staff viewed the close relational practice, which allowed them to become sensitised towards the pupils’ emotional needs and family backgrounds, as a characteristic feature of their practice from mainstream schoolteachers (and their own work in mainstream schools):

*...I think it's the closeness of it in here, that's what I really like. Cos sometimes the most I've had was like nine in here [classroom]...and I've just been able to see them all come on so much...in mainstream...you couldn't wait to get to the staffroom and have your break and just sit there to talk about other things. Whereas I've noticed here, we seem to talk about the children more. They are, the centre of the hub I think. (Sally)*

Sally describes how the teacher-pupil ratio in the PRU is low compared with mainstream schooling, which aides this closeness and connection that staff feel towards the pupils, enabling staff ‘to see them all come on’. In addition, however, she hints at something more than simply low pupil numbers which aides this closeness, describing how it is also an ethically driven part of the PRU professional identity. Sally senses an increased level of commitment and passion that staff have for supporting pupils in the PRU. She feels that practice is child-centred, which stands in contrast with her experiences of mainstream schooling.

### *Emotional boundaries*

Whilst this level of attunement towards children’s routinely difficult personal lives was beneficial to PRU practice, in terms of supporting the needs of pupils, it also created additional forms of emotional labour for the staff. Teachers regularly had to cope with hearing vicariously distressing stories as part of their daily routine:

*...and when they [parents] say ‘this is why this is happening’ [a pupil’s behaviour] it can be quite harrowing. (John)*

*And I do worry about individual little kids, and you know they’re going home to utter shit lives, you think ‘what’s going to happen to them for six weeks (of summer holidays) now.’ That will keep me awake at night. I do worry about them. (Helen)*

Both John and Helen express vicarious trauma here, becoming emotionally stressed through an awareness of the pupils’ difficulties. Having such a close awareness of social difficulties can be a ‘harrowing’ experience in itself, whilst for Helen there is an added sense of responsibility and worry, which extends beyond her working environment. Having a knowledge of such challenging home lives can keep her up at night, knowing that during the school holidays, they will be unable to offer any support.

The unpredictability of pupils' lives could also therefore add to this vicarious trauma. Although the staff were able to build up some degree of familiarity and emotional resilience in relation to the kinds of social challenges that young people were faced with, they could never be fully prepared for all eventualities:

*...even though I do a lot of community work, it's almost like every week that I do this job, I hear something that shocks me. About what a young person is going through...That I find very...it amazes me that I'm still, a year in, and I'm like 'WHAT happened!? Oh my god' you know... (Gemma)*

Gemma continues to be shocked by some of the stories she hears about the young people as part of her work. Being amazed by what she hears each week provides further context for the complex lives that these young people experience, and the ever-shifting challenges that staff are confronted with, which they have to try to resolve.

Jane provided some further examples of the pupils' difficult home lives and some of the most extreme negative experiences that staff had dealt with:

*Some of them come in and they're absolutely starving...And the parents are doing drugs some of them, and some genuinely didn't have food in the cupboards...another pupil, he committed suicide. And that was really harrowing, it was awful. He was a lovely boy...really traumatic. You just want to take them home with you, you do. (Jane)*

Similar to John's earlier comments, Jane articulates how being aware of these troubling home lives was 'harrowing' for her, highlighting one of the many ways in which staff were susceptible to secondary emotional stresses in their work.

Having an awareness of these limitations, wanting to do more outside of work, and worrying about the pupils during times when they were not with them, all helped to blur the boundary between the teachers' professional and personal lives:

*I think the hardest thing is emotionally, knowing the narrative and the background of the child...that can be really heart breaking... you can feel their pain...there's never enough time, there's not enough of us. Cos I would like to do so much more than I get done in a day. And I know what needs to*

*be done, and sometimes I go home and think 'I wish I'd been able to do that' but I haven't stopped since the minute I got in. (Rachel)*

Rachel describes the personal emotional challenges that staff deal with through having an awareness of the pupils' difficult personal lives, which is often 'heart breaking' for her. She also recognises the inevitability of these emotional challenges for professionals who practice empathetically, describing how through this work 'you can feel their pain'. Although Rachel recognises that there are limits to what can be achieved in a working day, it is this empathetic practice which forms part of her moral dedication to the profession, and as a result of why she continues to feel guilty once at home thinking 'I wish I'd been able to do that'. Such accounts were regularly cited by the PRU staff, emphasising the emotional labour that staff experienced in both their personal and professional lives:

*...again, very difficult to not take home with you, and worry about you know. I try to detach myself, but you still wake up in the middle of the night, worrying about a kid...you are emotionally attached to it. I don't think you could do this job...and be emotive-less you know, you couldn't do it...so you can get a bit too involved, it's having that disconnect and being able to shut off would be a magical trick, you can't just push a button, you can't do it...It's a labour of love, and you have more good days than bad days. (John)*

This level of genuine close relational work, which often occurred for six hours a day and five days a week was therefore highly intensive. Managing the professional/personal boundary on an emotional level in this context could be extremely difficult. This difficulty also became apparent when pupils ended their time at the PRU, with staff describing a sense of loss:

*And sometimes you can take it...you can get too engrossed in it all and it can become too emotional. Especially in the leaving ceremony when they're leaving. You've got to stay detached. It's hard sometimes mind. (Jane)*

The contradictory paradox of forming close, caring relationships with young people as part of the occupational task, alongside the goal of preparing young

people for re-entry into mainstream school meant that such relationships would always eventually be severed. Thus, staff were regularly dealing with feelings of loss (Buehler et al, 2006). Due to the transitional nature of the PRU, where pupils would regularly leave the setting, feelings of loss were part of the PRU experience for both the teachers and the pupils. Emotional situations such as these have also been recognised as similarly challenging within the working experiences of foster carers (Buehler et al, 2006), who also spend extended periods of time with young people. Managing the professional/personal boundary was therefore important for staff if they wanted to reduce the risks of emotional burnout (Pithouse, 1996).

One final emotional boundary for the staff involved their concerns for pupils' wellbeing beyond the boundaries of the PRU once they had left. Whilst staff clearly valued and recognised the importance of providing a safe and nurturing environment for the pupils, they did also question whether the provision was adequately preparing these pupils for their futures:

*...I think sometimes the worry is that they're so used to having so much support around them and being nurtured so much, that when they go out into the real world, is it...are they going to have had too much, and are they going to be lost again...is their anxiety going to come crashing back down on them...they're not going to have the support they have here. (Sarah)*

Sarah is worried about the type of provision that pupils receive in the setting, in that by being overly caring, pupils will not be suitably prepared for the 'real' world once they leave and as a result, their anxiety will 'come crashing back down'. In this sense the PRU is being viewed as potentially institutionalising for the pupils and their needs. There is a fear that although the PRU staff strive to meet these needs, they are in fact, as a consequence, not being met. These concerns relate in part to the debates around inclusion within education described during the literature review (Dudley-Marling and Burns, 2014). The 'least restrictive environment' (LRE) proposed by Hyatt and Filler (2011) suggests that what matters most in the inclusion debates is not the segregation issue and where pupils are educated, but the quality of education provided in order to adequately meet the needs of the learners. Staff were questioning

whether the work they did was truly effective for these learners, for life beyond the PRU. If indeed pupils are not being prepared appropriately for life beyond the PRU, then the alternative provision could be seen as exclusionary.

### *Emotional rewards*

Notwithstanding the challenges that they faced, all of the interviewees talked of how much they enjoyed their work. It appeared that the overwhelming drive for them was that the aim of their work was 'empowering' young people. Due to the close relationships that they forged, and the small number of pupils in attendance when compared to mainstream schools, staff were able to witness these changes on a daily basis, which made them feel good. Rather than describing any extrinsic benefits of the work such as recognition or pay, staff described the joy they gained from helping others in need:

*...if you can see positive changes, then I know I've done something really right. That's why I do the job. It might not happen so often, it might not happen all the time, but when you see that difference you know you've changed that child's life. That's amazing. (Mary)*

*...when you see that people are...being given that extra bit of help because they need it, I mean that's the crux of it really, they need us. You get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from it, and pride as well... (Tirion)*

Both Mary and Tirion articulate the positive emotions that they gain from working in the setting here, describing their experiences as 'amazing' and gaining 'satisfaction' and 'pride' from their work. These accounts highlight what makes the work meaningful for the staff. They describe the intrinsic rewards that they gain. The staff here then, draw on the intrinsic emotional rewards of moral wages (Kolb, 2014) when describing what they love about the job:

*...it's about...helping the low achievers, you know what I mean? The high flyers can fly by can't they...from my previous employment (prison teacher), it's always been the underdog for me and I like...trying to scoop them up, and give them a helping hand, if that makes any sense, you know...it's a sense of achievement for them and for myself, you know. Yeah, I feel worthwhile. (Mary)*

The staff all identify with a commitment which is morally centred, as part of a personal attribute for caring about others. It was therefore described as a vocation or lifestyle choice.

The original work of Hochschild (1983) suggested that emotional labour requires staff to suppress certain emotional feelings, in order to successfully carry out the working role, which could lead to emotional 'burnout' (Pithouse, 1996; Grandey, 2000). The teachers in this PRU however, whilst managing their emotions, viewed the emotional caring work as a genuine part of their humanistic practice. In this sense, this would concur with the work of Palmer (1998) who describes how the capacity for connectedness is essential to the practice of teaching. This connectedness does not become some technique that teachers can master solely through training, as it relies on a certain genuine and moral emotional dimension.

Similar to the findings of O'Connor (2008:125), the PRU teachers here use their identities 'to guide and shape their professional and emotional decisions'. They are motivated and supported in their work precisely because they are able to exercise their personal agency in this regard, drawing on their moral dedication (Bernstein, 2000) where 'moral wages' are gained (Kolb, 2014), providing them with a sense of satisfaction. At the same time however, whilst emotional rewards are available to these staff, there is a need to recognise that for these teachers, who have only recently moved into these hybrid professional roles, there appears to be few opportunities available to them for specific training such as those found within other closely aligned professions like social work.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has provided insights into the professional roles of the teacher in charge and her staff at the PRU. The participants' narratives highlighted how external recontextualisation had taken place through new policies initiatives, which had reframed the professional roles and identities of the staff. Whilst there was evidence of encroachment of the ORF, which organised the professional work in particular ways and threatened the model of social

pedagogy used within the PRU, teachers did also articulate how they were able to exercise their agency, by resisting and interpreting policy (Ball et al, 2012). This ensured that teachers were able to continue practicing through a social pedagogic approach, which could draw on their personal dedication to the professional role, as part of an idealised account of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011). Taking on these external accountability measures, alongside their traditional professional values, mirrored the metaphorical professional coin described by Bernstein (2000) and the ways in which staff are able to move between different professional identities. Staff were therefore viewed as having hybrid professional identities (Noordegraaf, 2011) in the PRU.

The second part of the chapter described the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) within the PRU, which staff experienced in various ways as part of their daily role. Emotionally challenging work was described by the staff, which also highlighted the ways in which occupations of this kind can blur the boundary between the personal and professional. Making connections to the emotional work from social work and that of foster carers, the teachers highlighted how a great deal of time had to be invested into this work, whilst feelings of loss could also be experienced. The final section of the chapter outlined how the emotional work, as an inherent part of the PRU professional role, could also be viewed positively by the staff, who felt good about the positive contribution they made to the pupils' lives.

# Chapter seven: Exploring the Educational Experiences of PRU Learners

## Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the findings from the research carried out with the young people in the PRU. To begin with a brief overview of the methods used by the participants provides some context. The empirical findings are then discussed. Firstly, the positive experiences which the young participants identified within the PRU are outlined, followed by a discussion of the more challenging aspects of the PRU which they shared. All of the participants were able to choose their own pseudonyms for this project. Jane, Flossy and Ragnar all did so, whilst Claire asked me to choose a name for her. Having had time to consider the different ways in which they could share their stories, the participants created a mind map outlining these various approaches (see Figure 4 in chapter four), which they then referred back to when selecting which methods to use. They all selected and took part in a variety of participatory research methods:

*Table 7. Research methods selected by young participants*

Pseudonym	Drawing	Story	Poem	Child Conferencing	Walking Tour	Camera	Observation	Target Board	Informal Interview
Ragnar			*	*	*	*	*		*
Jane	*			*	*	*	*	*	
Flossy		*		*	*		*		*
Claire		*		*			*	*	

The above table shows how all the participants agreed to being observed and to answer the child conferencing questions. In terms of the total methods used by the participants, two of them carried out four different methods, whilst the other two took part in six. Following the completion of the research and through the analysis process, a number of themes were developed out of the data. These specifically related to the kinds of relationships that the young people experienced in the setting and the physical spaces within the PRU.

## **Positive Relationships in the PRU**

When the young people were asked to describe and share their educational experiences at the PRU, they invariably talked about the positive feelings that they gained from being there. For instance, as a keen musician who could often be found scribbling down new lyrics in lessons or singing them out loud to his friends, Ragnar decided to write about the PRU setting in the form of a poem/song which he read out to us all:

*Verse:*

*Mr [John] banter so good  
He fires back like a slingshot  
He's a great guy but is fiery like a gin shot  
Smart lad he's got his facts off*

*Chorus:*

*[Name of provision] safe to be  
It's the place to be  
Feeling good like ecstasy*

*Verse:*

*Phil is the man with the notepad  
Middle aged man with the dad dance  
When he talks about chocolate logs  
Jane goes mad*

*Verse:*

*Barbara gets mad at quiche, call that rage  
Barbara in the garden planting carrots and sage*

*(Taken from Ragnar's poem)*

Ragnar describes the PRU as 'safe to be', and felt it was 'the place to be' in his life, as it was supporting his emotional wellbeing 'feeling good like ecstasy<sup>12</sup>'. For Ragnar therefore, the PRU was a place where he felt positive about himself. The poem also identified staff who were important to Ragnar, particularly John who he felt was a 'great guy'. John was one of the first teachers in the setting who Ragnar connected with, and the close relationship which they had formed

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<sup>12</sup> Ragnar didn't take drugs, and to my knowledge had never done so, but as the class joker he would often try to shock the staff with his comments, which he knew would get a reaction, particularly in this case.

was clearly important to Ragnar, as John appeared in all of the different accounts Ragnar provided. For instance, Ragnar asked to visit John's classroom during the walking tour of the PRU, where he took a photograph of him and described how he viewed John as a 'father figure'. These descriptions highlight the positive connection which Ragnar had with John, whom he held in high esteem and the professional/personal boundaries that were crossed in both student and teachers' accounts of daily life at the setting. The way that this individual relationship was forged between Ragnar and John was captured during John's interview:

*He [Ragnar] would just sit in a corridor at his own little table, and...wouldn't engage with anybody. And I'd walk past him and think, what's going on, you can't just leave him there [laughs] erm...so I attempted to engage him, and I think we probably exchanged a brief, less than a minute conversation and erm, just quickly picked up on the fact that he liked his music. So after that, Nirvana we used to talk about. And, within I'd say a week, of talking about Nirvana, he wanted to come into my lesson. You know, it's luck, you can't...there's been teenage girls now who I'd be stumped to know what they want to talk about...your personality will link with some of them, not all of them. (John)*

This extract from John's interview highlights how he was able to find a personal connection with Ragnar through a shared interest in music and a particular band. The data also highlights how these forged relationships could be gendered, as John describes being 'stumped' at knowing how he would connect on a personal level with a teenage girl. All the pupils described these positive relationships with staff:

#### *What do I like about the PRU?*

- *Being able to talk freely without being judged*
- *How my wellbeing is put first*
- *The fact that I don't have to do anything I don't want to*
- *I feel like I am being listened to*
- *Everyone tries their best to make me feel comfortable/happy*
- *I know I can leave a lesson if I need to and there is always someone to talk to*
- *The fact that my happiness is priority*
- *Everyone here cares for me and wants the best for me (Claire's story)*

Claire describes how the PRU staff were flexible and sensitive towards her needs, whilst she was offered a level of unconditional support in relation to her personal wellbeing. She felt that it was important that her wellbeing was prioritised and ‘put first’ and ‘the fact that my happiness is priority’ was another aspect of the PRU she liked. Claire felt that she was respected in the PRU and through her descriptions there was a sense that she felt a greater sense of agency or freedom to make decisions in the PRU: ‘being able to talk freely without being judged’, ‘I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to’ and ‘I can leave a lesson if I need to...’. Claire’s descriptions point towards a much more informal schooling experience in the PRU where she felt she was ‘being listened to’. An example of how Claire experienced this was captured through observations:

*A pupil has only been in the PRU for a couple of days and joins us in the Drama lesson for the first time [Claire]. ‘Would you like to take part in the lesson today’ the Drama teacher asks. ‘No thanks’ she says. She only stays for the morning lessons. (Field diary, 2.2.17)*

This field note highlights how Claire was given some freedom in choosing whether to take part in the Drama lesson. Although she sat on the edge of the lesson for the first few weeks, by the end of term she was an active part of the group, performing in the end or term play. Claire also only attended a few times a week to begin with as the above field note suggests. These periods of slow integration to the PRU were mutually agreed between the staff and pupils, again highlighting the careful and considered approach taken by the PRU and the way in which they respected the pupils’ views.

Knowing that the PRU had this kind of ethos and practice, which offered a degree of autonomy and unconditional support, added to the sense of stability and safety which Claire valued and needed as part of her educational experience. She could rely on this to support her – ‘I know...there is always someone to talk to’ ‘everyone cares for me’.

The approaches taken by staff in building these relationships was clearly valued by the pupils. All the young participants identified positive relationships with

staff as an important part of their PRU experience. Jane took numerous photos of staff during the walking tour:

*Figure 12. Jane's photos of staff during the walking tour.*



(Images blurred to ensure the anonymity of the participants)

Along with the photographs she described some of the reasons why she valued her relationships with the staff during the walking tour:

*Ragnar: We're gonna go bother the Art teacher.*

*[There's one pupil with the teacher and music from the radio is quietly playing in the background]*

*Art Teacher: What are you doing?*

*Ragnar: We've come to annoy you [first name of teacher used]*

*Jane Doe: We have come to erm, to see you because we are recording...and erm showing Phil our favourite people in the PRU...and taking photos*

*Art Teacher: Oh I hate having my photo taken*

*Jane: We like it here because we can talk to [first name of teacher used]...*

Jane describes the Art teacher as one of her favourite people in the PRU, because she is able to easily communicate with her. This suggests that Jane views the relationship as positive and less-hierarchical, where she 'can talk to' the teacher informally about anything, not just her academic learning. The extract also highlights the informality and closeness that existed in the pupil/teacher relationships, given how comfortable Jane and Ragnar were about interrupting the lesson. Ragnar also speaks to the Art teacher in a playful

and informal way when he responds to a question about what they are doing there - 'we've come to annoy you and [names teacher]'. He also uses the first name of the Art teacher in this informal interaction.

Flossy described the closeness of these pupil/teacher relationships within her story, highlighting the unconditional support from the staff during her time at the PRU whilst recovering from a number of mental health challenges. The nurturing aspects of the PRU and the relationships with staff were the most important aspects for pupils. Indeed, academic learning rarely appeared within their descriptions, as shown within Flossie's story below. For her, the PRU experience centred on her health and recovery:

*...the school has given me the best chance of life. I have anxiety, depression, OCD and possibly bipolar. We moved to [the new school building]. I was terrified but thanks to the support of [a staff member] I managed to move a bit better than I would if she didn't drive me here every day. A few months ago, I was rock bottom because of my bipolar, I have mood swings. I didn't think I could live my life. They sent me to hospital and supported me and showed me the meaning of life. [the nurture side of the PRU] is my family and life...I can actually live my life. Thanks to the teachers and staff I am safe, supported, back to being a 14 year old. (Flossy: Story)*

This story usefully captures what the PRU meant to many pupils in the setting. It was a place where they could recover their health and emotional wellbeing, through the dedicated support of the staff, who in Flossie's case, drove her into the new setting every day. This act of kindness by a staff member was over and above the expectations of the role, highlighting the teacher's personal dedication towards caring. This was more than just a job, as the act was drawing on the strong moral qualities found within the ethic of care (Tronto, 1994). It was clearly valued by Flossy, who was being supported with her transition to the new PRU. It highlights why social learning practices were so necessary, as Flossy was 'terrified' about change and a new PRU setting. Through a close level of caring support however, Flossy was able to overcome that feeling. She recognises the value of that support, describing how 'I managed to move a bit better than I would if she didn't drive me'. The story also usefully highlights why the wellbeing of pupils took precedence over academic learning. Flossy describes how through the PRU support she had moved from a

negative outlook, towards a more positive one. Whilst only at the start of this journey, this would help her to become more independent as her self-confidence improved ‘I can actually live my life’.

Young people were facing multiple difficulties in their lives such as ‘anxiety’ and ‘depression’. Often when feeling ‘rock bottom’, it was improvements in these areas which mattered most to pupils like Flossy, so that they could start living their lives again. Whilst the care here is described in a physical sense as helping her to ‘move a bit better’ it was the acts of care by teachers which allowed pupils to move forward in their lives and emotionally recover. Although these comments highlight how Flossy viewed the close, supportive relationships with staff as central to her recovery and re-engagement with schooling, they also highlight once more the blurring of the professional/personal boundary in the PRU. Staff go beyond their professional role drawing on their moral duty of care within a setting which is regularly understood as ‘my family’ by the pupils.

The inclusive and informal, relational approach which the young people described from the nurture side created a sense of belonging and was regularly viewed through the family metaphor by the pupils, in a similar way to the teachers. Suggestions of family pointed towards a more intimate form of relationship that existed between the pupils and staff in the nurture side, which was also often noted through my participant observations:

*The pupils are all hanging out when there is a big scream from one of the staff (Rachel). She then gives a big long hug to a pupil who has just arrived. The pupil has not been in for over a month and Rachel says ‘oh I’m so happy you’re here’ ‘get off’ says the pupil, clearly a little embarrassed...another pupil brings in chocolates for everyone...‘excuse me’ another member of staff says, ‘you don’t give presents without getting a hug’. (Field diary, 15.12.16)*

*A pupil is making Tanya a brew when I arrive in the wellbeing room at the start of the day, just before tutorial time. The rest of his group are in the Maths room opposite, ready to start tutorial. (Field diary, 23.3.17)*

As described earlier, staff used touch to maintain a positive and caring relational bond between themselves and the young people, pointing toward acts

which were not risk averse. These physical acts of care certainly appeared more readily within the nurture side of the PRU but did also occur in the behaviour side. Bringing in chocolates for everyone and making cups of tea for the staff also highlights the reciprocal nature of care in the PRU, which the pupils bought into. The staff believed that their consistent approach of kindness and care would help to instill similar values into the lives of the young people (see Smith, 2015).

For some of the participants within the study, they felt that this PRU approach was one which they deserved:

*Phil: So, imagine no one knows anything about this place, could you just describe it in a sentence?*

*Flossy: Erm...a school for children who go through difficulties, wellbeing, behaviour, mental health...*

*Ragnar: Basically, kids who can't go to mainstream isn't it?*

*Flossy: Yeah, they get to come here and have the school life they deserve. Yeah, we're all one big family.*

*(Extract from the walking tour of the PRU)*

The dialogue between Ragnar and Flossy here outlines how they view the PRU and the pupils within it. Again, there are links to family here and the social difficulties being experienced, but there are also views about the PRU in relation to mainstream school. Ragnar feels that mainstream school is incompatible with PRU learners, who simply 'can't go' there. Flossy views the PRU as giving those learners 'the school life they deserve' suggesting that the PRU and its staff offer something which other schools don't, and which the pupils require. Linking these comments back to those of Claire earlier, which focused on the relationships with staff and feelings of respect, there was a sense then that the nurture pupils felt more equal with the staff and were being treated like adults. The contrast between mainstream school provision and the PRU was only

picked up on once more by one of the participants, in Ragnar's questionnaire. It was also the only time when one of the participants identified academic learning as part of their positive PRU experience. Similar to the suggestion made by Flossy above, Ragnar felt that mainstream schooling had failed him, and that the PRU was more suited to his particular needs:

*It gives me an education that mainstream failed to give me...[the PRU] has definitely helped me to achieve a higher standard of work and improved my confidence. (Ragnar: Questionnaire)*

Ragnar identifies the dual priorities of the PRU above, recognising that both his confidence and standard of work has improved whilst being in the setting. Both of these aspects are viewed collectively as part of his PRU experience of education which he feels mainstream school was unable to provide for him.

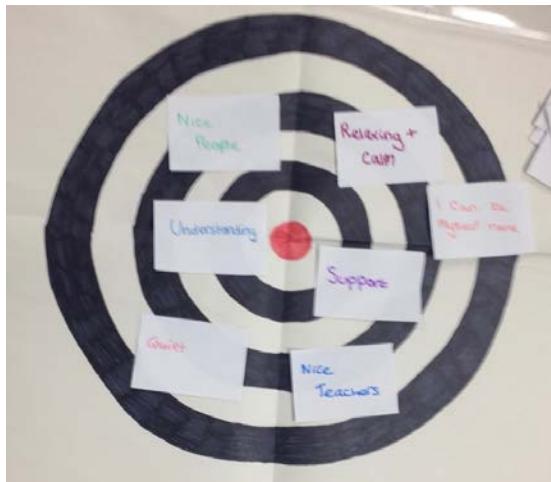
The PRU provided a degree of 'normalcy' (Courtney et al, 2005) for pupils, which could help them identify with school once more. Having a sense of agency over their individual actions in the PRU was clearly important to the pupils, to help them feel comfortable and relaxed in the nurture side and was another way in which the PRU cared for them. By allowing a degree of agency and voice in the setting, pupils who had become marginalised felt as though they belonged to something once more and that this had improved their confidence.

## **Safe and Difficult Spaces in the PRU**

The space itself and the environment of the PRU was closely related to the pupils' positive experiences and understandings of the setting as a safe and secure place. The atmosphere or 'whiff of the salon' as the head described it was understood variously by the pupils in the nurture side as one which was conducive to their needs. Often displaying emotions inwardly, these pupils preferred small, calming and predictable places in which to be educated. The target board method highlighted how both Claire and Jane viewed the PRU as supporting their needs in this way. When choosing words to describe what was

important to them in the PRU they both referred to the informal environment as variously 'Relaxing', 'Calm', 'Quiet' and 'Chilled':

Figure 13. Claire's target board.



Flossy extended this view of a supportive schooling experience, suggesting that pupils' views were respected in the PRU:

*a nice calm space, the kids are very included here  
(Flossy: Extract from the walking tour of the PRU)*

By making the space feel calm, relaxing and quiet the pupils felt that they could be comfortable in the setting and therefore feel 'very included here'. These findings are consistent with previous research where young people have recognised this sense of inclusion and respect as a positive aspect of alternative education (Smyth and Fasoli, 2007; Nairn and Higgins, 2011).

#### *Outdoor spaces*

Particular places within the PRU were identified by the young people as providing these kinds of positive and calming experiences. The vegetable and herb garden outside appeared to be a popular space for the young people:

*Barbara walks into the wellbeing room as lunchtime is about to start to ask if anyone would like to come and help her in the herb garden for a bit over lunch. Jane, Ragnar and two other pupils seem keen and head out there once they've had their dinner. (Field diary, 9.3.17)*

Jane also took some photographs of her friends in this outdoor area whilst Ragnar mentioned it within his poem, referring to Barbara who helped to manage this area, 'planting carrots and sage'. Through informal conversations Flossy and Ragnar also described how they enjoyed a walk to the local park for one of the wellbeing sessions and during the walking tour of the PRU, Ragnar and Flossy directed us to the large playground at the back of the building:

*We play football down there, when the weather's fine at break times...It's a good laugh. We get exercise and being out of school for a bit. (Ragnar: Extract from the walking tour of the PRU)*

The above comment highlights how Ragnar enjoyed his time in the outdoor space at the PRU, where he could have 'a good laugh' and be out of the school's physical confines for a while, getting some exercise. As I observed regularly during my visits to the PRU, break times were generally a positive experience for most of the pupils:

*I play football out in the yard at break time with pupils from the nurture group. It's usually just the boys that play while the girls sit on the grass at the edge of the pitch and watch on, but today they all want to get involved. We choose two mixed teams and have a match on the full gravel pitch. Everyone gets involved. They don't take it too seriously, and there's lots of joking and messing about as they get in each other's way and people nearly get hit with the football. One of the new pupils is really good and he tells me about his favourite football team (Barcelona) and how he enjoys playing outdoors. (Field diary, 10.5.17)*

*Pupils...were not closely supervised during break times, although there is a staff rota for the yard, with two staff always outside at breaks but not at lunchtime. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

These positive experiences at break times and lunchtimes were observed regularly during my visits to the PRU. As one large open space, the yard was used by both the nurture and behaviour pupils, although the behaviour pupils

used the outdoor space on fewer occasions. When they were outside, they would also be accompanied by a member of staff. Pupils were always laughing and joking with each other and had a chance to run about and get exercise. As the pupil described above, they enjoyed playing outdoors. Collectively, these outdoor experiences, along with the enjoyment of local parks and the vegetable patch, highlighted the positive connection that the young people had with nature (Gordon, 2014), which can be particularly beneficial for combatting difficulties associated with mental stress (Kaplan, 1995; Haidt and Paresky, 2019).

These outdoor spaces also provided the young people with a degree of privacy, away from the close, albeit informal, surveillance which they experienced during the majority of their time within the PRU. As the field note suggests above, during lunchtime pupils in the nurture side appeared to be less closely supervised by staff, certainly within the outdoor space. Two staff were still on duty but would only come to check on the pupils intermittently. These outdoor spaces provided the pupils with a degree of escapism and freedom from the confines of the PRU for a short amount of time each day. This is important as although the pupils were generally positive about the amount of close supervision they received in the PRU, research has also highlighted how this sort of environment can make it 'almost impossible...to hide away' (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015: 630). They were therefore able to experience some seclusion in the outdoor spaces.

### *Inside the building*

Whilst many of the pupils from the nurture side enjoyed this relative freedom to move around outside during break times, movement within the PRU building was much more restricted, due to the locked key fob doors. However, this restriction to move freely around the building was also viewed positively by some of the pupils. Flossy described how the locked doors allowed her to feel safe within the building:

*It's a safe place definitely. That's the one thing about the locked doors, that they are locked, it is a safe place. And it's a safe place for pupils to come really. (Flossy: Extract from the walking tour of the PRU)*

As one of the nurture pupils in the PRU, Flossy viewed the locked doors as a necessary part of the environment. Having the knowledge and certainty that people could not just wander the corridors without a staff presence, helped to create a sense of safety and ease, which would understandably encourage nurture pupils to attend the PRU. The door system was particularly important for these young people, as they were in relatively close proximity to the behaviour pupils (see Figures 7 and 8 in chapter five), due to the Portfolio status of the PRU. As pupils who could sometimes display outbursts of anger, the nurture pupils could become increasingly anxious about this closeness:

*...one young person [Flossy] talks about the behaviour pupils... 'are all pretty scary, they scare me' as a behaviour pupil can be heard kicking off in the corridor. (Field diary, 17.11.16)*

*One teacher explained she'd just checked the rota for breaktime and she was on yard duty for the behaviour learners – with a bit of trepidation in her voice. Flossy said, 'good luck with that, there's nothing to you (size) and (inaudible behaviour pupil) is big!' (Field diary, 24.11.16)*

These comments highlight how both pupils and staff who mainly inhabited the nurture side of the provision could be apprehensive about interactions with pupils in the behaviour side of the provision, as the final comment above highlights how the teachers saw yard duty as challenging. It is also the case that these staff may not have had substantial experience working with pupils who displayed their emotional difficulties externally and were therefore anxious about their limited knowledge and ability of working in that side of the setting. This had been the cause of similar anxious feelings expressed by a teaching assistant in the behaviour side of the provision when considering the prospect of working full-time with the nurture pupils. Flossy is clearly scared of pupils from that side of the building and her reaction to the staff member reflects the shared anxiety and apprehension that existed towards the other set of pupils. Indeed, it was these sorts of open conversations between pupils and staff that

helped to create and maintain a sense of unpredictability and fear of the behaviour side. However, as the data collected with the young people highlighted, there were genuine and justified anxieties about certain spaces within the PRU building, as the below field note highlights:

*...Ragnar tells me how one young behaviour learner got stabbed with a fork in the canteen, not serious but was still pretty bad...and that's why a few of them don't like going in there now... (Field diary, 9.3.17)*

As part of an informal follow up interview with Ragnar about the places in the PRU he didn't, he told me about this incident in the assembly hall/canteen area. Although all pupils were supervised by staff during the lunchtime period in the canteen area, this was one of the few occasions in the schooling day when pupils from each side of the PRU would share a communal space (the only other time being during assembly, which was in the same room). This story helps to explain why some of the nurture pupils disliked this part of the building. Within the child conferencing exercise both Claire and Jane said they didn't like the assembly hall. When asked why, they both explained it was because of the numbers and mix of pupils in there. This again highlights the problems that existed for this type of Portfolio PRU, which provided an education within one main building. Housing pupils with a range of behavioural and socially anxious emotions could worsen the anxieties of certain pupils. However, whilst this is a concern and these certain spaces were viewed negatively by the young participants, they did all speak positively about the safe and caring environment that the PRU also offered them.

#### *Classroom spaces*

Classroom spaces were also viewed in both positive and negative ways by the pupils. Particular rooms were identified as favourite places by the young people during their walking tour of the PRU:

*Phil: What do you like about the art classroom then?*

*Ragnar: It's a good laugh*

*Jane Doe: Yeah, we like the Art room, cos it's relaxed...*

*Ragnar: Yeah, it's not a real lesson.*

*(Extract from the walking tour of the PRU)*

The Art room was viewed by both Ragnar and Jane as a space where they felt relaxed and could have a laugh. The room itself felt welcoming, highlighted by the music playing in the background during our visit. This atmosphere was important to Jane as it helped her to engage in conversations with the teacher. Ragnar also describes his enjoyment of Art because 'it's not a real lesson'. This statement may relate to how the Art lesson, as an enjoyable experience for the young people, stood in contrast with the more traditional subject areas which the pupils were less positive about and described in detail shortly. It highlights how the pupils understood the hierarchy of subjects which existed within the PRU, where a greater level of importance and emphasis was placed on achievement in the core subject areas of English, Maths and Science. Without the pressures to succeed in Art Ragnar and his friends could relax. The Art lessons that I observed with the behaviour pupils were also enjoyed by them, as they were generally able to get on with their work without too much close supervision or encouragement, compared with the core subjects:

*After tutorial they go to the Art lesson. They have a very short, clear manageable task to do...and two of the pupils get on with creating their own pieces of pop art... the other pupil seems very tired, and quiet. He's not interacting with the staff and looks bored as well. He slowly rips paper up in front of him on the desk, with a stick he's found (part of a display in the Art room). The staff don't try to push him or keep him on task at all but every now and then attempt some conversation...he eventually begins work on his own piece of pop art. (Field diary, 5.7.17)*

Whilst one pupil was clearly struggling on this particular day, they were still able to sit in the room and eventually engage in the activity.

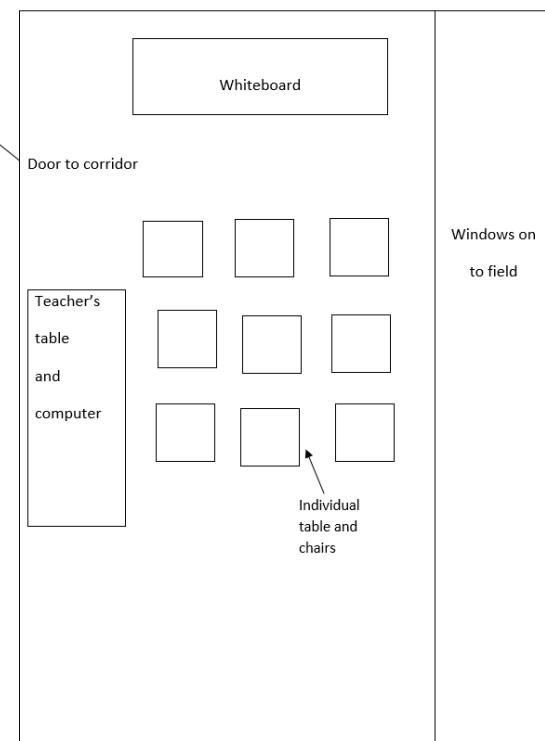
### *Difficult places and ongoing struggles*

Pupils were being supported by staff at the PRU during a particularly challenging period of their lives, and so inevitably, there were difficult experiences which became apparent through the research process, which the chapter now focuses on. Certain lessons were identified as particularly difficult for some of the pupils. Many of the core subjects were disliked by the nurture pupils and Science lessons were identified as one such subject by Ragnar, Jane and Flossy during the research. The Science room and space itself was described by Ragnar as his reason for disliking the lesson:

*At lunch I sit in the canteen with a few of the pupils...we talk about why Ragnar doesn't like Science, and he says it's because of the room... (Field diary, 8.4.17)*

It could be that Ragnar simply found Science, like many other pupils, a difficult subject to learn, and so the room was now associated with these difficulties. It could also relate to previous experiences of Science as suggested by the Science teacher during her interview, where pupils had been pushed to perform well and subsequently associated Science with the pressure to perform. This focus on the need to achieve is likely to have made Ragnar feel anxious if he found the subject difficult, which could have been exacerbated by the ordered and more formal layout of the classroom. This was a very different environment to the one found in the nurture side of the provision where there were spaces to relax:

*Figure 14. Layout of the Science classroom*



As the aerial diagram of the Science classroom shows, the layout mirrored a traditional academic classroom, with tables and chairs positioned in rows, facing towards the whiteboard at the front, where the teacher delivered the majority of the lesson. This classroom was similar to the layout in the Maths and English classrooms and stood in contrast to the other classrooms in the PRU, which had tables positioned in the round, facing inwards, such as in the wellbeing rooms. In these rooms there were no obvious focal points at the front of the room. These formal classroom settings represented a visible pedagogy (Sadovnik, 1991) which could add to the pupils' sense of anxiety and pressure to perform in these subjects. As benchmark subjects these lessons counted towards the PRU's overall academic performance and were a key indicator of their overall quality of provision, now annually released (Welsh Government, 2019a), which helps to explain why the rooms were organised in this way. Pupils needed to be taught a structured, academic syllabus in preparation for exams. Ragnar certainly felt a degree of anxiety towards Science, as one discussion highlighted:

*...in Maths the teacher is working with the pupils through their algebra books...*

*'I want to go to sleep' 'so do I' say a few pupils. The teacher walks around the class and goes to see if the individual pupils need any help. Ragnar is praying that his counsellor is in for his anger management, so he'll miss the next lesson – Science...*

*Ragnar asks if anyone has seen the anger management staff member. 'No, why?' 'I want to miss Science' 'Is Science that bad?' asks the teacher. 'Worse than death' says another pupil...*

*Science is next at 2.10pm...The Science teacher locks the door. After a few minutes Ragnar is taken out of the classroom...to have his one-to-one support session. (Field diary, 2.2.17)*

Here we see how Ragnar was already thinking about his next lesson, Science, and the hope of avoiding it. He clearly did not want to go, eager to find out if the anger management teacher was in the building. Having this counselling session scheduled to coincide with one of the core subjects seems unusual, particularly with the head's emphasis on getting the pupils a passport onto further training and work, through the attainment of grades in key subject areas such as Science. I only saw Ragnar being taken out of Science for a support session on two occasions, so it could simply have been an unfortunate coincidence as a result of availability. However, this comment by Ragnar highlights the conflict that existed between supporting the wellbeing and academic learning needs of pupils in the PRU. Ragnar was keen to miss a key academic lesson by attending an anger management session that had been scheduled for him at the same time. These were the kinds of concerns that the Science teacher articulated previously, in terms of trying to balance the dual objectives of the PRU.

In addition to the previous pressures to perform in mainstream school and due to their referral into the PRU, which meant the pupils were behind with their education, this added to their anxieties and sense of failure. It was understandable that for many of the pupils, they could not see themselves

achieving in core subjects like Science. They all understood the importance of such subjects, but this simply fuelled their anxieties further:

*The [Science] teacher explains how there will be seven pieces of work for the exams (six exams, one coursework). 'I don't know why I'm bothering anyway' says one pupil, 'I'm going to get an F'. 'This is stressing me out' says another. 'The exams are stressing me out...we all get A stars if someone dies, whose gonna die'? '[pupil named] will you die for us'? 'Yeah'. (Field diary, 26.1.17)*

Attempting to alleviate the pupils' concerns over exams and core subjects was therefore an on-going objective for staff. The above field note highlights how stressful it was for pupils, who felt there was no point in putting themselves through the stress, only to fail. They had very little confidence in their own abilities, and for those who were far behind in terms of the curriculum, it was difficult to see anything other than an F grade. Obviously joking together, pupils attempted to come up with solutions which would mean they did well, suggesting in the extreme, that a pupil could die for the cause. This young person often had a dark sense of humour and enjoyed seeing the shocked reactions from other pupils and the staff. This particular comment also provides an insight into the pupil's awareness of the schooling system and the importance that is placed on pupils achieving good marks in the core subject areas, by the PRU and education system more generally. It was difficult to observe conversations like this, understanding that pupils were 'behind' with their learning and concerned about how they could possibly pass an exam in just a few months' time.

Tensions were also apparent for the pupils from the behaviour side of the PRU when it came to academic learning in the benchmark subjects of Maths, English and Science. These kinds of concerns were regularly iterated by the learners during the schooling day:

*... one of the pupils says 'this is gonna be hard, I can feel it. I'm just going to make it up, I don't want to do adding, I want to go home, it's too hard.' She then continues 'I'm going to be here for four weeks and then I'm back to mainstream. And then I'll be naughty again. I'm going now, it's too boring in this room.' (Field diary, 7.6.17)*

*In Maths the teacher is trying to get pupils to copy down what's on the board into their textbooks... 'If you're not going to do the work you have to leave, or work in another room' 'well I'll be going to the special school soon anyway' says the pupil. (Field diary, 21.6.17)*

Both of these pupils understood how they would only be in the PRU for a short period of time 'I'm...here for four weeks and then I'm back to mainstream' and 'I'll be going to the special school soon anyway'. They therefore felt that nothing could be changed in relation to improving their behaviours in the time available. Their descriptions highlight the tensions that existed in the provision for them, and for staff who were encouraging them to take an active part in lessons. Interestingly again here, the tensions centred around a core academic subject (Maths). Such experiences here could pose similar challenges to the behaviour pupils, in relation to a visible pedagogy (Sadovnik, 1991) and the pressure to achieve academically. Both of the pupils questioned their ability and demonstrated low levels of confidence, viewing themselves as lost causes in the time available, as they would be 'going to the special school<sup>13</sup> soon anyway' or would simply be 'naughty again' once back in mainstream school. The behaviour pupils were therefore likely to experience and treat the PRU as a temporal holding ground, and therefore as a place not worth investing in.

### *Weekends and holidays*

Whilst some resisted the routines and enforced structures within the setting, it was also when these were absent that some of the pupils struggled. In contrast with many young people, at weekends and during the school holidays the PRU learners craved the routine and structure once more:

*...Before they start the pupils are sat around chatting. I say to Ragnar it's nearly the holidays. 'I don't like the holidays, they're boring, no routine and nothing to do'. (Field diary, 15.12.16)*

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<sup>13</sup> Special schools were the next form of permanent provision available to pupils for whom PRU provision had not worked.

Ragnar's comment about a lack of routine could suggest a chaotic home life which he experienced and also supports the earlier findings, where staff emphasised the need to offer a routine and some order, as part of their PRU experience. The need for a routine was also important to Flossy:

*'...I don't like the holidays because there's no structure.' (Field diary, 30.11.17)*

The earlier revelation from Ragnar about his dislike of the school holidays left me feeling troubled, which I reflected on in my out of field diary:

*I was genuinely surprised today when Ragnar told me he didn't like the holiday period at all, and now feel that I have been insensitive towards his needs, presuming that holidays would be a positive time for him, and forgetting that for many of these pupils, their home life can often be an unhappy experience. (Out of field diary, 15.12.16)*

Through discovering Ragnar's dislike of holiday periods, I felt this was an important area to investigate further during my time in the PRU with the pupils. It became apparent over time that for many of the nurture pupils, times away from the PRU were often challenging and disliked, which could have a negative effect on their emotions during the schooling week:

*We all sit in a circle together on the floor of the wellbeing room and take it in turns to describe how we are feeling that morning. Jane is a bit down today and not happy. When asked why she explains because its already Thursday. She hates Thursday's because it means there's only one day left until the weekend. She misses the PRU and her friends at the weekend. (Field diary, 12.1.17)*

Jane's issue about the weekends also pointed towards a lack of routine, in that she missed the PRU, but it also highlighted how she was unable to see her friends. The pupils regularly talked about how they found it difficult to meet up outside the PRU. This was partly due to the location of the PRU itself. As the only provision in the local authority this meant that any friends that were made in the PRU were dispersed across the entire county:

*...they find it difficult to go outside for a number of reasons to do with anxiety...he wants to go out more, and in the past they've tried to arrange meeting a couple of new friends he's made in this PRU. But as Barbara points out, it's more difficult to meet with friends from this PRU compared with a mainstream school because they come from all over the county, whereas in a mainstream school they're more likely to live relatively close to each other. (Field diary, 19.12.16)*

*'We don't meet up out of school cos some of us struggle to go outside, and it can be difficult sometimes. We live in different areas, in the county, so it's hard.' (Informal interview with Flossy)*

Pupils from the nurture side of the PRU were therefore doubly disadvantaged when it came to meeting up with friends outside of school time. Not only did they have to contend with their own personal difficulties around social anxiety, but because of the setup it became extremely difficult to see their new friends from the PRU. These difficulties feed into the concerns and debates around inclusion and PRU provision, where being cut off and isolated from mainstream settings increases the risk of further exclusion (Solomon, 2011) and an experience of emotional marginalisation for pupils (Nairn and Higgins, 2011).

As pupils were unable to meet up with friends to engage in out of school activities because of the distances involved, and as socialising more generally was anxiety provoking, this highlights how dependent they had become on a formal organisation for their social support and wellbeing. This greater reliance therefore on PRU staff to provide social learning in the young people's lives, could feed into the concerns raised by staff in earlier chapters around institutionalisation. By inadvertently creating this scenario, some pupils could be ill prepared for life beyond the PRU. These comments are certainly not intended to critique the PRU itself, but rather highlight the challenges which both staff and pupils faced within this schooling context. As noted in the literature review (Mills and Thomson, 2018) and highlighted through the empirical data of this study, measuring the improvements made by pupils in relation to their social learning and wellbeing needs was complex and far from straightforward. Knowing if these young people were able to socialise independently outside the PRU context was therefore difficult to judge and

raises questions about how they are supported or not during the holiday periods.

## Concluding Remarks

As a social pedagogic shared living space (Cameron et al, 2011) or community (Smyth and Fasoli, 2007), pupils in the nurture side of the provision identified with the setting and gained a sense of inclusion and belonging, leading to a re-engagement with learning once more. The setting was predominantly perceived as an less formal and safe place by the participants in the nurture side, although there were some contrasting views on the structure of the space itself, with some feeling the doors provided a safe and secure environment, but at the cost of it sometimes feeling like a prison, which restricted their movement around the building. This was necessary, due to the unique formation of the Portfolio PRU, which supported both the nurture and behaviour pupils, with the latter group often creating a sense of anxiety in the nurture pupils. Although the nurture pupils described a sense of belonging, it was difficult to see how a sense of inclusion could be created for all learners across the PRU, given the physical layout of the building, which divided learners into different sides of the building and controlled their movement around it.

As with findings from previous PRU research (Hart, 2013) pupils also articulated close positive relationships with staff which added to their sense of happiness and security. The relationships which pupils described articulated a relationship-based practice (Ruch, 2005) as performed by staff, where they understand the 'importance of reflective responses to unique and unpredictable situations and the holistic nature of human behaviour' (Ruch, 2005:113). Pupils described relationships with staff which were informal, formed on trust and respect, where time was given for pupils to articulate their difficulties. The PRU setting therefore provided the nurture pupils with an opportunity for voice and gave them a level of agency and autonomy. Similar to findings with staff, the pupils often compared these relationships to a family, highlighting the closeness and sense of belonging which they felt existed in the setting.

The challenges which emerged through the participants' accounts of the setting included the identification of particular spaces in the PRU which they struggled with. The core academic classroom spaces were associated with the pressure to achieve successful outcomes. This focus on academic learning and outcomes was evident in the way the classroom spaces were laid out, which mirrored traditional mainstream school classrooms and a visible pedagogy (Sadovnik, 1991). The pupils highlighted external struggles through the research process, in terms of social engagement in their spare time. Whilst the young people's social anxieties and lack of routine in their home lives already presented a challenge in this regard, this was compounded by the way in which their newly formed friendships within the PRU were dispersed across the county. For the behaviour pupils, they had a very different PRU experience, due to the relatively short period of time they spent in the setting and the more controlled nature of their schooling. This offered fewer opportunities for privacy due to the close levels of supervision throughout the day, which was in contrast with the nurture pupils. Both groups of young people however, appeared to struggle with the strongly framed curriculum in core academic subject areas and this continued to be the main site of tension for staff in the PRU.

## **Chapter eight: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Drawing on the findings from this study a number of overarching themes have emerged, which are discussed in detail here in relation to the theoretical literature set out in earlier chapters. Even though policy changes had been taking place in the PRU, such as the increased focus on academic attainment, the main arguments in this chapter highlight how PRU staff still had agency in their work, as a result of a hybrid professional role. This role enabled teachers to retain a certain type of pedagogy in the setting, centred on therapeutic and less formal teacher/pupil relationships. Although policy changes were being enacted, these had been reframed by the staff within the setting. At the same time, pupils actively resisted these policy changes, by refusing to engage in certain lessons. Considerations are also given in this chapter, to the emotional work of the teachers and the impact of the material dimensions of the PRU. Finally, the experiences of the young people are considered.

To begin with, the teachers' agency is outlined by drawing on the contextual understandings of policy enactment (Bowe et al, 1992; Ball et al, 2012), describing how policy was interpreted, resisted and enacted within the context of the PRU. The teaching staff, as recontextualising agents are considered further by engaging with the pedagogic work of Bernstein (2000) and the understandings of hybrid professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 20011, 2013).

### **Policy Enactment: Material and Situated Contexts**

The findings from this study described how the material context of the PRU was important to the delivery of policy. This included the number of staff (as assets to the PRU) who were available to the PRU to carry out its aims and objectives. As the teacher in charge and the Science teacher described in their interviews, with a minimum number of staff available and no middle management, the PRU

was restricted in its ability to offer training to staff, or ‘interesting lessons’. The geographic location itself, along with a poor transport infrastructure can also have a bearing on the ability of a school or PRU to attract teaching staff into roles (Braun et al, 2011). This in turn has an effect on the way policy is enacted (Ball et al, 2012). This could help explain why the PRU, located away from main transport links, had a high turnover of temporary staff.

The pupils who attended the PRU also brought with them a range of complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These existed as part of the situated factors (Braun et al, 2011) historically linked to the PRU, and PRU provision more broadly. The pupil profiles, or situated contexts, therefore came to define and shape the kind of provision and curriculum that was being made available to them in the PRU (Braun et al, 2011). The teaching staff regularly referred to the backgrounds of their pupils in order to justify the decisions they made in relation to how policy was implemented and practiced within the setting. They referred to ‘disturbed backgrounds’ and how they needed to ‘bring them back from the edge...’ through practices that had to ‘be about the wellbeing...and the time that takes’. These situated contexts of the pupils therefore informed the teachers in prioritising their therapeutic and social pedagogic practices. It was the immediate personal difficulties and needs of the pupils who attended the PRU that staff had to deal with first and foremost each day. As a situated context therefore, the pupils themselves, were able to define both the PRU and the staff within it (Ball et al, 2012).

Due to the referral process, the time that this took, and the difficulties that the majority of pupils displayed, particularly in the benchmark subjects, the pupils were also regularly behind with their academic learning. As another situated context (Ball et al, 2012) this too, had a bearing on how the PRU made decisions in relation to policy enactment. Coupled with the external directives of policy to improve academic outcomes in the benchmark subjects, this situated context resulted in the PRU increasing the amount of lessons that focused on Science and Maths.

Another important context to consider in the PRU was the professional context (Ball et al, 2012). The kinds of values, principles, commitments and experiences that teachers display in an educational setting are central to how policy is interpreted and enacted (Ball et al, 2012). As the findings from the study described, these teachers all articulated a child-centred commitment towards their work, modelled on a social, relational and morally driven professionalism. This resulted in a practice where therapeutic work was prioritised, and external policy requirements were recontextualised.

The pupils themselves also served to recontextualise policy. The study highlighted how the young people in both sides of the provision were able to resist and subvert the policy requirements of the PRU, particularly in the core academic subject areas of Science, Maths and English. There were examples of pupils disrupting the lessons both within the classrooms and outside them, sometimes refusing to even enter the room, or engage in any of the lesson content. It was within these interactions that most of the tension occurred within the teacher/pupil relationships.

## **Professional Recontextualisation**

As the study described, the PRU was moving through a transitional phase, which the teacher in charge was responsible for, as the recontextualising agent (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). Helen's role was to interpret external policy directives. The leadership role represented the reframing of professional practice in education (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018), where greater autonomy, in terms of decision-making and control over budget spending, sat alongside increased pressures to perform multiple roles. The teaching staff more widely also acknowledged the intensification of external policy measures. They described how these measures placed an emphasis on the academic outcomes of PRU learners, something that had not previously been present in their roles. These accounts mirrored the official recontextualising field (ORF) described by Bernstein (2000), where additional controls over working practices are experienced by professionals, at the expense of the pedagogic recontextualising

field (PRF). The teachers' work, which was organised and accounted for in particular ways (Beck, 2008), reflected these changes in the ORF and the ways in which the associated models of pedagogy can shift over time, in relation to the dominant ideologies of the day (Bernstein, 2000). It is important to stress that in the devolved education system of Wales, whilst there was some encroachment of this nature, with reforms that introduced accountability measures (Andrews, 2011), this has been to a lesser extent than England (Power, 2016).

Nevertheless, both the teachers and teacher in charge articulated increased levels of accountability, by explaining the ways in which they had become accountable to increasingly narrow measures of success. It was these changes that staff felt were reducing the social pedagogic elements of their role. These descriptions therefore highlighted how practice was being reframed as part of the ORF (Bernstein, 2000).

Whilst there was evidence of the encroachment of the ORF within this PRU, through a pedagogy that was orientated towards a 'performance model' approach within the core academic subjects, the PRF still flourished in this setting. Staff were still exerting agency through hybrid professional roles. Where a 'performance model' did exist, this resulted in classroom practices and a curriculum that was strongly classified (the *what* of educational knowledge) and framed (the *how* of educational knowledge). The comparisons between 'competence' and 'performance' models of pedagogy (see Table 3 in chapter three) can be used to highlight this point. 'Performance models', which enable outputs to be more easily measured and graded involve mainly explicit classroom instruction, with clear expectations for what children need to reproduce (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006). Within the core academic subjects at the PRU, teachers articulated and perceived a greater emphasis on specific outputs and the acquisition of specialised skills. A sense of rigidity in practice was described, in terms of academic learning and an increased focus on results and academic outcomes. The teachers contrasted this with their reflections on a pedagogy that had previously been progressively orientated, where pupils were taken out in the afternoons, engaging in fun, group work activities. This

suggests that the PRU had previously had a pedagogy that was more strongly orientated towards a competency model, where emphasis is placed on ‘achieving a sense of community, on co-operative work and on sharing activities’ and where children have ‘no fixed place to sit’ (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006:113). Fieldnotes from the Science lesson highlighted the strong pacing of the lessons, and the formally organised classroom layout. Individual desks and chairs faced towards the front of the classroom, representing a more tightly controlled classroom space associated with a ‘performance model’ (Ivinson and Duveen, 2005). The teacher provided clear instructions on what needed to be completed in the pupils’ exercise books and tried to keep moving the pupils along with the tasks. The aim of supporting pupils to acquire and reproduce specialised skills or criteria (Ivinson and Duveen, 2006) was captured when the Science teacher suggested that pupils were beginning to talk ‘in GCSE language’.

The findings did also suggest that staff were not simply passive recipients of official recontextualisation (Biesta et al, 2015; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) however. The teachers provided numerous examples of how they were still able to prioritise their own ethical and moral understandings of professional teaching. This centred on a relational and therapeutic pedagogy, which appeared less- hierarchical within the classroom. Being able to abandon lesson content to meet the wellbeing needs of the pupils was still an inherent part of the teachers’ practice in the PRU. Using Bernstein’s metaphor of the coin (Beck and Young, 2005), this highlighted how the teachers too, were able to move between an ‘inward’ (moral and ethical commitment to practice) and ‘outer’ (external performance management commitment to practice) justification of work. The staff therefore provided accounts about the ways in which they traversed these opposing logics of the profession, exercising agency at the micro-level of the professional role (Ball et al, 2012).

## **Hybrid Professional Roles**

These understandings of the professional PRU role can be linked to hybrid professional roles, including those which draw on a mixture of organisational and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2011), and those which are multi-agency (Noordegraaf, 2013), or use expertise from multiple professions and services. The ability to traverse an inward looking (moral) and outward looking (performance management) commitment to the PRU work can be linked to the conflicting professional discourses set out by Evetts (2011) within occupational and organisational professionalism. Occupational professionalism draws on professional autonomy, discretion and a strong sense of professional ethics (the moral and ethical commitment), whilst organisational professionalism relies on hierarchical controls, standardised work and external regulation (the external performance management commitment). It is this mixture of commitments for PRU staff, that made their hybrid professional role (Evetts, 2011).

As the earlier descriptions of classroom practices highlight, on a pedagogic level, these practices were not firmly orientated towards one end of the pedagogic spectrum. Many of the classroom practices were more closely aligned to a ‘competence’ approach, where competencies are informally and tacitly acquired, often through therapeutic means (Bernstein, 2000). Examples of teachers using implicit instruction were seen within the Wellbeing and Drama lessons for instance, where pupils often carried out group work activities, with teaching staff acting as facilitators. Pupils were able to plan their own sets of objectives and outcomes, which required negotiation and compromise, and a considerable investment of time to resolve, on occasions, for the teaching staff. These lessons highlighted the high levels of autonomy that pupils had in these classroom exchanges and the high investment of time by teaching staff, associated with the ‘competence model’ of pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000). With a commitment towards the pupils’ development of social competencies and wellbeing, this was an example of the PRU teachers’ occupational professionalism once more (Evetts, 2011).

As hybrid professionals (Evetts, 2011; Machin, 2018), these teachers therefore showed agency in being able to resist and reframe aspects of policy that did not align with their own professional values and beliefs (Noordegraaf, 2007). In this sense many aspects of the progressively orientated pedagogy of the PRU had been retained. The teacher in charge provided another example. Whilst Helen embraced the new external changes as part of her leadership role, she also continued to identify and practice her own moral professional approach towards her work. This was highlighted through the way she voiced concern about the wellbeing of her staff and pupils, and by calling for the need for contextualised data in relation to academic outcomes. Helen believed it was important that Welsh Government acknowledged the ‘distance-travelled’ by learners when it came to their academic achievement, emphasising her awareness and priorities towards supporting and improving the social and wellbeing needs of the pupils.

By using their own convictions and justifications for their work, which were drawing on wider fields of professional practice including social work and youth work, these teachers were also carrying out a form of inter-professional practice (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2013). Many of the teaching practices also drew on tenets from social pedagogy (Kyricaou, 2015), another form of hybrid professional work (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2013), and these were amalgamated with more traditional and formal teaching practices. The teachers represented their professional practice as a unique hybrid, caught somewhere between the traditions of education and social work/youth work. For instance, the teachers initially focused on getting pupils into the building, by making them feel comfortable through the building of trusting and respectful relationships (Held, 2006). As a trait from youth work (see Young, 1999; Williamson, 2011), prioritising the development of meaningful relationships with the pupils was viewed as essential by the staff, so that some level of learning could then take place. The teachers also saw success as having happy pupils, whose overall wellbeing was supported and improved as a result of spending time in the PRU. Teachers justified their work by turning to their inwardly-orientated ethical commitment, or occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), a key element

within Evett's model of occupational professionalism. Staff described their 'labour of love' for the work, which involved the emotional cost of caring (Kolb, 2014).

The changes to professional practice described in the PRU were consistent with previous research in England (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016) which suggested that external accountability measures had reframed the management and practices within PRUs. However, with a different educational policy structure in Wales (see Power, 2016; Connolly, Milton et al, 2018) that has been distinctly more progressive (Power, 2016), this has resulted in a delayed and less pronounced encroachment of the ORF, which is only just being viewed in Welsh PRUs. Teachers in this PRU were still able to exercise their agency therefore, despite these external accountability frameworks. The staff actively reframed policy measures that did not align with their own wider professional convictions.

## **Emotions**

It is necessary to acknowledge how emotional work took place in the PRU, as part of the teachers' commitment to meeting the emotional needs of the pupils (Fineman, 2003). As the findings from this study emphasised, emotions were central to the teachers' task, which involved prolonged periods of face-to-face interactions with the pupil population. The teachers described how they developed meaningful and individualised relationships with the pupils by using their personal histories and interests, which involved emotional work (Held, 2006). Teachers articulated how they were able to draw on common and shared interests with the pupils, such as through a love of music, or by using their developed knowledge of children's interests more broadly, from their own offspring. This 'capacity for connectedness' (Palmer, 1997) through the use of their personal emotions, was viewed as an integral part of the professional role by the PRU teachers. They described the need to 'invest emotionally' in these relationships, through a 'labour of love', which involved genuine acts of caring, again drawing on their personal and professional identities to achieve this. The

findings highlighted the ways in which the personal/professional boundary could easily become blurred in the PRU for this reason, as teachers described the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) they felt as part of the role. The findings also outlined how the personal/professional boundary was less clearly defined in the PRU due to the ways in which staff and pupils interacted. This included how teachers would regularly hug the children and the example of a pupil who plaited a teacher's hair. With informal and less-hierarchical relationships in the PRU, these examples pointed towards a practice that was not, therefore, risk-averse. Although the staff did describe how they were able to gain emotional rewards or 'moral wages' through the practices they performed (Kolb, 2014), this blurring of the personal/professional boundary was emotionally demanding for the teachers. Although staff drew on inter-agency skills from social work and youth work to carry out their roles, they also described the difficulties in preparing emotionally for this kind of work. It was only once a professional was in the PRU that staff could develop ways of managing this emotional aspect of their practice.

Whilst the use of tacit experiential knowledge, a key element in occupational professionalism (see Evetts, 2011), supported the staff in their personal approach to practice and provided a positive experience for the young people, this occasionally had negative emotional consequences for the staff. One emotional challenge of a personal nature for staff and likely the pupils also, was the feeling of loss (Buehler et al, 2006) that was felt once pupils had moved on from the PRU. This is perhaps unsurprising given the heightened and intense level of relational support that the PRU provided to the young people, in order to make them feel comfortable in the setting. Pupils clearly required these informal relationships to aid their recovery and the close bonds and familiarity which emerged through the setting were understandable due to the very low number of pupils that attended. Whilst these feelings of loss highlight the blurring of the personal and professional boundaries of staff, they also bring into question how transitions out of the PRU setting should be managed.

The young people who attend PRUs are often those who have some level of disruption and loss in their home lives (Taylor, 2012; Children's Commissioner

for Wales, 2014) and indeed, this was the case for many of the young people in this PRU. Thus, building close positive relationships with staff and then ending these abruptly could have an adverse effect on their future wellbeing and mental health needs. As a setting that was effective in building a strong sense of belonging and care for the young people, prolonging this outside the PRU environment could be hugely beneficial for vulnerable young people, as others have found with young people in care (Holland, 2010).

## A Liminal Space

In relation to creating a sense of belonging in the PRU, it is also important to acknowledge the physical building itself, including its location and the internal structural divide. The PRU was a liminal space, located on the periphery of the community, on the edges of an industrial estate. In this sense it was out of sight and had the potential to increase the perception of the PRU as a dumping ground (Solomon, 2011; BBC, 2014). The PRU was not only a liminal physical space but existed ‘in-between’ the traditional professional disciplines of education, youth work and social work, and was recognised in legislation as both a type of school and EOTAS (Welsh Government, 2017a). Drawing on the understandings of liminality and space described within the literature review (Shields, 1991; Dale and Burrell, 2008), the PRU existed across the margins of two distinct spaces therefore, but was not established in either, which helped to maintain its peripheral position, both physically and metaphorically (Hetherington, 1997). This sense of a liminal or ‘in-between’ space was heightened further by the division of the PRU itself, into two distinct halves. Whilst pupils in one side of the PRU had to wear school uniforms, in the other side, pupils could wear informal clothing and engage with teachers on a first-name basis. This clear divide in approach, both for learners and teachers, therefore enhanced the competing demands or in-betweenness of the PRU’s aims and identity.

The structural and instructional divide also increased a sense of ‘otherness’ and difference between the groups of learners in the PRU, through overly-simplified

categories of ‘nurture’ and ‘behaviour’. In doing so, this inadvertently created labels of the ‘troubled’ or ‘troublesome’ child (see Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2007; Williamson, 2018).

## **The Young People’s Experiences**

The findings from the research with the pupils in the nurture side of the PRU outlined how they valued their relationships with the teachers, who they invariably likened to an extended family. They viewed the approach taken by the PRU and teaching staff positively, referring to the relaxed and informal environment, which helped to make them feel a sense of belonging in the setting and improved their self-confidence and social skills. Particular spaces were appreciated by the young people in the PRU as well, including the Art room, which again felt relaxed and welcoming, where music could often be heard playing, and outside spaces including the yard and the vegetable patch. Identifying these outdoor spaces as important to them, supports previous findings from evaluations of alternative provision (Mills and Thomson, 2018), which outline how outdoor spaces can provide a calm and supportive environment to pupils.

In respect of physical spaces in the PRU, the participants also identified areas that were viewed less positively. The Portfolio structure of the PRU building was viewed negatively by some of the learners, who sometimes felt a heightened level of anxiety due to the close proximity of the behaviour pupils. This also meant that locked key fob doors became a necessary addition to the PRU, in order to maintain a sense of security and physical divide between the two sides of the provision. Whilst these doors were viewed positively by some of the pupils, others also likened the PRU to a prison because of them. The locked door system could therefore be seen to work against the informal and caring environment that the PRU strived for. As described above, the structural divide also meant that binary understandings of the pupils were reinforced. This could have seriously negative consequences for the pupils’ wellbeing. The classroom spaces associated with the benchmark subjects were also viewed

negatively by many of the pupils, which reaffirmed some of the difficulties described by the staff in earlier chapters and a lack of resources. It was within these lessons that pupils could resist and subvert policy.

Finally, pupils talked about how they disliked the weekend and holiday periods as they felt a loss of structure and order in their lives, and also found it difficult to meet up with one another. Additionally, the staff felt this could lead to regression in relation to the pupils' social learning skills.

Some of these difficulties with the provision, particularly in relation to the Portfolio structure of the PRU and a lack of resources, highlight the previously held concerns described within the literature review (McCluskey et al, 2015) around exclusions, protection and the rights of the child. The Welsh Government are clearly committed to improving the educational experiences and outcomes for young people who attend PRUs, in light of their recent policy commitments. And as some of the data from this study emphasises, many of the pupils enjoyed and benefitted from this educational experience. However, whilst difficulties like those described within this study continue to exist in PRUs, questions will be asked about whether such educational settings are in the best interests of the pupils. This is particularly so in relation to Article 29 of the UNCRC, and the need to develop the personality, talents, mental and physical abilities of the child to their fullest potential (UNCRC, 1989).

These questions over the quality of alternative provision, as previous studies have highlighted (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014), bring us back to debates on inclusion in education once more (Phtiaka, 1997; Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011; McCluskey et al, 2015). This includes considerations about what type of provision is indeed in the best interest of the child. Full inclusion in mainstream provision can result in further excluding certain learners when adequate resources for them are missing (Hodkinson, 2007). Yet, this PRU also risked excluding pupils further, given it was in a remote and in-between space, that could increase a sense of 'otherness' in learners who were divided into over-simplified areas of the PRU. Nevertheless, the participants who took part in the study described a sense of belonging that may not have been available to

them in mainstream provision. These experiences for the pupils rely on the social pedagogy and ethic of care (Held, 2006; Petrie et al, 2006; Cooper, 2007; Smith and Whyte, 2008) practiced by the teachers, which must therefore continue to be an integral part of PRU provision in Wales, as part of any improvement measures. It is encouraging to note that these therapeutic and social aspects of PRU provision were acknowledged in this way, through the evaluation report commissioned by the Welsh Government (McCluskey et al, 2013). Emphasising the need to identify and acknowledge individual level statistics in order to understand and promote the profiles of EOTAS pupils, will help to ensure that the social aspects of the provision remain at the centre of practice.

## **Concluding Remarks**

It was felt by the staff that the therapeutic and relational approach taken in the PRU was a necessary one, in order that pupils would engage back in schooling again and turn up on a regular basis. Building meaningful relationships took time and effort on behalf of the teachers, but as the findings from this study have shown, positive relationships matter for these young people. A lot can be learned from PRUs and their staff roles and priorities when it comes to developing an inclusive education system for all learners, albeit the PRU also had the potential for creating a sense of ‘otherness’ and difference between the pupils, due to the structural division of learners into the ‘nurture’ and ‘behaviour’ groupings. Pupils in PRUs should not be written off and it is encouraging to see that the Welsh Government have shown a commitment towards supporting these young people. However, whilst trying to improve the academic outcomes of these learners is welcome within this renewed policy focus, it should not be at the expense of the pastorally-orientated pedagogy within PRUs. The contextualised nature of PRU pupils’ lives and the difficulties which they face need to be acknowledged within any performance metrics, highlighting the distance which these young people have travelled in their learning, both socially and academically. This is where tensions can lie, in relation to what the purpose of education should be within alternative settings.

Combining a commitment to academic learning with more vocationally driven learning and social skills development, such as improvements in confidence, can be achieved through a creative and engaging pedagogy within the classroom. Drawing on those practices described from social pedagogy and other caring and relational professions such as youth work and social work, this can be a pedagogy which provides flexibility and creative freedoms for teachers, with a degree of pupil autonomy. Meeting the academic learning aims of external policy requirements can still be an integral part of this practice, but through a pedagogy that is not firmly orientated towards a ‘performance model’, particularly in the core academic subjects. In doing so, this could reduce the resistance towards learning that pupils predominantly showed during these lessons.

In summary, this study has highlighted how PRU professionals continued to have a level of agency, reframing Welsh policy changes through the development of a hybrid professional role. This was based on a social pedagogy that accommodated both the pupils’ social needs and academic learning. This enabled them to preserve a pedagogic approach centred on therapeutic and less formal teacher/pupil relationships; albeit to a lesser extent in the behaviour side of the provision. Pupils also resisted some of the policy changes, particularly in the core academic subject areas where a pedagogy orientated towards a ‘performance model’ was most apparent. Pupils’ in the ‘nurture’ side of the provision welcomed the therapeutic and relational approach they experienced in the PRU, but these practices did involve a high degree of emotional labour for staff.

## **Chapter nine: Policy Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The final research question in this study asked: What policy changes could be enacted to improve the experience of those working and studying in the PRU? Based on the findings from this thesis, the following chapter sets out some of the recommendations and possible changes that could be made to PRU practice in Wales, in order to support developments in the future.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### *Dual aims of PRU provision must be upheld*

As this study highlighted, there is a renewed focus on improving academic achievement and outcomes within PRUs across Wales (Welsh Government, 2017a). Whilst this is encouraging, there is a need to ensure that the dual aims of PRU practice, namely academic and social learning, each remain equally central to practice. This study supported findings from previous research that emphasised how the social learning opportunities which PRUs offer can be hugely beneficial to young people (Nairn and Higgins, 2011; McCluskey et al, 2015; Te Riele et al, 2017). Having an approach that is less formal and based on therapeutic relationships as previous evaluations have discussed, can improve and resurrect young people's motivation and confidence in learning once more (McCluskey et al, 2015). The thesis described the ways in which these meaningful and trusting relational practices that staff created in the setting took considerable amounts of time to craft and strengthen. In a similar fashion to the relational practices of youth work therefore (Williamson, 2011; Batsleer, 2013), the necessity of slow relationship building in order to develop meaningful connections, needs to be acknowledged as part of PRU practice. As Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) suggest in their own recommendations, relationships should be seen as a learning goal in their own right as learning to develop and maintain trusting, constructive and supportive relationships is a significant life

skill. There is a danger, described by teachers in this study, that as the dual aims of PRU work become established, less time is available to try and meet both of these aims for the pupils. As the reporting of academic attainment data is already established within the new policy framework (Welsh Government, 2019a), social learning could become marginalised, as PRUs begin to place more attention on these visible requirements. Tracking and monitoring improvements in therapeutic work or ‘soft outcomes’ such as improved confidence, are difficult to achieve (Mills and Thomson, 2018). But failing to do so, could reduce the emphasis on social learning in PRUs. Such a scenario would undermine the previously outlined strengths of PRU provision (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014), and risk undoing work which enables young people to re-engage with schooling and learning more broadly. Encouragingly, the Welsh Government (2017a) do recognise the need to have robust measures in PRUs around contextualised data, in order to understand the profiles of individual learners. Establishing a ‘distance-travelled’ framework which incorporates both academic and social learning would help to uphold the dual aims of Welsh PRUs. A framework of this kind could include the assessment of life skills in areas such as collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking, as part of the marking criteria for each subject area. **In order to maintain the dual aims of PRUs therefore, the Welsh Government should devise a ‘distance-travelled’ framework for all subject areas, which incorporates equally, measures to track improvements in both academic and life skills.**

### *A broad curriculum*

Following on from a ‘distance-travelled’ framework, and in aiming to offer a truly dual academic and social learning experience to learners, a focus on benchmark indicators should not reduce the curriculum to a limited range of subjects in a PRU. The curriculum should still include therapeutic and social learning, which continues to provide staff with flexibility, agency and the opportunity of developing a creative pedagogy. The thesis highlighted how there had been some movements within the curriculum towards an increased level of academic learning, at the expense of some social learning. However, this

traditionally structured curriculum was often resisted by the pupils in the PRU. The new EOTAS Delivery Group (Welsh Government, 2019c) have recognised these challenges, and welcome attention has been given to PRUs within the new curriculum developments taking place across Wales. Ensuring that the curriculum is accessible for PRU learners, the delivery group also recognise the need for strong relationships between PRUs and mainstream schools. Drawing on the expertise of PRU staff for the six areas of the new Welsh curriculum, especially the area for mental health and wellbeing (see Donaldson, 2015) would be particularly useful. More involvement with the curriculum developments could also help to give PRU students more choice around what they want to learn, by having access to this broader curriculum. **As policy is developed within PRUs therefore, any narrowing of the curriculum should be resisted. This will be supported by recognising and including PRU staff as key to the construction of the new Welsh curriculum, particularly in the area of mental health and wellbeing.**

#### *Classroom layout*

With pupils often resisting the core academic subjects in the PRU, it was at these times that tensions between staff and pupils most frequently occurred. The pupils' behavioural difficulties and resistance towards these subject areas could be related to their association with previous negative emotions and pressures to perform in mainstream settings (McCluskey et al, 2008). Such pressures are likely to be increased by the formal layout of the classrooms, which create a sense of inflexibility and elevate the importance of these subjects (Bleazby, 2015). Developing creative ways of adapting classroom environments and layouts into less formal spaces for learners could help to engage them in the subjects they find most challenging. This would also feed into the design of the new curriculum, assisting the mental health and wellbeing focus by further recognising the needs of learners. Creating classroom spaces of this nature will support PRUs in developing and embracing both academic and social learning goals as part of their equally valued dual focus. **More consideration therefore needs to be given to the ways in which PRU classrooms, particularly the**

**core academic classrooms, are configured, in order to help pupils feel more comfortable in these settings. These considerations should feed into the design of the new curriculum, supporting the area of mental health and wellbeing.**

*Further training and a professional status*

Although staff were now practicing as hybrid professionals in order to meet the dual aims of the PRU, supporting both the social and academic needs of learners simultaneously, was not straightforward. This was particularly apparent in the core academic lessons, where tensions would arise, and pupils would often resist the lesson content. How academic learning can take place without undoing the social learning practices needs careful consideration therefore, particularly when these tensions can have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the learners. A concern for the wellbeing needs of staff is also paramount as the thesis highlighted the emotional investments and costs for the teachers, in forming caring relationships with the pupils. While there were examples of informal levels of emotional support available for teachers, such as the wellbeing days described in the staff handbook and the ‘counselling advice’ that teachers provided to each other, no formal training in managing emotions and relationships with pupils was apparent. With close and often physical acts of kindness and support taking place in the PRU, managing the professional/personal boundary within the PRU would be beneficial for the teaching staff. A commitment in policy towards providing a greater level of preparatory training for PRU teachers would therefore support the sector in creating its own unique and valued professional practice. One example could include training and support for staff that relates directly to their relational practices in the PRU, by drawing on those sectors which already incorporate this training into their professions, including social work and youth work. Recognising approaches such as an ethic of care (Held, 2006; Hennessey, 2011), which can support staff in understanding how their personal emotions can be utilised and managed in order to develop meaningful relationships with young people, would support the professional/personal boundary. An ability to engage

young people through a creative pedagogic approach would also be a beneficial part of any training schedule. This could include utilising aspects of youth work where professionals view pedagogy as an experience in which they accompany and care for pupils, helping them to make learning more meaningful, stimulating and inspiring for their lives (M.K. Smith, 2019). The development of creative and engaging lesson content has been recommended in other policy reviews (Mills and Thomson, 2018) and with the drive to improve academic outcomes for learners, this would surely be a positive first step in reducing the attainment gap in the threshold subjects. Arguably, making training available in areas such as these would be beneficial for the professional development of the staff and the pupils' learning experience, potentially reducing the current tensions that exist within the core subject areas. Providing formal training opportunities for PRU staff would further support the creation of an officially recognised PRU professional occupation. Understanding how to incorporate these alternative practices within traditional teaching methods would form a critical part of that training. PRUs therefore need to be given time for this additional training, which will include developing creative pedagogic approaches. This recommendation supports earlier report findings (Welsh Government, 2017a; Mills and Thomson, 2018) whilst the need for additional training has also been embraced in Wales, as part of the new EOTAS framework (Welsh Government, 2019c).

With training in mind, if PRU provision is to be viewed as a necessary and integral part of the educational landscape, a recognised professional qualification could be established specifically for PRU professionals. There is a clear commitment being made by the Welsh Government to improve the sector, and a qualification of this kind could consolidate the traditional therapeutic practices of PRU work with those from education and the established caring professions of social work and youth work. This would help to develop the PRU profession in its own right and serve to preserve the traditional social aspects of PRU delivery. **In summary, PRUs should be supported in developing unique training opportunities which combine training skills from education with**

## **social, emotional and counselling skills from social work and creative pedagogic techniques from youth work.**

### *Access to mentors*

In relation to training there were a lack of mentors for the teacher in charge, and additional cover for teaching staff. The use of mentors for those in charge of PRUs would be a helpful addition to the PRU structure in Wales. The teacher in charge reflected on her own role, describing the performance of multiple tasks which heightened her own sense of isolation and risk (Collet-Sabe, 2017). The provision of a mentor would help to address some of these difficulties, by providing a sounding board, an opportunity for reflection and access to further support. These mentors could offer a 'safe space' therefore, through practical and pastoral support and advice, which could be developed further by integrating all of the PRU heads in Wales into the national Academy of Educational Leadership (Connolly, Milton et al, 2018). This kind of practical and pastoral support could be particularly useful, given that PRUs are void of middle level management. With this lack of middle management roles Helen was restricted in developing the teachers' careers and found it difficult to provide them with additional training opportunities. With a single teacher for each subject area, there were few opportunities for staff to take time away from the classroom for additional training. Teachers from mainstream schools could be encouraged to spend time in PRUs in order to develop their own professional careers. This would then allow PRU staff to develop their own professional learning. **In summary, mentoring for PRU heads should be included as part of the new national Academy of Educational Leadership, and mainstream teachers should be encouraged to take up professional development roles within PRUs.**

### *Additional resources*

Improving relationships and communication between mainstream schools and PRUs would be helpful, so that PRU pupils have access to a broad curriculum and improved access to resources. As the findings in this study described, there were feelings amongst the staff that they lacked financial support in the PRU, which could have a detrimental impact on their lesson delivery. This included within the Science classroom, where practical activities were limited, and a lab technician would have been beneficial. Science was a particularly difficult subject for the pupils to engage in, and the lack of resources hampered the teacher's capacity to develop highly engaging and stimulating lessons. Thus, being able to access laboratories and technicians and having additional resources available to staff, could help to create more engaging lessons for the pupils, which would encourage their participation further. **PRUs should be supported in accessing more resources, to support them in improving lesson content and providing pupils with greater access to facilities.**

### *Clear tracking and support*

The emotional challenges that exist for learners going through school transitions is well documented (West et al, 2010; Rice et al, 2015) and this is likely to be just as challenging, if not more so, for pupils who already have social and emotional difficulties within PRUs. Although focusing on the transition between primary school and secondary school, Bagnall (2019) highlights how there continue to be few programmes or interventions which provide emotional support for pupils, during the transfer out of school. As an educational setting that is recognised for dealing with vulnerable groups of learners in Wales, the Welsh Government should implement policies which allow for clearer tracking and support for students as they enter and exit PRUs. These would include keeping exit and destination data that would facilitate longitudinal tracking of PRU pupils' progress and trajectories, in order to develop an understanding of PRU effectiveness (Mills and Thomson, 2018). Tracking of this kind could also be supported through the renewed focus described earlier, around developing closer relationships between schools and PRUs. Training which enables school

teachers to spend time in PRUs, and vice-versa, could include supporting PRU pupils during their transitional periods in and out of these settings. Not only would this support the tracking of pupil destinations, but it would also provide some level of consistency and guidance for pupils as they move through this often challenging period. Closer working relationships of this kind between schools and PRUs would help to maintain these important connections and relationships. **The Welsh Government should therefore introduce policies and support PRUs in developing clearer tracking and support procedures for pupils as they enter and exit PRUs.**

#### *PRU locations*

Closer ties with schools have also been traditionally challenging in many circumstances, due to the location of PRUs. As described in the literature review, segregating pupils runs the risk of stigmatising and ‘othering’ young people. Yet this should not deter policy makers and practitioners from the PRU model, which can offer a more holistic form of education to learners. Efforts should still be made however, which concentrate on overcoming potential issues with stigmatisation and marginalisation. As these recommendations have so far indicated, it would be beneficial to have PRUs situated near to, adjacent or within mainstream school sites in the future. This would help to improve communication, training, access to resources, and the curriculum more generally. Where this is not practically possible, PRU locations should be more carefully considered. For instance, issues of stigmatisation could be lessened by firstly, locating PRUs more centrally within local communities. Being placed on the periphery of an industrial estate, away from public amenities, is likely to only increase a sense of marginalisation and isolation amongst teachers and pupils. As a central part of PRU provision is dedicated towards supporting the social needs of learners, being part of a local community would help PRUs in developing social networks, linking with businesses and homes for the elderly, and building these into the curriculum. Whilst having more centralised locations for PRU provision would be preferable, there may understandably, be some cost implications for this. **Serious consideration needs to be given to**

**the location of PRUs. Where possible, PRUs should be situated close to other mainstream schools, or at least within a local community setting.**

*Access to extra-curricular activities away from the PRU*

In relation to PRU locations, more thought could be given to how PRU learners can continue to be supported on a social level during the holiday periods, such as through dedicated out-of-school clubs and youth work provision. The findings from this study highlighted how pupils had limited opportunities to meet up with their friends outside the PRU and struggled socially without additional support. These young people displayed a range of social and emotional difficulties, and continued opportunities for organised social activities during the holiday periods would therefore be beneficial. Having activities of this nature would support the PRU's aims of improving the pupils' social learning skills. The benefits of out of school activities for young people have been well documented, in terms of supporting wellbeing and improving resilience and social competence (Gilligan, 2000; Gordon, 2014; Morgan et al, 2019). Careful consideration should therefore be given towards how PRU learners have access to out of school resources in the future. This kind of resource could again be factored into the closer ties being developed between PRUs and schools. Summer school activities which are run out of mainstream schools could for example be made available for PRU learners. As our social movements and interactions have become seriously restricted during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the development of online resources for young people should also be made a priority, so that they can maintain relationships away from school. This should include assurances that all pupils have access to adequate online equipment such as laptops and efficient broadband facilities. **In summary, PRU pupils should be supported by the Welsh Government during the summer holidays, to ensure that they can maintain social relationships both physically and virtually.**

### *The Portfolio PRU structure*

Finally, careful consideration needs to be made in relation to the use of Portfolio PRUs. The findings from this thesis highlighted the struggles that existed in terms of how the Portfolio structure was managed. This was evident both through the referral meeting process and the experiences of the setting, which the young people described, and I observed. Having an overly simplified divide between the nurture and behaviour groups inadvertently risked polarising and labelling the pupils into either being ‘at risk’ or presenting ‘a risk’, potentially creating ‘othering’ within the PRU itself. Further clarity is required into why Portfolio PRUs exist in this way, within single sites. If the justification is a financial one, then more should be done to support bespoke provisions which are able to integrate learners together, regardless of the different difficulties they display. This would reduce the risk of further stigmatisation in the pupils’ lives, whilst also improving consistency in the PRU’s aims and approaches to supporting learners. This would provide pupils with a similar and more equal experience of education within the PRU setting. **Pupils should not therefore be divided into different types of provision within the same single site but integrated into the same learning environments.**

## **Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter I have set out the ways in which PRU provision in Wales can be supported and developed in the future. Drawing on my own empirical findings and in line with the latest policy initiatives, it is important that the therapeutic traditions of PRUs are not lost, or reduced, by the introduction of high accountability measures. PRU staff must be enabled and supported further, to carry out their dual aims as hybrid professionals, through the development of strong and meaningful relationships with mainstream schools. As the chapter has highlighted, such an approach could support PRUs in a number of ways, including through: the improvement of transitions in and out of PRUs; an increased level of resources, such as access to equipment, facilities and staff; opportunities for a broader curriculum and out of school activities; further professional development opportunities, leading to improvements in mental

health and wellbeing awareness more generally; and finally, through a reduced sense of marginalisation. It is encouraging that many of the plans set out by the Welsh Government recognise these current concerns, and that they are actively seeking to include PRUs within the curriculum developments taking place (Welsh Government, 2019c).

As we enter a period which is likely to bring up further challenges for the education sector, it is important that PRUs and their learners are appropriately supported so that pupils can have access to an educational experience which meets their needs. Building closer ties with mainstream settings will certainly help in ensuring that pupils' experiences are equivalent to their peers within mainstream schools. Having PRUs on the site of mainstream schools would vastly increase this current development period, certainly in relation to having easier access to resources and staff.

This could help to reduce the need for separate PRU provisions in the future, as schools and PRUs begin to incorporate their staff, resources and approaches for supporting and teaching vulnerable learners. This would include professional development in the areas of wellbeing awareness and creative pedagogy, as part of the reformed holistic approach to schooling (Donaldson, 2015). During this interim period however, staff may need to develop an awareness of how separate provisions can still feed into perceptions of 'othering' and 'dumping grounds'. When pupils become more visible to one another within these different buildings, staff will need to remain responsive to the ways in which they educate both themselves and their learners, around issues of inclusion and respect.

## **Chapter ten: Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Thesis**

At the beginning of this thesis I provided an overview of the main objectives and intentions of this study, describing how during a period of educational policy change in Wales, I was interested in exploring the daily practices and routines of professionals and pupils from one PRU in Wales. As an ethnographic case study which used a variety of qualitative methods with teaching staff and pupils, I wanted to provide an in-depth understanding of how macro-level policy changes have established themselves within the micro-level practices of the PRU. Using my background from youth work I was able to engage in the setting as a participant observer, which allowed me to get close to the daily routines, practices and experiences of both the teachers and the pupils. This provided me with rich empirical findings that could be analysed in order to inform my overall discussion.

There are many different approaches I could have adopted but did not, and my justifications for this study are outlined in the methods chapter. However, some of these are worth reflecting on here. Firstly, one of the aims of the study was to provide a space for young people in the PRU to share their experiences and insights of PRU provision. Whilst only four participants were able to share their views, I had intended and hoped to engage with many more. The challenges entailed in this, however, should not be underestimated for those seeking to carry out similar research. Vulnerable groups of children and young people rightly have many safeguards in place when it comes to gaining their consent for research. Whilst many of these are justified, the difficulties encountered in this study highlighted how, when we seek to listen to the voices of the marginalised, additional barriers aimed at protecting young people can serve to maintain their marginal status, preventing certain voices from being heard.

As researchers we must continue to reflect and creatively explore the ways in which we can overcome such challenges ethically. In doing so this would enable

more marginalised groups of young people to participate in research, supporting them to create their own narratives. The difficulties of achieving this in a school setting in a way which causes as little disruption as possible, should also be recognised as being highly problematic. Having limited periods of time in which to carry out research in schools can ultimately dictate how and when research takes place. Whilst the narratives of young people were restricted in my study, this in no way lessens the meaningful contribution made by those young voices who took part.

Given some of the policy recommendations set out previously, future research in the area of PRU provision could complement these recommendations. For instance, studies could focus more specifically on the roles of staff across a number of PRUs, in order to develop a greater understanding of their professional training needs, the challenges they face, and the difficulties associated with practicing as PRU professionals. Additionally, research which focuses on the experiences of PRU learners during the holiday periods would be hugely beneficial for understanding why these times can be particularly challenging periods for these young people. Exploring the supportive role that summer school activities could have for vulnerable learners from PRUs would also be an important focus for future research.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As the beginning of this chapter reiterated, the thesis aimed to unearth the daily micro-level practices, routines and experiences of staff and pupils from one PRU setting in Wales, in order to answer the four over-arching research questions. These questions explored the enactment of policy changes; the professional roles and identities of staff; and the experiences of pupils. In doing so the study aimed to offer further policy recommendations to improve the experiences of those working and studying in PRUs.

PRUs have regularly been perceived in negative terms, viewed as places of abandonment which fail to give young people an adequate education (The Guardian, 2018). Indeed, reports have highlighted the failings of PRUs when it

comes to supporting pupils' wellbeing and learning needs (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014; McCluskey et al, 2015). Within the educational inclusion narrative there are also concerns about the impact that segregation can have on learners emotionally (Solomon, 2011) and educationally in terms of academic achievement (McCluskey et al, 2015). This raises questions about whether alternative settings are inhibiting a child's right to an adequate education, which meets their needs, and is of a similar standard to mainstream provision (Phtiaka, 1997; McCluskey et al, 2015).

By carrying out an in-depth ethnographic study of one PRU in Wales, this thesis has been able to add a nuanced contribution to these ongoing debates. Through the use of interviews, participant observations and participatory methods I was able to explore the views and perspectives of staff and pupils from various vantage points. In doing so, this research has highlighted the limitations of overly simplistic (and often derogatory) representations of PRUs which are often circulated in politics and the media. It is important to remember that PRUs work with pupils who are facing multiple challenges in their lives, and despite the best efforts of staff, some of these pupils will continue to struggle. Although many challenges existed, the study highlighted how pupils from the nurture side of the provision spoke positively about their experiences, describing the sense of belonging which they felt in the PRU setting. Due to the structure of the PRU, which aimed for a quick turnaround for learners in the behaviour side, it is unlikely that all learners shared this sense of belonging however. In addition, it is important to note that having structural divides such as the one described in this PRU, can inadvertently harm the pupils' experiences and undermine the fundamental principles of belonging and social inclusion. Alternative programmes such as this one should nevertheless be acknowledged for the positive work that they do, in terms of re-engaging young people in learning which mainstream settings have often failed to achieve.

Entering the field of research in an exploratory way, my intentions were to add my own, small contribution to the existing PRU narrative. Whilst there were certainly challenges which existed in the setting, the thesis has also been able to shed light on the positive attributes that PRUs can offer to young people in need.

For many of the pupils I met, this caring and less formal approach to education had aided their wellbeing and recovery. Instilling a therapeutic ethos into all school practices and providing staff with the time to build meaningful relationships with learners as part of a whole school approach, should be encouraged further.

The young people in this PRU had become highly visible to a number of different organisations and services, as the fieldnotes from the referral meetings highlighted. The complex lives that many of these young people experience, however, often become marginalised or de-contextualised within education settings, due to the kinds of data that are collected, namely around academic achievement. It is important therefore, that we do not forget the reasons why some young people might be struggling with their education, and that we continue to recognise the value of caring therapeutic practices in schools. It would also be beneficial to understand how this support can continue for young people during their transitions out of PRUs, as they move into work, training, and further education. This research has shown that young people often speak positively about their experiences of PRU provision. Nevertheless, the effects of these positive experiences can often wane away as many struggle to sustain education, training and work placements beyond the PRU (Wilcock, 2020). Future focused research in this area would therefore be beneficial and could help to maintain the longevity of these positive experiences in their lives.

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# **Appendix One**

## **Interview Schedule for Staff**

### **Introduction**

- Please introduce yourself, including your job title, and how many years you have worked here?

### **The PRU Context**

- What are some of the main aims and objectives of the PRU as an organisation?
- What are some of the typical challenges faced by the PRU and how are these overcome?
- How would you describe your role, is it similar or different to other roles here?

### **Teaching and outcomes**

- What sorts of skills are required to teach in PRUs?
- What are your usual aims in a lesson/session?
- How would you describe your main day to day tasks here and the time you spend on these?
- How would you describe a typical day here?
- How did you become a PRU teacher?

### **Young people**

- What are some of the typical needs of the young people here?
- What sorts of relationships exist between teachers and pupils?
- In what ways do you think the young people would describe this setting?

### **Finally**

- What works well in PRU provision?
- What do you like / dislike about the job?
- What attracted you to this sort of work?
- Do you feel your role has changed in any way during your time here?

## **Appendix Two**

### **Information sheet for young people and parents/guardians**

#### **Who is doing the research and what is it about?**

My name is Phil Smith. The research will be part of a PhD degree course that I'm doing at Cardiff University. The research is about Pupil Referral Units and as part of the study I need to find out what young people think about them, by collecting some of the experiences they have had. I'd really like you to take part in my research.

#### **Why do you want to talk to me?**

I think it is very important to make sure that young people are involved in research when it is relevant to their lives. You may have some important knowledge or experiences that will help us to understand what it is like to attend a Pupil Referral Unit.

#### **How long will it take and where will the research be done?**

There are lots of activities that you can choose to take part in over the next few weeks. You can do as many or as few as you like. Some can be done on your own in your spare time if you like, whilst others will take place in the PRU during one of your wellbeing classes on a Thursday.

At the end of the sessions I might talk to you one-to-one, to make sure I understand what you have done and said in the activities. This could take up to 30 minutes. If you want to, you can bring a friend with you or a teacher if that would make you feel more comfortable about taking part.

I'll also be keeping notes about things I observe in the schooling day, both during classes and at break times.

### **Will people know I took part?**

Other people in the group will know you have taken part, but you don't have to show anyone apart from me what you have done in the activities. And nobody will know apart from me, what you have said. I will also make sure that no one can be identified, using made up names for each participant.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You can change your mind at any time you like, this includes both during collecting the data and after you have taken part. Just let me know and I can simply remove all the information you have provided from the study.

### **What will happen to the information?**

I will write up the information you have provided to me. You can then read it to see if there's anything else you want to include, or to take something out. If you have made something during the research like a poem or a drawing, these will be kept safely locked up with all my other research findings until I've finished the study. At the end I can give it back to you if you want, or destroy it.

If you do tell me anything during the research that could be harmful to you or other people, I have to pass this information on to the relevant people, just like your teachers would. I will let you know if I have to do this.

### **Then what happens?**

At the end I'll be writing up a PhD 'thesis'. This is a large piece of coursework all about what you and others have helped me to find out.

If you want to talk to me at any point about the research or have any questions you can contact me through the staff at the PRU.

If you have problems with how the research was done you can also speak to one of my supervisors instead –

Professor Andy Pithouse: [Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk) or

Dr Mark Connolly: [ConnollyM4@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ConnollyM4@cardiff.ac.uk)

Thanks,

Phil

## **Information sheet for staff**

### **Who is doing the research and what is it about?**

My name is Phil Smith. The research will be part of a PhD degree course that I'm doing at Cardiff University. The research is about Pupil Referral Units and as part of the study I need to find out how staff make sense of their working role, and how daily activities are carried out.

### **Why do you want to talk to me?**

It is likely that you will have some important knowledge and experiences that will help to inform our understandings of Pupil Referral Units.

### **How long will it take and where will the research be done?**

The interviews will only take around 30 minutes to complete, and will be completed at a time and place that is most convenient for you. I'll also be keeping notes about things I observe in the schooling day, both during classes and at break times.

### **Will people know I took part?**

Other people at the PRU may know you've taken part, but I will be making sure that no one can be identified from the data I use, also using pseudonyms for each participant.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You can change your mind at any time you like, this includes both during collecting the data and after you have taken part. Just let me

know and I can simply remove all the information you have provided from the study.

### **What will happen to the information?**

All the information you provide will be confidentially stored electronically on a University computer that only I have access to.

### **Then what happens?**

At the end I'll be writing up a PhD 'thesis' and may use some of the information you have provided during the interview. If you want to talk to me at any point about the research or have any questions you can contact me through the Bridge Alternative Provision staff.

If you have problems with how the research was done you can also speak to one of my supervisors instead –

Professor Andy Pithouse: [Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk) or

Dr Mark Connolly: [ConnollyM4@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ConnollyM4@cardiff.ac.uk)

Thanks for your support,

Phil Smith

## **Appendix Three**

### **Research consent form for pupils and staff**

By signing the below form I give my consent to take part in Phil Smith's PhD research about Pupil Referral Units and the experiences of young people and staff.

Before signing this form I

- have read the information sheet and understand what the research is about
- understand that I can withdraw from any part of the research at any time
- have been given a name of someone I can contact if I have any problems about any of the research
- understand that full anonymity is guaranteed – I will not be identifiable from the information I provide in the research

Name of young person.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Name of parent/guardian (if required).....

Signature.....

Date.....

## Appendix Four

(some sections of this form have been removed to ensure confidentiality)

### Referral Form

It is essential that this form is completed with all of the supporting evidence including ~~Behaviour~~ and Wellbeing Team involvement before the case is discussed. We will not consider the referral of any young people who are not on a school roll.

#### **COMPLETED FORMS SHOULD BE FORWARDED TO:-**

Is this application for        with CAMHS involvement?

SA

SA+

Statemented

#### **SECTION A TO BE COMPLETED BY OR WITH THE PARENTS:**

##### **SECTION A – PUPIL DETAILS:**

1. Name:
2. D.O.B
3. National Curriculum Year:  LAC
4. School:
5. Name (s) of Parents:
6. Address:
7. Postcode:
8. Tel No Home:
9. Tel No Mobile:

#### **SECTION A CONTINUED:**

If the child does not live with parents please give details of those with whom the child lives.

10. Name:	<input type="text"/>
11. Address:	<input type="text"/>
12. Postcode	<input type="text"/>
13. Tel No Home:	<input type="text"/>
14. Tel No Mobile:	<input type="text"/>
15. Relationship:	<input type="text"/>
(e.g. Foster Carer, Grandparents etc)	

**SECTION B TO BE COMPLETED BY OR WITH THE PARENTS PUPIL DETAILS:**

**SECTION B – SCHOOL DETAILS:**

1. Present school:
2. Date admitted:
3. If not a local authority school please provide the address and telephone number:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide the following information:**

4. Reason(s) for requesting placement  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Does your child have a statement of Special Educational Needs? YES/ NO

**SECTION B \_CONTINUED:**

6. Does your child have any health/ medical problems or issues? YES/ NO  
(If yes, please provide details and attach evidence)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Language spoken at home: \_\_\_\_\_

8. English as an Additional Language – does your child need help with English Language:  
No

9. Please detail significant events that may have affected your child's education:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. General Comments from Parents:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print: \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Guardian)

**Criteria Checklist must be completed and attached.**

**(ABSENCE OF INFORMATION WILL DELAY THE PROCESS OF ADMISSION)**

**Note: All ticked boxes must have reports attached in order for the referral to be accepted.**

**Evidence of Multi-Agency Involvement**

Documentation	Attached (Tick box)	Original Date	Specialist Contact Name
Involvement of Educational Psychologist			
Involvement of Behaviour and Wellbeing Team			
Involvement of CAMHS			
Involvement of Social Services			
Other (specify)			

**Evidence of Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties**

Documentation	Attached (Tick box)	Original Date	Specialist Contact Name
IBP/IEP/PSP/PEP/ (delete if not included)			
Risk assessment – essential			

**Evidence of Strategies/Interventions tried**

Documentation	Current Y or N	Date Completed	Specialist Contact Name
Other (specify)			

**Evidence relating to abilities and attainments: This section must be completed**

**Evidence of Strategies/Interventions tried continued/...**

**Additional comments on interventions:**

Documentation	Levels
<b>KS2 &amp; KS3</b> .....	
<b>Attainment Levels</b> Current Spelling Age ..... Current Reading Age .....	
CAT/FFT/Other (Please specify)	

Any Other Information Included:

**PREVIOUS INTERVENTIONS:**

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(Please attach as previously indicated on page 6 copies of current and most recently completed Individual Educational Plan targets for learning or behaviour and copies of the concurrent records of the child's responses to them).

**SCHOOL ACTION PLUS REVIEW DETAILS**

Please include information on the following:

- Last review date .....

**BEHAVIOUR & WELLBEING SUPPORT SERVICE**

This section must be completed by a member of the Behaviour and Well Being Team in your locality. This referral will not be discussed unless there is a written report from the Specialist Team, signed and dated.

Name of Pupil		DOB
School		Year group
Date and Visit/s and Venue		

**Reason for Involvement****Observations****Information from Parents/Carers****Strategies/IBP Targets Agreed****Review of Strategies/IBP Targets****Other information (e.g. involvement of other agencies, child view, current**

educational arrangements)

**Plan details**

Signed:	
Name:	
Behaviour and Wellbeing Team Member:	Locality:
Date:	

All schools need advice from their EP when referring to specialist provision.  
There needs to be evidence of this.

Name of Referrer ..... School .....

Date .....