

An interpretative analysis of parents' and
pupils' experiences of permanent
exclusion and placement in a pupil
referral unit: Implications for successful
reintegration

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to consider how parents' and pupils' make sense of their lived experience of permanent exclusion and highlight any arising key messages for professional practice, in terms of both retaining these pupils in mainstream schools and re-integrating them into a new mainstream school after exclusion.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with six parents of pupils who attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) within the local authority. The children of these parents who had been excluded were also interviewed. An additional focus group was also conducted with staff at the PRU; in this focus group the research themes were shared and PRU staff were asked to reflect on their role in response to the themes.

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was applied to the generated data from the semi structured interviews and focus group. The significant themes emerging from the analysis of the pupils', parents' and PRU staff accounts highlighted that in some mainstream schools, school systems are failing pupils, and that what these pupils actually need is a protective nurturing environment. Another significant theme shared by Pupils' and PRU staff accounts draws attention to the anticipation of change for the young person and the importance of ensuring a successful re-integration back into mainstream school. The role of parents in the exclusion process was also seen as a central theme to both parents and the PRU staff.

The results are discussed in light of improving school systems to engender a more inclusive ethos. The central importance of positive relationships and interactional patterns between teachers' and pupils' within school is also discussed. Recommendations are provided for all professionals with the hope that this might lead to more effective practice.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The content of this thesis relates to the lived experiences of exclusion from the viewpoint of parents' and pupils'.

The structure of the thesis will guide the reader as follows:

- a critical literature review reflecting the theoretical underpinnings of the research
- the rationale for the adopted methodological approaches
- the procedures followed for data collection
- the results that were obtained
- a discussion of the results, relating to theory
- future implications of the research for practice and research and the limitations of the research

The research comprises a number of areas of professional interest:

- working with pupils described as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)
- working with pupils who are risk of exclusion
- working in secondary schools at an organisational level
- the work of SEBD specialist provisions and PRUs

A number of factors have contributed to my interest in this particular area of research. In my previous career as a primary school teacher, and inclusion manager, in a large junior school I had experience of working with many pupils described as having SEBD (often pupils who had been excluded from previous schools). Due to the caring and inclusive ethos within the school these pupils' needs were met and these pupils had a mostly successful junior school experience. However, having close links with the local secondary school, it was always saddening to hear that these pupils did not always have the same success at secondary school. This led me to question how these pupils could function well within a junior school setting but not so within the secondary school.

More recently, since undergoing doctorate training as an educational psychologist, I have become increasingly interested in working alongside secondary schools in improving their support for pupils who are at risk from, or have been previously excluded. I have also become increasingly interested in how we can successfully engage parents of pupils who are described as having SEBD, as in my work I have often felt that these parents were marginalised compared with parents of children with other Special Educational Needs (SEN).

This is also a relevant area to address in the local authority in which I work as the procedures and provision for permanently excluded pupils are undergoing major changes. The key stage three PRU in which this research was undertaken is undergoing many changes, one of which is to become a 'short stay school'. Consequently, the staff will have more of a role in preparing both pupils and new schools for the reintegration. The aim of this research was to explore how listening to and understanding the parents' and pupils' experiences of exclusion may help professionals to reflect on how best to support excluded pupils in their reintegration back into school.

This study recognises that the perspectives, experiences and position of the researcher are a crucial element of the research. As a trained teacher and trainee educational psychologist, with experience of working with pupils who have been excluded and their families, this research touches upon important aspects of both my personal and professional life. An interpretative research method was, therefore, selected for this study. Based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an interpretative account of the experiences of parents' and their children were explored. Semi structured interviews were employed to generate shared understandings. Themes arising from these interpretative accounts were shared with a group of professionals working at the PRU in a focus group in order to gain further insight into their experiences and perceptions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the current literature pertaining to the subject of this study. The reader should be aware that in line with interpretative phenomenological analysis, the selected methodology, the literature review has been written before, during and after the analysis of the generated data.

The first section of this review will reveal current data about exclusion trends. Section two will give consideration to what may be the reasons behind why schools may decide to exclude pupils. Section three will examine pupils' experiences of exclusion and section four will examine parents' experiences of exclusion. Section five will draw together some conclusions around the complexity of issues surrounding exclusion.

The research aims of this study shall then be outlined.

Section one – Setting the scene

The high numbers of pupils who are excluded from school, either on a temporary or permanent basis, and who present challenging behaviour present a challenge to the United Kingdom government's inclusion agenda. Williamson and Cullingford (2003) note that significant numbers of young people appear to experience difficulties in school and that there has been an increase in the rates of truancy, exclusion and school dropout and a corresponding increase in policies and publications aimed at alleviating these problems.

Data from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF 2009a) shows that in England there were 81300 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and special schools in 2007/08; this represents 0.11% of the number of pupils in schools. Of these permanent exclusions, 86% were from secondary schools, 12% were from primary schools and 2% were from special schools.

Who is most likely to be excluded?

2007/2008 data shows that the permanent exclusion rate for boys was three and a half times higher than that for girls, this ratio has remained stable for the past five years with boys representing approximately 78% of the total number of permanent exclusions in England. Data shows that the most common point for both sexes to be excluded is at ages 13-14; approximately 52% of all permanent exclusions were of pupils of this age.

Statistics show that pupils with SEN (both with and without statements) are over eight times more likely to be permanently excluded than pupils with no SEN. In 2007/08, 33 in every 10,000 pupils with statements of SEN and 38 in every 10,000 pupils with SEN without statements were permanently excluded from school. This compares with 4 in every 10,000 pupils with no SEN.

OFSTED (1996) produced a list of risk factors associated with disruption and leading to exclusion. These were:

- family breakdown
- time in care/social work involvement
- multiple moves/disruption
- disability/bereavement
- violence/abuse
- major accident/incident
- special educational needs
- previous exclusions
- no member of household in paid work
- poor basic skills
- limited aspirations and opportunities
- poor relationships
- peer pressure to behave in ways likely to conflict with authority

However, Parsons (1999) believes that an overemphasis on locating the causes and solutions of exclusion at the child or family level leads to neglect of the evidence for causes located at the policy and institutional level. Therefore,

there is also a need to look closely at the school environment in which the pupil is situated.

Section two - What leads to schools excluding pupils?

Harris et al (2006) state that pupils identified as having 'social emotional problems' or being 'disaffected' pose a significant challenge to schools having an inclusive education system. In 2007/08 (DCSF, 2009a) the most common reason for exclusion (both permanent and fixed period) was persistent disruptive behaviour. 11 per cent of permanent exclusions were due to physical assault against an adult.

Some attempts have been made to consider children's problems in school from a systems perspective (Sutoris, 2000). Dowling and Osborne (1985) state that a 'systems' way of thinking refers to a view of individual behaviour which takes account of the context in which it occurs. Therefore, the behaviour of one part of the system is seen as affecting and being affected by, the behaviour of another part. This implies a circular causality as opposed to a linear model which looks for causes in order to explain effects (for example, the medical model). General systems theory, proposed by Von Bertalanffy (1968), asserts that all living systems are maintained through the interaction of their constituent parts. He believed that an understanding of the system could be gained by looking at the 'transactional processes' between different parts of the system. Reed and Palmer (1972) state that, in order to survive and grow, an open system depends upon the exchange of energy, people, materials and information with its environment. Sutoris (2000) believes that pupils and schools can be seen as open systems.

De Pear (1995) stressed the importance of considering the effect of the context (the systems within school) on the pupil, as well as difficulties within the pupil's personal situation. Cole (1998, p115) suggests that, 'school organisational style and resulting ethos can contribute to the creation of behaviour problems'. Mayer (2001) looked at organisational characteristics that contribute to constructions of an aversive school environment,

- over reliance on punitive disciplinary practices
- unclear rules tied to consequences that do not make sense as an appropriate response to a misbehaviour
- Inconsistency in leadership, administrative structure and rules
- poor academic performance and failure
- inappropriate use of behaviour management strategies
- insensitive and inappropriate recognition of socio-cultural differences
- absence of pupil involvement

Cooper et al (2000) present a series of dilemmas, which hinder the development of an inclusive school environment and have an effect on the prevention and management of school exclusion.

Dilemma number one – the rights and needs of the *individual* opposed to the rights and needs of the *collective*. It has been argued by OFSTED (2005) that the disruptive behaviour of some pupils disrupts other pupils' education as well as their own. There is an argument that other pupils in the school have a right to a disruption free education and this argument is often used to justify the exclusion of a pupil who exhibits challenging behaviour. However, Hayden and Dunne (2001) believe that most excluded pupils need sympathetic social support and guidance about appropriate social behaviour; therefore, it is questionable whether exclusion meets the rights and needs of the individual. The requirements of the National Curriculum, the government's Standards Agenda and the demands of the OFSTED inspection framework can also be seen as driving factors for institutions to meet the needs of the *collective*. Watkins (1999, p.74) believes that the government's standards agenda has created, what he calls, 'frightened organisations'. In such organisations, the teachers fear of failure leads to didactic, content driven classroom practices where stressed teachers and vulnerable children are unable to cope with the demands placed on them, inevitably leading to the creation of negative relations between the two. OFSTED inspections are another source of stress for schools as pupil behaviour is seen as an indicator of a successful school. Cooper (1993) states that it is an accepted belief that the level of 'problem behaviour' in

a school is a factor that can be used to judge the ethos of the school. Pupils who show challenging behaviour are a difficulty for teachers during such inspections as poor pupil behaviour and persistent disruption from a minority of pupils can have a damaging effect on the overall judgements made about a school. In addition, exclusion data can be important to consider when looking at the performance of a school as it provides hard evidence that shows how a school deals with its most challenging pupils.

The second dilemma identified by Cooper et al (2000) is the tension between responsibility for *student* well-being and responsibility for *staff* well-being. An effect of the increased focus on standards is that there has been an associated workload burden on teachers (Muschamp et al, 1992). This has in turn decreased the amount of time teachers have to devote to pastoral issues. Searle (1996) believes that,

Time and energy previously devoted to young people's welfare, which might have made a significant difference in turning around disaffected behaviour or changing negative attitudes and therefore have prevented conduct leading to exclusion, is being usurped and lost at a time when it is needed more than ever.
(Searle, 1996 p.45)

Pye (1988) also notes that teachers worry about controlling large classes and as a result become stressed and insecure. He believes this insecurity leads to less effective interaction with the pupils. This insecurity may be intensified further if teachers have to deal with pupils with particularly challenging behaviour within a large class. Ramvi (2010) believes that the role of teacher demands considerable personal investment, and that a teacher's self-image is highly dependent on their relationship with pupils. Ramvi suggests that there are often parallel processes of transference-countertransference between teachers and pupils with regard to anxiety. If teachers are not attuned to recognising anxiety in themselves and pupils, then they will not be able to offer containment for the pupil and may behave in a punishing manner, possibly leading to a complete breakdown of relationship between the teacher and pupil.

The revised OFSTED evaluation schedule for schools (OFSTED, 2011) has more of a focus on pupils' emotional health and well-being in all areas of judgements than previous schedules. This will hopefully bring the pastoral care of pupils to the forefront of education rather than being an 'add on' that is secondary to levels of attainment. It will be interesting to see what effect this shift has in the future on improving relationships between teachers and the more vulnerable children.

The third dilemma identified by Cooper et al (2000) is the issue between the need for pupil *correction* and the need for pupil *understanding*. OFSTED (1996) advises on what good behaviour policies should incorporate – implications set out in clear language, clear expectations for staff and students, clearly stated sanctions and rewards, consistent implementation by all staff and an agreement that it is seen and supported by parents. However, Lloyd-Smith and Dwyfor Davies (1995) argue that if there is a tendency to focus on the mechanisms of managing behaviour (policies, sanctions), this may distract attention from the more vulnerable pupils whose needs and circumstances are diverse, leaving teachers with a poor understanding of these pupils.

Jull (2008) makes a comparison between pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and children with learning difficulties. She makes the interesting point that for pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties, the externalisation of their difficulties (antisocial or disruptive behaviour) leads them to be at risk of punitive measures or even exclusion because their behaviour weakens the positive, safe school environment that the teachers are trying to create. In comparison, children with a specific learning difficulty, who experience repeated difficulty with reading would not be punished but would have a systematic assessment of their needs, which would lead to a modified Individual Education Programme (IEP). This highlights that for pupils who experience social and emotional problems the focus can often be on correcting the externalising behaviours through punitive measures, rather than understanding the pupil and attempting to find ways to meet their needs.

Parsons (2005) believes that another problem is society's willingness to reject

children without looking at the causation of the pupils' behaviours within the context of pupil-institution interactional effects. Maag (2004) suggested that pupils whose social norms poorly fit with the ethos of the school are at risk of problem behaviour and possible consequent exclusions. Maag believes that some children are unable to adapt to the schools cultural norms and therefore resist the structures and normative values of the school by displaying antisocial or disruptive behaviours. Ogden (2001) described disruptive and/or antisocial behaviours, for some pupils, as adaptive – they are the manifestation of a pupil's response to a threatening environment. Ogden believes that when a pupil displays externalising behaviour it is their way of coping with school as a social situation. This is linked to the idea of pupils taking a role within school (Sutoris, 2000). Pupils who find it difficult to take up their role within a school system because the emotional demands on them are too great, may avoid taking a role, and therefore, an attachment to school. Luxmore (2006) also notes that some pupils find it difficult to 'attach' themselves to school and that because of this they may be incapable of learning as their anxiety is too great. This idea is linked to Sternberg's (1997) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, which suggests that in aversive environmental conditions there are limited behavioural responses for the individual. The three options are:

- adapt to an existing environment by a person changing their beliefs about their needs
- altering an existing environment to better coincide with a person's current needs
- Opting out of a poor fit environment in favour of a more optimal setting where possible.

Maag (2004) observed that many pupils who are either incapable of, or refuse to modify their behaviour to fit their ecological niche, are likely to be labelled as having emotional and behaviour difficulties. These pupils are then likely to opt out, displaying off task or disruptive behaviour. For these children it is important that schools ensure that conditions in the classroom minimise rather than promote behavioural problems, which requires an alteration of the existing environment in order to meet the pupils' needs.

Section three – Pupils' experiences of exclusion – what are their views on the factors that influence them to behave in a way that leads to exclusion?

Why is it important to find out pupils' views?

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), endorsed by the UK government in 1991, outlined a number of important rights for children, and the updated Special Educational Needs Code of practice (DfES, 2001: 3.1, 3.6, 3.9) has a whole chapter dedicated to the participation of pupils with SEN in procedures and practices used to address their needs.

According to Fielding and Bragg (2003), the benefits to pupils of such involvement are:

- improved academic, communication and community skills amongst pupils, as well as an increased sense of agency, motivation and engagement with schools affairs;
- valuable insights for teachers which can lead to improved practice and better relationships with their pupils;
- important feedback for schools, which can improve teaching and learning throughout the whole school.

De Pear and Garner (1996) state that the approach of gaining the views of pupils who have been excluded has been absent in much of the literature and the information gap has been frequently noted. Davies (2005) also highlights that there have been many studies about mainstream children's voice but relatively few specifically about or with pupils described as having SEBD. Wyness (2006) believes that opportunities for pupil empowerment are often compromised within existing systems that are determined by adults. Davies (2005) believes that these difficulties are magnified in institutions for pupils described as having SEBD; as such provision is centred on firm boundaries, and systematic structures and routines that are controlled by adults. Lewis and Burman (2008) also believe that many mainstream teachers overtly or covertly resist attempts at pupil empowerment as they are uncertain about allowing power and control to be given to pupils. Again, these concerns will be

exacerbated when teachers are working with pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour that is difficult to manage (Sellman, 2009). Therefore, for pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion or who have been excluded and are being educated in a separate unit, it seems unlikely that their voices will be heard. Cooper (2006) makes the case that it is important for all pupils views to be heard, especially those described as having SEBD, as it is their entitlement and because they have important things to say about the appropriateness of the curriculum and the effectiveness of different teaching styles. In addition, the little research that has been undertaken on the perspectives of this group suggests they easily reproduce the dominant cultural voice that their difficulties are innate and perhaps, even beyond their control (Cooper and Shea, 1998). This is a misconception that needs to be explored. Sellman (2009) believes that if these pupils are given a chance, they could be very articulate about their experiences and raise a number of critical issues and questions relevant to a school's practice. Wise (2000) hoped that her research into the unique views of pupils described as having SEBD would offer readers an opportunity to better understand and increase their respect for these pupils. Her hope was that such an understanding may lead to more appropriate and successful support in schools.

Pupil's views of their exclusion

Hayden and Dunne (2001) asked pupils how they felt about being excluded, their feelings varied, but the most common feelings were anger or sadness. They found that a pupil's feelings about being excluded depended to a large extent on whether they perceived the exclusion to be fair.

Kinder et al (1996) found that the pupils themselves identified the following factors, related to school context, as a cause for their disruption (in rank order);

- the influence of friends and peers
- relationships with teachers
- the content and delivery of the curriculum
- bullying
- the classroom context (individual learning support and classroom

management)

- problems arising from their own personality or learning abilities

I will now consider some of these factors in more detail.

Pupil-teacher relationships

Research shows that the issue of lack of respect by school staff was a common grievance expressed by pupils who had been excluded (Williamson and Cullingford, 2003, John, 1996). John (1996) believes that lack of respect by teachers reinforces the low self-esteem of pupils and can make them feel like their maturity is being underestimated.

John (1996) found that pupils felt that fairness was an issue as they did not feel they were being listened to. Hayden and Dunne (2001) found that 59% of pupils in their study perceived their exclusion as being unfair. The pupils illustrated that they felt they were treated differently to other pupils, that they did not do what they were said to have done or that there was no evidence to prove what they were accused of. Munn et al (2000) found that pupils they interviewed spoke out about having been singled out by teachers for having a bad reputation. They found that the pupil's sense of injustice was even greater when this bad reputation was not gained personally but as a result of having older siblings who had behavioural issues. Mayer (2001) found evidence for teachers' preferential treatment of certain students as results showed that pupils identified with a SEN, particularly SEBD, encounter disapproving statements from their teachers at a ratio of 15:1. Van Acker and Talbot (1999) also found that teachers were seven times more likely to interact negatively with students identified by teachers as disruptive. This shows that these pupils' feelings of unfairness were not unfounded. This may not be something that teachers are aware of but they need to have an understanding of their preconceptions of certain pupils and attempt to not let these influence how they interact with the child. It is important to note that although unfairness is a 'perception' of these pupils, their teachers may have a different view of this. However, it is how these pupils experience the world and it will, therefore, affect the way they respond and behave. This is consistent with a phenomenological perspective; for example Apter (1981, p.176) suggests that, 'phenomenological psychology

becomes the study of the way in which the individual himself understands what he is doing and how he feels about it'.

Wise (2000) suggests that pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties may have a heightened sense of injustice and may respond quickly to any indication that they are being treated differently to others. Wise believes that this acute awareness to unfairness may be a result of them already feeling insecure and different and being mistrustful of adults as a result of prior experiences. In a phenomenological sense this would be described as a pupils 'natural attitude' (Husserl, 1936); that the pupils have preconceptions about the situation and the teachers concerned and may anticipate particular outcomes.

Wise (2000) also found that consistency in approach was important for pupils; she described how some pupils were told off for not handing in their homework but noticed that other pupils were not told off for the same offence. Skiba and Peterson (2000) believe that inconsistent and overly harsh disciplinary procedures are not only ineffective in the short term but do little to address the long term problem of negative behavioural routes, and may even contribute to the perpetuation and escalation of future behaviour problems.

Significant relationships

Munn et al (2000) found that pupils were consistent in describing 'bad' teachers as those who shouted and threatened, and 'good' teachers as those who had good interpersonal relations, who listened and talked to them, who took time to explain work and who were strict (but only in relation to work, not disciplinary systems). Five pupils in this study also spoke about how they had enjoyed primary school more than secondary because of the better relationship they had had with the teachers there. Research has shown the importance of the role of teacher-pupil relationships in fostering attachment to school and academic success (Cooper, 2006, Smith 2006). Maintaining teacher-pupil relationships may be even more important for pupils who display emotional and behavioural difficulties. Wise (2000) found that a number of pupils in her study emphasised the importance of positive relationships with one particular

teacher or other adult in the school. Wise believed the essence of a successful and supportive relationship in the school was one that involved an offer of time and the chance to talk on an individual basis. She found that the pupils she interviewed simply wanted their teachers to listen to them and get to know them better. Harris et al (2006) investigated the narratives of pupils who after a permanent exclusion had transferred to a new school to make a fresh start. These pupils pointed to the importance of them being welcomed and treated with care and respect by staff at their new school. These pupils felt special and valued by certain teachers at their new school as a result of interventions to integrate them successfully into the school. Harris et al state that these interventions addressed a need for individual attention and care. According to Rogers (1983), it is this positive regard and care from significant others which enables a pupil to develop a healthy self-regard. For these pupils knowing that someone thinks they matter makes a real difference.

The academic learning environment

The link between learning difficulties and behaviour problems is widely accepted (DfEE, 1999) although it is often difficult to unpick the extent to which one is affecting the other. Harris et al (2006) found that ten out of fourteen of the pupils they interviewed experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum and that these difficulties contributed to their feeling of disaffection. They found that pupils' comments suggested that even if a learning difficulty wasn't the primary contributor to behaviour problems, it was important to them that their academic progress was supported. Castle and Parsons (1997) believe that pupils' self-esteem is linked to their success and that repeated failure is demoralising. They suggest that pupils may prefer to hide this behind a façade of disruption.

Behaviour policies – rules, sanctions and rewards

Williamson and Cullingford (2003) found that one of the most common themes to emerge from pupils was a dislike of school rules and the ways in which they were enforced. Many pupils felt that some rules were 'petty' or inappropriate. Cullingford (1999) found that a number of male students found the ways in which teachers demonstrate their authority too

oppressive to manage. Pupils recognised the need for some rules, for example, against theft or aggressive behaviour (Williamson and Cullingford, 2003, Smetana and Bitz, 1996), however, pupils were against rules regarding uniform and personal possessions.

Harris et al (2006) noted that a pupil they interviewed associated better teaching with the consistent use of a clearly defined behaviour management policy for the whole school. This is consistent with recent literature which suggests that effective behaviour policies provide consistent, predictable, clear boundaries which allow pupils to develop a 'secure base' and develop enough self-support to manage their levels of anxiety and therefore prevent the externalisation of emotional difficulties through disruptive behaviour. Kinder et al (1996) also found that pupils put suitable sanctions and rewards among their own top ranking solutions to disruptive behaviour. Therefore, it is clear that, although certain rules may be rejected and may cause difficulties between pupils and teachers, most pupils enjoy the security of a well thought out and implemented whole school behaviour management policy. Most difficulties seem to arise when pupils perceive unfairness and inconsistency in the systems as discussed earlier.

Threats to autonomy

Williamson and Cullingford (2003, p.314) found that pupils perceived school as, 'a deindividualising institution with an emphasis on conformity and uniformity'.

They believed that teachers were more concerned about adhering to rules than fostering the development of individuals. Williamson and Cullingford (2003) believe that for these young people,

...the 'self' is actually fractured from the experience of learning and the classroom is presented as a place of control and acquiescence rather than one of discovery, creativity and self-development.

(Williamson and Cullingford, 2003 p.314)

Research suggests that independence and individuality is central to a sense of well-being and adjustment for young people (Magen, 1998, Glatzer, 2000), however, the educational environment for some pupils does not seem to match their developmental needs and self-image (Eccles et al, 1993). Therefore, for some pupils, not feeling valued as an individual may lead to unhappiness in school and the potential to externalise this feeling by displaying challenging behaviour.

Effects of exclusion on pupils

Exclusion may solve the 'problem' for the school, but what are the consequences for the excluded pupils? John (1996) found that excluded pupils had low self-esteem, even though many of them presented a front of self-confidence or even arrogance. People with low self-esteem find it difficult to attempt new ways of behaving; they will continue to display unhelpful patterns of behaviour, in order to behave in a way which is consistent with their poor self-image (Maines and Robinson, 1998). This then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy with adults responding to the negative behaviour, rather than the pupil's need. The pupil will then internalise the negative messages people around are giving them and continue to believe that they are of no value (Mearns and Thorn, 1988). This is important for pupils labelled as 'disruptive' or 'antisocial' because they do not appear to feel valued by significant adults in school, therefore feeling a lack of respect and then consequently behaving in a challenging manner will only reinforce their low self-esteem. Research into resilience promoting classrooms has shown that, conversely, students with a sense of belonging and community are more likely to develop and engage in pro-social behaviours, and to have a sense of competence (Battistich et al, 1997). Cefai (2007) believes this process takes place because of the satisfaction of pupils' basic psychological needs, namely, caring relationships, meaningful participation, high expectations and shared norms.

Cooper (2006) believes that another consequence of exclusion is further hindrance to already poor educational progress. Other, more long term

consequences are pupils being put at risk of being involved in criminal offences, or being put in danger, such as through prostitution (Parsons et al, 1994, Stirling, 1992).

Section four – Parents’ experiences of exclusion

The importance of gaining parents’ views

Most research on the subject of exclusion from mainstream schools has focused on the excluding school or excluded pupil. However, the consequences of exclusion extend beyond these immediate experiences. McDonald and Thomas (2003) believe the experience of parents is essential as they are partners in the process, however, their story is often either not told or not heard. Lucyshyn et al (2002) state that the voices of parents often remain unheard, despite the fact that they are seen as playing a valuable role as their child's most important teacher. Brantlinger et al (2005) also note that a missing voice when trying to understand children with challenging behaviours and the experience of their families is the voice of the family connected to the child. Osher, Quinn and Hanley (2002) also found that schools have difficulties in supporting involvement of parents of children described as having SEBD. Therefore, parents’ involvement in the process and consequent views on their experiences of exclusion are important in helping schools to consider their practices and procedures around exclusion.

Parents’ views of the reasons underlying their child's exclusion

Hayden and Dunne (2001, p.25) explored parents’ perceptions of the reasons that might underlie their child's exclusion. When looking at reasons related to the school, they found the following reasons were cited (in rank order):

- the school being concerned about its image/league tables
- school views their child as being disruptive
- a personality clash with a teacher
- school views their child as aggressive

- child was used as a scapegoat
- other parents made complaints about their child
- school were attempting to get a statutory assessment for their child.

When the parents were asked about reasons related to their child's peer group, 86% of parents cited peer relationships as an underlying factor relating to exclusion, bullying being the most frequently cited peer group factor (61%). McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that one of the parents they interviewed attributed their child's exclusion to other pupils in school. This child had been picked on in mainstream school and in the pupil referral unit (PRU) he was referred to. This parent believed that teachers did not do enough to protect their child or represent their views in the conflict. Parents may believe that because of their child's reputation, teachers may believe other children's views at the expense of their child.

When Hayden and Dunne (2001, p.26) asked the parents about reasons related to their individual child and their needs, they found the following reasons were cited (in rank order);

- child's attitude in school
- child's special educational needs are not adequately met
- child having difficulties with the work they are set.

Hayden and Dunne did however also find that many parents did see issues related to the home, or themselves as parents as a possible reason underlying their child's exclusion.

Minor offences – unfairness on the part of the school

Munn et al (2000) found that many parents were supportive of the school, and accepted that exclusion was necessary when something serious had happened. They, like pupils when interviewed, made the distinction between serious offences where exclusion was justified and exclusion for 'silly things'. McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that five of the parents they interviewed believed their children were excluded for minor offences that could have been dealt with effectively within school. They thought that the reasons their children were excluded were a culmination of petty

misbehaviours that had built up over a period of time. However, Munn et al (2000) found that some parents they interviewed did understand that incidents that may seem 'petty' in themselves may have a cumulative effect over time, which may result in more serious disruption to the work of a whole class.

McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that all the parents attributed at least some blame to school for their child's misbehaviour and consequent exclusion. One parent believed that her son was treated in an unfair manner that did more harm than good. What is clear from these insights is that there is not a shared understanding of incidents between parents and school staff, parents often believing that schools are blowing up incidents out of proportion. This leads to the question of how well schools are communicating with parents, and how much of parents knowledge of what has happened in school is gained by them speaking to their children, rather than being informed by school.

McDonald and Thomas (2003, p.112) found that the attitude of teachers towards pupils was an important factor. They found that two of the parents they interviewed believed that 'vindictive teachers' played a part in their child's exclusion. They felt that teachers had made it clear that they did not like their children and had no time for them. Another parent believed that teachers contributed to their son's behaviour by the way they taught lessons and handled behaviour.

Frustration with the system – a sense of powerlessness and anger

Many parents commented on their anger and frustration at the exclusion process, they were angry with the way they were treated and confused about what was happening with their child's education (Munn et al, 2000, McDonald and Thomas, 2003). A common complaint was that referrals to PRUs took a long time and that parents did not know what to do with their child or who to contact. McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that one set of parents revealed that their son had lost a year of schooling due to the school being ineffective in arranging meetings and organising support. Munn et al (2000) found that parents were concerned that their children

were likely to have missed a lot of education and confused by the lack of priority given to reintegration by senior education officials. Parents were angry that schools had not sent the pupil work home to do and saw the exclusion as a holiday for the pupil since they had nothing to do.

Meetings

Many parents in McDonald and Thomas' (2003) research expressed their dissatisfaction with meetings leading up to and about their child's exclusion. One parent described the exclusion meetings as very negative experiences, especially for their son. This parent believed that these meetings were problem focused and did not make any effort to develop any form of action plan or help the pupil with his problems. The parents also found the meetings very unfriendly and intimidating as the meetings included a large number of people who they had not met before. This obviously involved a power dynamic as the parents must have felt quite disempowered in a room of local authority officials and specialists. Consequently they may not have felt that they had been actively involved in what was happening to their child. McDonald and Thomas (2003) also found evidence that parents actually felt belittled by what was said to them in meetings. One parent believed that the head teacher of the school would belittle her to the point that she was made to feel like an unfit parent. It is clear that some of these parents felt a sense of blame and felt they were being stigmatised for their child's behaviour. Korroloff et al (1996) state that traditional approaches to working with families of children with emotional difficulties have tended to blame, marginalize or ignore them. This is surprising as it is obvious that parents may be feeling vulnerable at this time and may need support and understanding from school rather than to feel they were being judged. Another parent found exclusion meetings embarrassing as they often heard things about their child for the first time in the meeting. This seems another way of disempowering parents as they may not be confident enough to challenge what school was saying in the context of a meeting with other professionals involved. This parent also felt that schools ran meetings to suit their own ends and saw them as being dishonest. This type of interaction would not be conducive to the parents and schools building

positive relationships where decisions could be made collaboratively to meet the best interests of the child.

Parents - a silent voice?

McDonald and Thomas (2003 p.116) found that parents interviewed in their study had negative experiences of mainstream school for the following reasons

- they found the authoritarian nature of the schools restrictive and prohibitive
- their children did not have harmonious relationships with their teachers
- their children found the curriculum difficult to comprehend
- that a major obstacle for their children, in term of their behaviour, was conforming to the norms of the school
- they felt that their child had no voice – they were not listened to
- they felt that they themselves had no chance to voice their concerns

An illustration of feeling of having no 'voice' was a parent's experience of communication with a school both prior to and after exclusion. Prior to exclusion, the school did not contact the parent when her child was having difficulties and was truanting from school. After the child had been excluded the parent tried to complain about this lack of communication and to find out what was happening in her child's education, both in person and over the phone, but she felt that the school had cut ties with both her and the child and that she gained no support at all from the school. Most parents with a child who has been excluded must feel a sense of hopelessness and frustration about the situation, however, further poor communication with a school can only heighten these negative feelings and leave the parents feeling angry, disappointed and alone. McDonald and Thomas (2003) concluded from the parents' stories that the process of exclusion has two consequences; the students are prevented from participating in any school activity and the parents are also excluded from being part of the school. Consequently, parents cannot then enter into a dialogue with school about the best way of meeting their child's needs.

Evidence of parental appeals against exclusion (DCSF, 2009a) shows that once a school has made a decision to exclude a child, the parent does not have a strong voice in what happens in their child's education. There may also be many more parents who do not feel that they have the power to lodge an appeal and who simply accept the school's decision. New government guidance set out in the document, 'The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper' (DFE, 2010, p.6) gives parents even less power to appeal against an exclusion when a pupil has committed a serious offence.

This lack of parental 'voice' in the exclusion process supports the research undertaken by Gordon Lamb into Special Educational Needs and Parental Confidence (DCSF, 2009b). Lamb found that when schools did not engage parents in discussions about their child, trust diminished and so did the potential for a good working relationship between parents and the school. The Lamb Inquiry Review of SEN and Disability Information suggested that education professionals need to,

...ensure that parents can access the information that they need, when they need it, in ways that are convenient to them and that includes face-to-face discussion with those who are working with their child
(DCSF, 2009b p.8)

The review also noted that,

The style of communication both affects and is a reflection of the working relationships between professionals and parents. The worst communication that we saw generated significant levels of hostility
(DCSF, 2009b p.9)

Lamb reported that good levels of communication engendered high levels of confidence in schools and local authorities. Importantly for some parents of children with a special educational need, communication was as much about the capacity of schools to listen to them as to talk to them.

Family stress

Munn et al (2000) believe that it has to be remembered that exclusion has some important effects for family life. They emphasise that some of the families of children who are excluded are already under an amount of stress due to, for example, divorce proceedings, a recent remarriage, the birth of a new baby, family ill-health, therefore, further stress caused by exclusion may only exacerbate such difficulties. These family difficulties may also contribute to events leading up to exclusion. Munn et al (2000) also found that this extra stress caused by a child's difficulties in school could lead to arguments within the family. The family of an excluded child may also feel they have been inconvenienced by a school's decision to exclude a child. Parents may not be able to work if their child has to stay at home and it may also have an effect on younger siblings. This may also lead to the parent feeling irritated with the child as they are then spending a lot of time together in a confined environment where the child may have nothing constructive to do.

Section five - Conclusions

There are complexities of issues that surround exclusion from school and exclusion can have devastating effects on the wellbeing of the pupil and their families. Views of pupils and parents frequently highlight a sense of injustice around the current systems, which often lead to frustration and a negative outcome for all concerned, at the worst a pupil not engaging in any educational provision. It is important that pupils are engaged in, and experience achievement in, some educational provision, as the Home Office Youth Lifestyle Survey (Flood-Page et al, 2000) indicates that attachment to a school protects pupils from later antisocial behaviour or criminal activity, and that achievement in school is an even stronger protective factor.

The literature suggests that schools need to improve their practice by finding constructive ways of communicating concerns about a pupil's behaviour to parents. All parties need to be involved in more solution

focused conversations, which have the immediate and future educational interests of the pupil at the centre of the discussion. Only with greater knowledge, based on the experiences of the people immediately involved (pupil and family), can we overcome barriers, perceived or real, to keeping pupils engaged in education. McDonald and Thomas (2003) believe that the respectful inclusion of marginalised voices would enable schools to develop inclusive environments where all stakeholders are listened to and made to feel worthwhile.

It is also important, however, to acknowledge the difficulties that schools face in managing difficult pupils. Teachers often feel under unreasonable stress and may therefore be less tolerant and less able to support pupils. Hayden and Dunne (2001) believe that schools, like families, operate most constructively in an environment that is collaborative and problem solving, rather than blaming and judgemental.

Any knowledge gained from research into the process of exclusion which supports schools and families in managing pupils behaviours and keeping them in education, is ultimately in everybody's interests.

Reflection

This research may appear to present only one side of the story as the subjective viewpoint of parents and pupils seem to have been privileged over other people's experiences and viewpoints. In taking a side, I am taking a feminist standpoint in that I feel it is impossible to position myself outside of the subject matter because, in my professional role, I am implicated in the phenomenon of exclusion. My standpoint will inevitably shape the research process and any findings; therefore, I will attempt to make my reflexive position transparent throughout.

Research Aims

The above literature leads to the research aim of this study which hopes to gain some insight into issues relating to the experiences of exclusion from the viewpoint of pupils' and parents' and how these may help others to reflect on how to successfully reintegrate excluded pupils into mainstream school.

Three research questions have emerged which also reflect the theoretical underpinnings of interpretative phenomenological analysis, which shall be discussed in later chapters:

Research Questions:

Research question 1

What are parents' reflections on, and understandings of, their child's experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their permanent exclusion and subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit?

Research question 2

What are pupils' experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their permanent exclusion and subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit?

Research question 3

How can key themes arising from interviews with parents and pupils help PRU staff to reflect on how they work in partnership to support pupils' reintegration into mainstream schools?

Parent – in this research 'parent' may mean mother, father, carer or a combination of these.

Pupil/child – In this research the children will be between the ages of eleven and fourteen.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter aims to address the methodological principles considered at the design stage of this research. This chapter provides a rationale for the selection of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodological approach for this research. This chapter will seek to demonstrate that the research questions are appropriately matched with the methodological approaches.

Section one considers issues of research design, including the selection of IPA. Section two outlines the theoretical basis of IPA. Section three considers issues of validity and quality assurance in this research. Section four is concerned with the practicalities of the procedure. Section five addresses ethical considerations, and finally, section six outlines the method of data collection and analysis.

Section one: Research Design

Epistemological Position

This research is exploratory in nature and aims to explore a less well researched facet around exclusion, that is, idiographic perspectives of parents and pupils. Quantitative data, collected via a traditional hypo-deductive model, would be unlikely to supply the rich and detailed personal accounts which would allow the researcher to explore the concerns and life worlds of the participant. Therefore, in order to satisfy the research questions the methodology will need to be participant led or bottom up, in that it allows meanings generated by the participant to be heard, and also open ended and flexible enough to facilitate the emergence of new categories of experience (Willig, 2001). This means that this research requires a qualitative methodology as opposed to a quantitative one.

Throughout this research I have reflected upon my positionality along epistemological and ontological continuums, i.e. epistemology - how knowledge is created ('how can we know' Willig, 2001, p13) and ontology - how knowledge

exists ('what is there to know' Willig, 2001, p13). Madill et al (2000) argue that qualitative research is characterised by epistemological diversity and attempt to classify qualitative approaches into three epistemological strands (see figure 1) ranging from 'naive realism' where the ontology is that the view of the world that we derive from our senses is to be taken at face value, that the world is, 'an orderly, law-abiding enduring, fixed and objectively knowable and constant place' (Moore, 2005, p 106), to 'radical relativist' where the ontology is that the world is ambiguous, irregular and constantly changing and therefore cannot be 'known' in any objective sense.

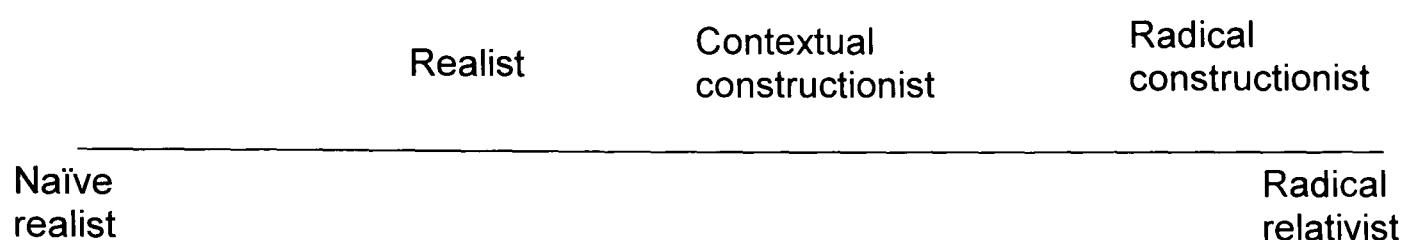


Figure 1 (Madill et al, 2000)

Madill et al (2000) state that realist qualitative research is characterised by a 'discovery orientation'. Contextual constructionist research is described as being based upon the assumption that all knowledge is necessarily contextual and dependent on the individual's standpoint. Therefore, different perspectives will generate different insights into the same phenomena. Finally, a radical constructionist standpoint, stipulates that knowledge is a social construction and the focus of research is the discursive resources and practices that constitute knowledge.

My reflections on the chosen research methodology, and my interpretation of experiencing life as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and research practitioner, have led me to align my position, and that of this research, as being between these two extremes - contextual constructionism.

Contextual constructionism is the position that all knowledge is local, provisional, and situation dependent (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988), therefore, research will yield different outcomes depending on the context in which the data was collected and analysed. Pidgeon and Henwood (1997, p.250) identify four dimensions which may affect the production of knowledge:

- participants' own understandings
- researchers' interpretations
- cultural meaning systems which inform both participants' and researchers' interpretations
- acts of judging particular interpretations as valid by scientific communities

The researcher and subject of research are both conscious beings interpreting and acting on the world around them within networks of cultural meaning (e.g. Giorgi, 1995). Therefore, all accounts, researcher or participant, are subjective, and the concept of objectivity and reliability are rejected.

Willig (2001) states that within a contextual constructionist framework, participants and researchers accounts need to be evidently grounded in the conditions within which they were reproduced. Thus an important criterion for evaluation in this context is reflexivity. This also places the onus on the researcher to represent the perspectives of participants through basing findings in participants' actual descriptions (Tindall, 1994).

This position fits well with the method of IPA (also supported by Madill et al, 2000) as IPA draws upon epistemological realism where knowledge is produced about what and how people think about the experience of exclusion, and ontological relativism where what is important is *how* participants experience exclusion (Willig, 2001). IPA acknowledges that it is impossible to gain a direct insight into someone's personal world; however, there is an assumption that a participant's account can tell us something about their private thoughts and feelings. Therefore, IPA researchers need to fully engage with their participant's accounts in order to encourage an insider perspective. IPA also assumes that participants can experience the same 'objective' conditions (the experience of exclusion) in entirely different ways because their experience is mediated by the thoughts, beliefs, expectations and judgments that the individual brings to it. However, IPA researchers accept that any understanding of the participant's psychological world can only be gained through the researcher's involvement in and interpretation of the participants account, requiring a reflexive outlook from

the researcher.

Reflection

The notion of requiring a reflexive outlook from the researcher is one of the features of IPA which particularly appealed to me, as it fits my way of working as a TEP. I have worked hard throughout my training to be reflective and reflexive in all my casework with schools and families. I hoped that I would be able to transfer this skill to the research process.

Section two: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

This section introduces the approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and identifies its theoretical basis.

IPA is a qualitative research method which has tended to focus on the exploration of participants' experience, understandings, perceptions and views (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) believe that pure experience is never accessible and that what we actually do is try to conduct research which is 'experience close' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009 p.33). They believe that because IPA sees participants as 'sense making creatures', the meanings participants give to an experience, as it becomes an experience, can be said to represent the experience itself. IPA is idiographic in nature focusing on the particular case, this is in contrast to most psychology which is 'nomothetic' and concerned with making generalisations, and with establishing general laws of human behaviour (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

The first IPA studies were carried out in the 1990s, Jonathon Smith's (1996) paper argued for an approach to psychology which was able to capture the experiential and qualitative, and which could still converse with mainstream psychology. Early IPA work aimed to stake a claim for a qualitative approach which was grounded in psychology. Brocki and Wearden (2006) state that IPA has been developed as a distinctive approach to conducting qualitative research in psychology - it is concerned with psychology in the real world – how people engage with the world. Smith and Osborne (2003) were keen to stress

the hermeneutic phenomenological roots of the method as with IPA there is less emphasis on description and a greater focus on interpretation, as well as greater engagement with mainstream psychological literature.

Smith et al (1999) suggest that IPA may have particular relevance for health psychology and as such the majority of published work has been in this field, however, IPA has more recently become more prevalent in other areas of psychology, including that of clinical and social psychology (Eatough and Smith, 2006, Smith, 1999).

The historical foundations of the approach

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness. It is the name given to the philosophical movement which began with Husserl (1900, 1931, 1936) and was developed by Heidegger (1925, 1927). Not all phenomenological approaches agree with the same concepts, some working in a way which is consistent with core phenomenology but also taking a distinctive perspective. The remainder of this section focuses on the main phases of phenomenology: transcendental, hermeneutic and existential.

Transcendental phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology was developed by Husserl (1936), who laid the foundations for the phenomenological movement that followed. Husserl was interested in finding how someone might come to accurately know their own experience of a given phenomenon, and do so with a depth and rigour which might allow them to identify the 'essential' features of that experience, which may then go beyond the particular circumstances of their appearance and may possibly enlighten how others experience a similar phenomenon (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Husserl famously argued that we should go back to 'the things themselves' (Husserl, in Landridge, 2007. p 16); in this he was suggesting that we should try to focus each particular experience in its own right.

Intentionality is the key feature for Husserl; he argued that any study of lived experience focuses on what is experienced in the consciousness of the

individual. The term intentionality is used to describe the relationship between the process occurring in consciousness and the object of attention for that process. This means that whenever we are conscious, or aware, we are always 'aware' of something. This is important as it emphasises the need to pay attention to how people's experiences appear in their consciousness, a reflective endeavour, as opposed to seeing experience as a purely cognitive endeavour.

Husserl argued that an individual's understanding was characterised by the 'natural attitude', our everyday experience, with all our taken for granted assumptions. With the human need for order, these help us to fit things within our pre-existing systems of categorisation. Husserl proposed the concept of 'epoche' which means the process by which we attempt to abstain from such pre-conceived ideas and concentrate on our perception of the world. The aim of epoche (or bracketing) is to enable the researcher to describe the 'things themselves' and achieve an objective understanding of a phenomenon.

Reflection

I find the Husserlian concept of 'epoche', in its strictest sense, difficult to embrace. I engaged in a critical literature review around 'exclusion' more than twelve months ago and have encountered pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion regularly in my casework. Therefore, I cannot enter this process as a naïve researcher with no knowledge of the subject. Also in constructing an interview schedule it could be argued that I had some broad expectations about the outcomes of the research. As a consequence this will have an effect on my interpretations of the data. At best, I believe I can attempt to put aside, or at least be aware of, my existing knowledge and pre-conceptions, and clearly document my position as a researcher throughout the process through reflective notes in my research diary.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic or interpretative phenomenology was developed by Heidegger (1927) who questioned the possibility of any knowledge outside of an interpretative stance which is grounded in the world of people, relationships and language (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Heidegger disputed the Husserlian idea of bracketing by suggesting that the researcher is as much a part of the research as the participant, and that the researcher's ability to

interpret the data is always reliant on their prior knowledge and understanding. Johnson (2000) suggests,

Understanding is never without presuppositions. We do not, and cannot, understand anything from a purely objective position. We always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world.

(Johnson, 2000, p.9)

Landridge (2007) states that one of the most important concepts developed by Heidegger is 'Dasein' which is often translated as 'being in the world'. Human beings are bound up in a world of relationships, objects and language; and 'being in the world' is always perspectival, always temporal and always 'in relation to' something' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p18). Therefore, according to Heidegger, it is impossible to be objective and not engage in the subjective act of the interpretation of peoples meaning making activities. Therefore, hermeneutic psychology postulates that what can be gained from research is an individual, subjective account of a person's experience.

Hermeneutics

A major theoretical underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics as, in IPA, hermeneutics is concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation. Researchers try to make sense of their participants by engaging in close interpretation of what they have read or heard.

Willig (2001) states that IPA recognises that a researcher's understanding of participants' experiences is necessarily influenced by their own ways of thinking, assumptions and preconceptions and their interactive experiences of the world. However, she believes that these 'biases' are a necessary precondition for understanding another's experience. Therefore, making sense, or understanding, requires interpretation. Smith (2007) (based on the work of Heidegger, 1927 and Gadamar, 1975) describes a model of the hermeneutic circle of the research process, where the 'whole' is the researcher's ongoing biography and the 'part' is the encounter with a new participant,

I start where I am at one point on the circle, caught up in my concerns, influenced by my preconceptions, shaped by my experience and expertise. In moving from this position, I attempt to either bracket, or at least acknowledge my preconceptions, before I go round to an encounter with a research participant at the other side of the circle. Whatever my previous concerns or positions, I have moved from a point where I am the focus, to one where the participant is the focus as I attend closely to the participants story, facilitate the participant uncovering his/her experience. This requires an intense attentiveness to, and engagement with, the participant as he/she speaks.

(Smith 2007, p. 6)

Smith and Osborne (2003) believe that IPA involves a double hermeneutic: the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of a particular phenomenon. They believe that this illustrates the dual role of the researcher, as being both like and unlike the participant. They are drawing on their everyday human resources to make sense of the world, but they also only have access to participants' experience through what the participant reports about it, and are also seeing this experience through their own experientially informed lens. Therefore, the researcher's sense making is only ever second order. The hermeneutic circle is a useful way of thinking about the method of IPA, a key principle of IPA is that analysis is iterative: the researcher moves back and forth through the data to explore meanings at a number of levels. This emphasises the cyclical nature of IPA and how important the reflexive position of the researcher is to this process.

Existential phenomenology

Heidegger's work on 'Dasein' was elaborated further by Sarte (1943) and Merleau-Ponty (1945). Merleau-Ponty described humans' relationship to the world as being embodied; he suggests that humans see themselves as different from everything else in the world. This suggests that although we can observe and experience empathy for others, we can never entirely share another person's experience as their experience belongs to their own 'embodied'

location in the world (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Therefore, each individual's experiences, both physical and mental, must be acknowledged as being different to those of others.

Reflection

I anticipated that parents' and pupils' may discuss the subjective and physiological effects of exclusion (physical effects of stress/anxiety). In listening to the experiences of my participants I considered the embodied elements of their experience. I felt great empathy for them, particularly around their feelings of shame and regret, but I realised that I could never fully share or understand their experiences as their experiences were uniquely created through their actions.

Rationale for selecting IPA as a research method

I believe that IPA is well suited to this research as in IPA, there is a focused exploration of the 'lived experiences of a small number of participants' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin. 2009, p.202), hence working at a micro-analysis level. This fitted well with this research as I was interested in exploring how people, in a particular context, give meaning to, and make sense of the experience of exclusion.

The double hermeneutic stance of IPA is also well suited to the aims of this research. My interpretations of interactions and relationships are inevitable in my role as a TEP and therefore reflexive practice is crucial to my everyday work and will be crucial to this research as part of the hermeneutic cycle. IPA allowed me the opportunity to attempt to understand the parents and pupils and make sense of their experiences, as well as reflect upon my role as a researcher in the process of making my interpretations.

Reflection

After reading a large amount of literature around research methods I felt that I would be very interested in trying to use grounded theory, IPA or narrative methods within my research. However, I felt inclined to use IPA. Being relatively new to qualitative research, I felt more confident with the fact that IPA had a clear structure about how to conduct the analysis. However, I also liked the fact that the structure was not too prescriptive and allowed room for creativity. I feel that this has helped me to develop my skills as a qualitative researcher.

Researcher Beliefs and Aims

Interpretative research embraces reflexivity and subjectivity; Parker (1994) notes that, 'Research is always carried out from a particular standpoint' (p13). Due to the interpretive role of IPA, it is important for the researchers involvement, e.g. beliefs and preconceptions, to be made clear prior to analysis (Brocki and Wearden 2006). Therefore, my subjective position requires exploration, in terms of how I formulated my research questions and how it affects my interpretation of participants' experiences.

I have prior experience, as a teacher and a TEP, of working with excluded pupils and their families. I have worked at a systemic level within secondary schools to improve the pastoral support systems and have seen first-hand some of the difficulties faced by both pupils and school staff. I also engage regularly with young people who are at risk of exclusion and this work can sometimes evoke strong emotions as it can be a difficult and stressful time for all involved. This inevitably leaves me with preconceptions and assumptions about the practice within mainstream schools, and motivates me to work pro-actively to support schools in improving systems to support such vulnerable pupils. I am also aware that I am not a parent and have not personally experienced the process of exclusion; however, I acknowledge that as each person makes sense of an experience in their own way, I can never expect to gain a direct insight into someone else's world even if I was a parent with an excluded child.

This research also holds personal significance to me, as a TEP, as it will allow me to reflect on my everyday practice, particularly of how to engage with the more 'hard to reach' parents and pupils. In addition it has also provided a space in which to reflect on how behaviour difficulties are managed in mainstream schools. Subsequently I hope to become a more effective practitioner.

Limitations of IPA

As with all qualitative methods, there are some limitations of IPA as a methodological approach.

Firstly, the success of IPA is determined by the participant being able to

articulate their thoughts and communicate the richness of their experiences (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). The approach would not be accessible to individuals who were unable to articulate their views. This was a concern as one group of participants were aged between twelve and fourteen and this group may not have had the expressive language skills, or inclination, to articulate their experiences of a potentially emotive experience. To minimise such difficulties I strived to create an environment and atmosphere to facilitate open discussion, as well reflecting closely on my interviewing skills.

In addition, IPA makes the assumption that language provides participants with the necessary instruments to capture their experiences. Willig (2001) argues that language constructs rather than describes reality. Therefore, the words people choose to describe an experience will always construct a particular version of that experience. However, it is important to attempt to understand the '*particular version*' a person chooses to articulate.

As a researcher I find Husserl's concept of bracketing unsatisfactory.

Throughout the research process I will attempt to 'bracket' my taken for granted understanding of the world and put aside the knowledge and suppositions that I am aware of. However, I am aware, and I am willing to embrace the fact that there will be assumptions and patterns of thought that I am not aware of and which I am unable to identify and 'bracket'. Therefore, IPA as an approach would be best adopted by researchers who value the importance of reflective and reflexive practice and are skilled in doing so. The role of a critical friend and audit trail in the analysis stage will be crucial in showing a commitment to the quality and validity of interpretations.

Rejected approaches

The Social Constructivist version of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) was comprehensively considered as an alternative methodology to IPA as both approaches 'adopt a broadly similar perspective' (Smith, 1995, p 18). Willig (2001) states that Grounded Theory and IPA both aim to produce a cognitive representation of a person's or group's view of the world, and work systematically through the text in order to identify themes and categories, which are progressively developed until they are thought to capture the nature of the

phenomenon being explored. These approaches also start with individual cases which are then integrated to form a collective picture which informs us more about the phenomenon in question. Grounded Theory was rejected as a research method as it was developed to allow researchers to study basic social processes and, therefore, it could be argued that it is better placed to address sociological research questions. In contrast IPA is interested in gaining an understanding of the quality of individual experiences, i.e. the nature of a phenomenon rather than the social processes which account for that phenomenon. Grounded Theory would have been better placed in this research area to consider the social processes in school which may lead to pupils being permanently excluded rather than the individual lived experiences of exclusion.

A case study was also considered as a potential method in this research. Yin (1994) believes case studies are concerned with,

Establishing the how and why of a complex human situation.

(Yin, 1994 p.16)

This type of research is characterised by the researcher collecting rich and detailed information about a phenomenon and its context. Willig (2001) states that case study research requires the researcher to provide detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the characteristics of the case in order to create new understanding into the phenomenon being investigated. As the objective of this research was to gain an insight into my participants' thoughts and beliefs around the phenomena of exclusion a case study may have been a suitable method in eliciting this information. I thought in depth about doing a case study of one pupil, their parents and teachers, however, upon much reflection I decided that although this would yield in depth, rich and interesting data, it would only allow me to explore one specific, unique experience of permanent exclusion. As I hoped to infer good practice from my research to inform my work with schools, I felt that one case would give me insufficient scope to do this, and exploring a number of experiences would allow me to identify any common themes or differences between different situations.

Section three: Validity and Quality Assurance

There is considerable discussion amongst qualitative researchers about the assessment of quality in qualitative research, with a growing dissatisfaction about using the criteria applied to quantitative data (reliability and validity) to evaluate qualitative work. I will now discuss the issues of validity and reliability in relation to this research.

Reliability

Reliability has been defined as 'the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions' (Scaife, 2004 p66). Such positivist expectations do not match the aims of phenomenology, which is concerned with how individuals experience the world within certain contexts and at certain times. Because IPA is highly interpretative and subjective it is unlikely that two researchers reading the same data would replicate each other's analysis (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Scaife (2004) believes that within interpretative methodologies, one cannot simply consider reliability in terms of the results produced but with the whole data collection procedure.

Validity

Scaife (2004) defines validity as 'the degrees to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure' (p68) with considerations given to the intentions of the researcher, methodology applied and the results achieved. Again, such considerations would be more applicable to quantitative research. Therefore, when undertaking an interpretative approach, validity, cannot be understood in relation to this traditional definition.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that a better approach may be to use general guidelines to assess the 'validity' or 'quality' of qualitative research.

Yardley (2000) presents four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research.

The first principle is *sensitivity to context*. To ensure that this research was of current relevance and validity I aimed to situate the research within the current theoretical and educational literature, as demonstrated in the literature review.

The findings and discussion sections are linked to this existing literature. I was aware that my purposive sample of families who have experienced exclusion may be difficult to access, and that, it was important for me to establish a rapport with the head of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) as she was central to the viability of my research. Sensitivity to context is also demonstrated through the interactional nature of data collection within the interview situation. I am aware that an IPA analysis is only as good as the data it comes from, therefore, in order to obtain quality data I also needed to have a close awareness of the interview process, being sensitive to participants' non-verbal communication as well as listening closely to their conversations. Any information about a participant's non-verbal communication was noted in my research diary and reflected upon after the interview and during analysis. As each interview was the initial meeting between interviewer and participant, ethical considerations and the creation of a working alliance was important to ensure that the participants were relaxed and comfortable so that I could achieve my ultimate aim of obtaining useful information from them.

Sensitivity to context also continued through the analysis process. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that the strongest context which a good piece of IPA research will be sensitive to is that of data. A good IPA study will demonstrate sensitivity to the raw data by having a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants' material to support any assumptions being made.

Yardley's second broad principle is *commitment and rigour*. With IPA there is an expectation that commitment will be shown in the degree of attentiveness to the participant during the data collection stages and the care with which the analysis of each case is carried out. I needed to show commitment to learning new research skills, particularly in regards to conducting in depth interviews which are a positive experience for the participant. I feel that commitment to this research is shown through engagement with the project over a long time period.

Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study in terms of;

- the appropriateness of the sample
- the quality of the interview
- the analysis being carried out systematically
- the analysis being sufficiently interpretative

Through thorough planning and attention to detail I hope that I have satisfied all these measures of rigour.

Yardley's third broad principle is *transparency and coherence*. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe transparency as how clearly the stages of the research process are described in the write up of the study. I will ensure that this research will be transparent throughout the write up of the doctoral thesis by establishing an audit trail. Coherence will be judged by looking at whether the research presents a coherent argument, whether themes fit together, and whether ambiguities are dealt with clearly. In order to achieve coherence, time was allowed for careful writing and considerable redrafting of my analysis. This was also achieved through supervision and the use of critical friends to ensure that the process of interpretation and data analysis was robust. I asked colleagues to do 'mini audits' of my analysed transcripts so that they could check that my initial annotations have some validity in relation to the text being examined and the approach being employed.

Yardley's final broad principle is *impact and importance*. Yardley makes the important point that a real test of validity lies in whether research tells the reader something important, interesting or useful. It is hoped that the outcomes of this research will facilitate fresh insight into the experience of exclusion and be of interest to the staff in the PRU and staff in mainstream secondary schools, possibly identifying implications for future practice. This piece of research hopes to result in the identification of good practice, the strategies, resources and support needed to prevent exclusion or successfully reintegrate excluded pupils into a new mainstream school, in relation to the context in which the research took place. Any examples of good practice will be shared with the PRU, with the hope that they can use this knowledge to develop their

procedures and apply this good practice in their collaborative work with secondary schools.

This research took place in a key stage three PRU in a local authority where I am currently employed. This PRU was in the process of changing to a short stay school where pupils attended for a period of approximately six weeks before being integrated into a new mainstream school or alternative provision. This new role necessitated the PRU staff to work more closely with receiving schools. I saw this as an opportunity for more systemic work to be developed in order to attempt to prevent future exclusions and support the emotional health and well-being of pupils and their families.

Section four: Procedures

The three final sections of this chapter address the practical and ethical aspects of this research.

Participants

The sample of participants involved in my research was selected purposively because they offered an insight into the experience of exclusion. Participants were selected on the basis that they grant access to, and represent, a particular perspective on the phenomenon of exclusion rather than a population. IPA is an idiographic approach; therefore, it is concerned with understanding a particular phenomenon in a particular context. This research, therefore, will be attempting to look at the phenomenon of permanent exclusion in the local authority in which the researcher works. IPA researchers usually try to find a homogeneous sample for whom the research question will be meaningful. In this research my participants will be pupils who have been excluded and are attending a key stage three PRU, and their parent(s). Therefore, the analysis will be a detailed examination of the experiences of this particular group in a particular context. The sample will be divided into parents and pupils so that the experience of exclusion can be understood from more than one perspective.

Selection of individual participants

Potential participants were contacted via a referral from the Head of the PRU. I discussed the research at length with the Head of the PRU and asked her to suggest six families who would be suitable for participation in this research. My definition of suitable participants was,

- parents and pupils who are living in the local authority area and will not be moving out of district for the duration of the research.
- parents and pupils who are not experiencing extremely stressful experiences in their life at the time of data collection (bereavement/divorce)
- parents and pupils who the PRU head believe would not experience undue distress through speaking about their experiences
- parents and pupils who would be willing to have an initial discussion with me

Reflection

I was aware that although I was dealing with a potentially hard to reach population, I should not shy away from involving parents who the PRU had found previously difficult to engage. I shared this view with the head of the PRU and discussed the criteria above with her. I was pleased I made this point as some of the parents I spoke to had not engaged well with previous schools but were happy to share their experiences with me

The Head teacher of the PRU approached six families and asked if they would be willing to allow me to discuss my research with them. I then contacted the parents, discussed the research with them and, if they consented, arranged a date to meet them at home. Written information was provided to parents and their children, informing them of the nature of the research and highlighting the ethical considerations around the study (see appendix no.1). I made it clear to the parent I initially spoke to that mothers, fathers, step parents or other guardians were welcome to attend the interview. In two interviews I spoke to the pupils' mothers, in one interview just the father of the pupil and in the final three parent interviews I spoke to both parents. I became familiar with the pupils in the referral unit by visiting the unit regularly several weeks before interviewing the pupils. It was hoped that familiarity would increase the pupils'

trust in me and make them feel more comfortable when being interviewed.

Number of participants

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) note that the typical number of interviews carried out in a professional doctorate IPA study is between four and ten. This research utilises the views of twelve interviewees, from six different families, to address the research questions. I aimed to interview six families in this research as I was aware that not all participants may have engaged fully in the research and I wanted to ensure I had enough data to develop meaningful points of similarity or difference between participants. For pen portraits of the six families involved in the research see appendix no.2.

Section five: Ethical Considerations

Approval

Ethical approval was received from the Ethics Review Process of the School of Education in May 2010, and is contained in appendix no. 3.

Informed consent

All participants who agreed to participate in the research were fully informed about all aspects of the research project that might reasonably be expected to influence their decision to participate. Participants were told that they have the right to change their mind and withdraw consent at any time, prior to or during the interview. All participants were asked to sign a consent form, and parents were asked to give consent to their children being interviewed (see appendix no.4).

Conducting the interviews

The research was conducted in a respectful manner in line with my values as a practitioner. Parents and pupils participating in this research were not exposed to risks that are greater than, or additional to, those they encounter in their everyday lives. I was aware that questioning parents or pupils about exclusion may be highly sensitive, raise confidential or personal issues and intrude, or be perceived to intrude upon their comfort and privacy. Therefore, with the support of my supervisors, I made careful judgements about the type of questions I

asked. I was prepared to signpost participants to relevant agencies if I felt it would be beneficial to them.

Reflection

I was aware that within the interview situation there will invariably be a power imbalance. As I had requested the interview, designed the interview schedule and required the information from the interview for my research I felt that however I tried to reduce the power imbalance, the participants may be disadvantaged in that they had nothing to gain from the experience. I tried to address this by explaining that their views may be valuable in informing future practice. However, after the interviews I felt that the participants had found the interview a valuable experience in that it had given them an opportunity to share their experiences. One father stated that he was surprised that anyone cared enough to spend several hours listening about his experiences.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The interview data and transcripts were treated as confidential information, and were anonymised on transcription. The audio recordings of the interviews made during the research were used only for analysis. Names of participants and schools were changed to ensure anonymity. Quotes used in the final write up were selected on the basis of non-identifiable information. When any outcomes of the research are fed back to schools, all information will be anonymous and no participants will be identifiable.

Section six: Data collection and analysis

Data Collection

IPA approaches typically use semi structured interviews as they provide a flexible data collection method allowing the researcher and participant to engage in conversation and dialogue. Questions can be modified in reply to the participant's responses. The researcher is also able to probe further any interesting and important issues that may arise. The researcher is therefore able to follow the participant's interests and concerns (Smith and Osborne 2003). A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed for both participant groups (see appendix no.5) and a pilot study was carried out in March 2010.

Pilot study of interview schedule

For my pilot study I planned to interview one parent and their child. The Head of the PRU identified a child in care and their carer as suitable participants. The pilot study highlighted that the target population of this research may be difficult to engage as it took several attempts to engage with the parent. The pilot interview was useful as it gave me chance to practise my interview technique and pilot my interview schedule. As a result of the pilot I decided to include questions about other agencies and also to make the focus broader than just the child's last school. The pilot interview gave me chance to think about what prompts were useful and I also made sure that my questions were open and not leading. It also ensured that I had covered all areas of importance. Unfortunately, I did not manage to interview the child despite several attempts; however I did manage to share my information letter and my interview schedule with him in order to gain feedback.

Quality in qualitative interviewing

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) outline twelve aspects of a qualitative interview from a phenomenological perspective. I will discuss some of these which I feel are particularly relevant to this research.

Life world

The topic of the qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewees and his or her relation to it. In this case this is the lived experience of exclusion of parents and pupils, who are invited to offer rich, detailed, first person accounts of their experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann argue that the qualitative studies of subject's experiences of their world are basic to the more abstract scientific theories of the social world, the qualitative interview is a method which gives privileged access to people's basic experience of their life world.

Meaning

These interviews seek to understand the meaning of central themes of the parent's and pupil's lived world. I aimed to record and interpret the meanings of what was said as well as how it was said, including vocalisation and facial

expressions. Kvale and Brinkmann believe it is necessary to listen to explicit descriptions and to the meanings articulated, as well as what is said 'between the lines'. Such observational notes were recorded in a research diary directly after the interview to be considered later at the time of analysis.

Descriptive

In my interviews I wanted my participants to describe precisely what they experienced, including their feelings and actions. I was interested in the differences in descriptions of experiences of exclusion rather than putting participant's experiences into fixed classifications.

Specificity

In the interviews I was interested in descriptions of specific situations rather than general opinions; I wanted parents and pupils to speak about their specific situations rather than more general opinions about permanent exclusion from school. I tried to do this by using prompts to keep the participants focused on speaking about their experiences.

Deliberate Naivety

In the interviews I hoped to be curious, sensitive and open to new and unexpected occurrences rather than having ready-made categories of interpretation. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe interviewers as being naïve but curious listeners trying to get to know the person in front of them. The participant has experiential expertise. I attempted to focus on attending closely to the words of my participants in order to help me to bracket my own pre-existing concerns, assumptions and hypotheses. I felt that acknowledging and being aware of my presuppositions made me critically aware of my own hypotheses.

Focused

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) see an IPA interview as an event which facilitates the discussion of relevant topics. I decided to construct an interview schedule where I thought about the type of questions I would like to ask and the order I should ask them in. I felt that the process of developing an interview schedule forced me to think explicitly about what I expected the interview to

cover and also consider any difficulties I might encounter and anticipate any potentially sensitive issues for the participant. The interview schedule also allowed me to think carefully about how I phrased my questions in a suitably open form. Kvale and Brinkmann state that through open questions the interview focuses on the topic of research, experiences of exclusion, but allows the participant to speak about the aspects he or she finds important in the phenomena of enquiry. The initial focus of the interview will be determined by the questions on the interview schedule, however, I wanted the interview to be part led by my participants' concerns and I was aware that I may have to follow up matters which were not on the interview schedule but nevertheless interesting and related to the research question. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) note that the participant is the experiential expert on the subject, therefore, they should be given leeway in taking the interview to 'the thing itself' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009 p.58).

Ambiguity

Kvale and Brinkmann believe that the interviewee's statements can imply several possibilities of interpretation and that they may give apparently contradictory statements during an interview. In my interviews I did not hope to gain definite and quantifiable meanings on the theme of exclusion, I was interested in the genuine inconsistencies, ambivalence and contradictions in the world in which my participants live.

Change

Kvale and Brinkmann believe that an interview can be a learning process for the interviewee as well the interviewer. I was aware that during the course of my interviews my participants may change their descriptions of, and attitudes towards the subject matter. Questioning participants may instigate participants to reflect on what they are saying and possibly discover new aspects of what they are discussing or change their understanding. I was interested to note any evidence of change in my interviews.

Sensitivity

I was aware that due to my sensitivity toward and knowledge of the topic of exclusion, I may produce different statements from the participants on the same

themes, than a different interviewer who had no knowledge of exclusion. However, the aim of this research was not to obtain intersubjectively reproducible data from a standardised interview but to engage in a reflexive process. I hoped that my sensitivity to the topic allowed me to elicit nuanced descriptions of my participants' meanings.

Interpersonal situation

Kvale and Brinkmann state that the interviewer and the participant act in relation to one another and reciprocally influence each other. I was aware that I was asking my participants to discuss an emotive subject which may evoke anxiety in them so I was aware of a potential ethical violation of the participants' individual limits of what they felt it was appropriate to discuss. I was also aware that that the interview situation may invoke anxiety and defence mechanisms in myself as well as the participant. This was addressed by having regular supervision sessions with a critical friend.

Positive experience

I hoped that the interview experience was an enriching experience for the participant as it may given them the space to gain fresh insights into their experience. In this research many of the parents vocalised that had rarely been given the chance to speak openly about their experiences to someone who was interested and sensitive to the issues and experiences of exclusion.

PRU focus group

A focus group was conducted with ten PRU staff in order to gain insights into the PRU staffs' reflections on the pupils' and parents' experiences, gained through my interpretative analysis, and their perceptions of working with excluded pupils. The PRU staff were a mixture of teaching and support staff. The use of focus groups with IPA has been contested with Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.29) arguing that IPA is 'committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the viewpoint of particular people, in a particular context'. Focus groups have been used with IPA (Flowers et al, 2001), although this does present challenges in applying experiential analyses to more complex social activities (Reid et al 2005). However, it can allow for a multifaceted understanding of the experience:

...the exploration of one phenomenon from multiple perspectives can help the IPA analyst to develop a more detailed and multifaceted account of that phenomenon.

(Reid et al, 2005 p22)

IPA was used to analyse the data generated from the focus groups. The role of the researcher incorporated a role of facilitating and monitoring the discussion, where the focus of the group was presented, and then where necessary, the discussion was steered. This involved encouraging group members, recalling the focus of the group and following up interesting points (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In the focus group the parents and pupils interpretative themes were presented and the PRU staff were asked the following questions:

- How do these themes fit into your existing work?
- Is there anything that surprised you?
- Is there anything that contradicted your current understanding of the pupils you work with?
- What do you feel are the three most important things these themes highlight?
- In light of what we have discussed - Where might we go from here? And how could we get there?

The focus group aimed to generate additional data to augment the data. This is achieved by allowing statements to be 'challenged, extended, developed, undermined, or qualified' (Willig, 2001, p 29). The focus group is, therefore, dependent on the participants responding and contributing to one another's contributions.

The strength of the focus group lies in looking at ways in which participants jointly construct meanings, but also where any differences of opinion lie. Through this, evidence is provided about how participants may justify their positions. A focus group is argued to have higher ecological validity than a semi-structured interview as it is seen to be less artificial (Willig, 2001).

Analysis

The analysis was carried out using the approach outlined in Smith Flowers and Larkin (2009). I trialled this approach as part of the pilot study carried out in March 2010.

Pilot Study

I transcribed my entire pilot interview and practised analysing my data using IPA. I found it very useful to listen to the interview several times to become familiar with it. When doing the initial noting I found the process of looking at linguistic comments most difficult. This may have been because when transcribing I did not pay enough attention to the linguistic features (such as pauses, laughter, repetition, tone or use of metaphor), or it may just have been that there was not much to note within this particular interview. When I had a list of emergent themes I wrote them all on strips of paper and physically grouped them in terms of how themes related together to look for connections. I found that this was a useful way of looking for patterns which I then utilized in the main study.

Data analysis procedures

Smith Flowers and Larkin (2009, pp.82-101) suggest the following stages, as a guide, to analysing data using IPA.

Step one – Reading and re-reading

The sound recording of the interview was listened to as I read the transcript at least twice. This ensured that I was familiar and actively engaged with the data. During this process any recollections of the actual interview experience and any initial observations were recorded in my research diary. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) believe this helps the researcher to reduce the level of 'noise' and allows focus to remain with the data.

Step two – Initial noting

At this stage the researcher looks carefully at the text and explores language use and semantic content on an exploratory level. The cyclical nature (hermeneutic cycle) of the analysis was kept in mind as each text was re-read

and revised as I strived to explore the text's meaning to the participant and to myself as a researcher.

The exploratory comments were written in a wide column to the right hand side of the original transcript, and the three different types of comment were recorded in a different colour (For a sample of analysis see appendix no.6).

The exploratory comments were broken down into three discrete processes with different functions:

- Descriptive comments – focused on describing the content of what the participant has said (written in pencil)
- Linguistic comments – focused on exploring the specific use of language by the participant (written in black in and underlined in original transcript)
- Conceptual comments – focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (written in green ink)

Step three – Developing emergent themes

In looking for emergent themes the researcher attempts to 'reduce the volume of detail whilst maintaining complexity, in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p91). At this stage the researcher has a more central role in organising and interpreting the data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state that the main task at this stage for the researcher to extract what they feel is important from the transcript to generate a 'concise and pithy statement'. The emergent themes were written in the column to the left hand side of the original transcript (see appendix 6).

Reflection

I felt that the hermeneutic cycle is important again here as the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part. I continually considered the interview as a whole and looked at individual fragments of the text, in relation to each other. This was a time consuming, and at times confusing, process but I felt it helped me to gain a thorough understanding of the data.

Step four – Searching for connections across emergent themes

At this stage the emergent themes are amalgamated by the researcher into

subordinate themes. My preferred technique was to print out a typed list of themes, cut them up and physically group them on a large piece of paper.

Step five - Moving to the next case

Subsequent texts and transcripts were analysed utilising, if appropriate, the initial emergent themes created in the first transcript. New emergent themes were added as well as existing themes being supported. After analysis of each of the transcripts the circular process of going back over the themes in the previous transcripts and modifying them in the light of greater reflection and familiarity was repeated.

Step six – Looking for patterns across cases

Once all the emergent themes had been created for all transcripts, all emergent themes were collated and the process completed at stage four was repeated again. Subordinate themes from each transcript were kept in mind but all emergent themes were considered and new connections across the cases were looked for, as well as distinctive themes which were particular to individual participants. This process led to reconfiguring the subordinate themes and creating higher order superordinate themes which encompass a number of related subordinate themes. Once all the superordinate and subordinate and emergent themes had been produced a critical friend (EP colleague) also familiar with IPA was invited to consider the themes produced. This involved them scrutinizing the texts and asking for justifications for the themes leading to further modification of some of the themes.

The outcomes of the analysis will be described in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Phenomenological Presentation of Research

Findings

The following chapter outlines the themes that have emerged from the interpretative analysis and will explore shared experiences of the parents', pupils' and PRU staff, as well as allowing for unique individual experiences to also transpire. Analysis has allowed for nine superordinate themes to emerge with a number of relating subordinate themes. Two of the superordinate themes were shared by all participant groups (parents, pupils and PRU staff) and were, therefore, most significant. They were:

- School systems failing pupils
- Pupils need a protective nurturing environment.

Each superordinate theme will be discussed in turn. Superordinate themes shared by all three participant groups will be discussed first, followed by superordinate themes shared by two of the participant groups. The parents' individual superordinate themes will then be discussed, followed by the pupils' individual superordinate themes. For a visual map of themes and which participant group they relate to see appendix no. 7. See appendix 8 for each superordinate theme, its relating subordinate and emergent themes, as well as illuminatory quotes.

Due to the interpretative nature of this research both descriptions and some preliminary interpretations will be provided in this chapter. This will be followed by a discussion chapter which further interprets and relates the data to the critical literature review, which has been composed before during and after the analysis process. As interpretative analysis lends itself to lengthy extracts to assist in conveying the participant's lived experience, quotes have been included to provide a detailed portrayal of the interpreted experiences. Further quotes can be seen in appendix 8 (the reader will be signposted to the relevant page).

Superordinate theme – School systems failing pupils

| Superordinate Theme | Parent subordinate themes | Pupil subordinate themes | PRU staff subordinate themes |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| School systems failing pupils | Lack of understanding of pupils needs | Lack of understanding of pupils needs | Lack of understanding of pupils -putting round pegs into square holes |
| | It's not fair | Exclusion as unfair | |
| | Poor relationships between teachers and pupils | | Lack of time to build relationships |
| | Schools unsuccessful attempts at dealing with issues | | |
| | Expectations of failure | | |
| | | problems with discipline | |
| | | Pupils being pushed to the limit | |
| | | Lack of trust in school | |
| | | Pupil not part of school | |
| | | | Academic pressures in mainstream schools |
| | | School systems difficult to change | |

See appendix 8, pages 149-155

Parent, pupil and PRU staff subordinate theme

Lack of understanding of pupils needs/ putting round pegs into square holes

Pupils and parents both expressed a feeling that mainstream schools did not have a good understanding of pupils' emotional well-being and academic needs

Most of the pupils I interviewed apparently had experienced academic exclusion, most citing English and Maths as lessons they did not enjoy and found difficult. Pupils often felt that they did not receive help when they needed it. Pupil S explained why he had found a humanities project difficult:

We had to do theme parks, making our own theme park; it was just a bit difficult for me to do. My reading is not good and my writing is terrible!

I: What help did you get with reading and writing?

T: None.

(Pupil T, lines 27-31)]

Pupil A was given a time-out card so that she could leave the classroom when she felt she was becoming agitated. However, teachers' apparent failure to understand A's needs, and believe that she was using the time-out card appropriately, was perceived to have increased A's difficulties:

...you find some of the comments from some of the teachers who used to teach A when she showed her card were "put your card down, there's nowt up with you" you know, they were really ignorant to it, it's annoying.
(Mrs Y, line 74-77)

A number of pupils had issues with on-going bullying in school. It seemed that teachers did not have a good understanding of the magnitude of the issue, or the desire to tackle the issue. In some Pupil K's case this resulted in the issue reaching a crisis point which led to his exclusion.

Parents generally felt that school were happy to 'sweep issues under the rug' rather than take time to support vulnerable pupils:

...and if they would've walked around with their eyes open, instead of having their eyes closed, than they would have seen what was under their noses.

(Mrs S, line 134-136)

There was also a feeling that many schools were ignorant about mental health issues, participants feeling that it was easy to ignore mental health issues as they were often not visually apparent. It was felt that these pupils were almost forgotten and seen as someone else's problem. I believe that this may reflect a teacher's unease, due to lack of knowledge, around dealing with mental health difficulties:

*If they've got kids that are like...so like if you have got a kid with a disability you can see it can't you? But they've got problems so you can help them physically but when there are people with something wrong with them, I'm not a nutter or owt, but when its mental, not mental as in crazy, but, you know what I mean?, they didn't do owt for them, they just pushed them into one corner...Ours just get pushed into learning support, or isolation, or ****, that's bad in there!*

(Pupil A, line 84-94)

At times the lack of communication rather than ignorance seemed to lead to mental health difficulties going unnoticed and pupils unsupported, for example M's school were not aware of his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder until parents told them at parents evening.

A member of staff from the PRU used the analogy of putting 'round pegs into square holes' to describe how vulnerable pupils find it difficult to work within mainstream school systems. I think that this sums up the difficulties we face very well. Essentially there is something about school systems that does not meet the needs of certain pupils. The challenge is to either change the system or help the pupil to be able to learn how to fit better within school systems. This is a dilemma which will be discussed further later.

Parent and pupil subordinate theme

Exclusion as unfair

Parents and pupils appeared to recognise two types of unfairness, the child being treated unfairly for the same types of behaviour as other pupils, and

feeling that it was unfair that the child had not been supported.

Some parents and pupils felt that the exclusion was an extreme reaction to one incident and as such it was not fair. It seemed that Mr and Mrs O expected to have had some discussions with school about their child's behaviour before such a serious decision as exclusion was made.

Other pupils and parents felt that sanctions and exclusions were often given for petty reasons. Pupils and parents felt that other pupils would not be punished for the same behaviour and felt a sense of unfairness towards them:

...yeah, just for silly little things, like, you get, I got excluded for stuff like being late to lessons, but then there were other kids who were just walking by and the teachers didn't even say anything
(Pupil M, lines 104-108)

Some parents felt that their child was being unfairly victimised by staff in school:

We do think that the SLO [school learning officer] and the teaching assistant were all the time looking for the smallest little thing to have a go at him
(Mr and Mrs N, lines 33-35)

Pupils who were excluded for violence towards others felt that they had been punished unfairly as they felt that they were forced to deal with their situation as no-one else in school had helped. O felt that most pupils who stick up for themselves are excluded.

Parent of pupils who had shown violence felt their behaviour was unfairly punished. Mrs Y did not see the violent behaviour as normal for her child, she felt that the situation the child was in and the lack of support from school, led to her child's extreme reaction.

Parent and PRU staff subordinate theme

Poor relationships between teachers and pupils/Lack of time to build relationships

A major issue for parents appeared to be the lack of positive relationships between their children and adults in school. They felt that their children were not listened to and that adults were sometimes unsympathetic to children's worries. Mrs S talked about the teacher's lack of compassion.

Mr and Mrs O, and other parents, felt like their children were often alone in dealing with problems in school when adults did not support help them, despite complaints from parents.

Mrs Y described incidents where they felt her child had been treated with a lack of respect by adults in school and other parents actually believed that their children were unfairly victimised by certain teachers:

...she just said that them two seem to really have it in for him and it's not fair the way he's been treat.

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 72-74)

A member of the PRU staff highlighted the possible difficulties for mainstream teachers to build relationships with pupils due to the high pupil teacher ratio and lack of time. They speculated that the types of pupils, teachers may build such relationships with, are more likely to be the academically successful pupils rather than the vulnerable pupils. However, in reality, it seems that it is the vulnerable pupils who would benefit far more from the development of a positive relationship with an adult:

Because of the staff pupil ratio it's so different isn't it? That's the problem in mainstream isn't it? They maybe have it with one child, but it's usually the more academic child that they'd get that with, not the sort of child that would come to us.

(PRU focus group, lines 43-48)

Mr and Mrs L described how schools were very impersonal when dealing with their child's exclusion. It seemed that in some situations the 'child' as a person is forgotten in the midst of descriptions of behaviour, evidence gathering and witness statements. I felt that this could feel very hurtful to the family and could be perceived as a further attack on the child.

Some parents felt very socially excluded from all facets of the school as their child had a long period of time at home where school had very little contact with the family. Mrs Y described how her child was absent from school for almost a month before the school decided to permanently exclude.

Parent subordinate themes

Schools unsuccessful attempts at dealing with issues

Although parents felt that school systems had failed their child, they did recognise in many cases how school staff had tried in some way to deal with the issues in question.

Most parents felt that there had been someone in school who they had a good relationship with and whom they could contact. Mrs Y described feeling comfortable to ring A's head of year to tell her if A was unsettled.

Parents also noted that there had been some attempts at putting strategies in place to support their child. However, Mrs Y felt that these strategies were not always consistently applied. Parents also observed that the school had a number of resources for all pupils to use but understood that their child may not have chosen to use such resources when they needed them,

there's a lot going for it, a lot that don't want to actually sit in a lesson, they have got time out rooms and things like that, but they can't get anyone to do time out if they don't want to or anything. That's what E was like.

(Mr G, lines 174-177)

The support of outside agencies was also acknowledged, and appreciated; however, Mr G appeared to acknowledge that, sometimes, no-one could help.

Expectations of failure

Parents felt that school staff often had low expectations for their children, often expecting the worst of their behaviour in school. Mr G described a situation where he received a phone call from school to say his child had been excluded when he wasn't even in school.

When asked what would be a positive development for his family's situation Mr G said:

*That he's got a school, that's a positive... that he is basically still there
(Mr G, lines 333-334)*

This highlights that some parents also have low expectations for their child, feeling that their child's attendance at some educational provision would be positive, which should be an achievable aim for all the pupils in this study.

Pupil subordinate themes

Problems with discipline

Pupils felt that school discipline systems and sanctions were ineffective which resulted in a general lack of discipline. Pupil O felt that no one ever got into trouble for bullying at his school.

Other pupils frequently emphasised the mismanagement of bullying:

From when it was my first day, I got bullied by loads, and I told my mum and dad and they said we'll see how you go, when you get there, and it still carried on, it carried on all through the year. My mum and dad went in, nowt still got done.

(Pupil T, lines 64-68)

Most pupils were aware of the systems of sanctions and rewards but felt that they were not applied consistently and fairly. Pupil M also saw some discipline in school as being overly strict and punishment being disproportionate for incidents:

You get more than so many ticks and you get sent out. But there used to be no point, they'd just send me straight out.

(Pupil A, lines 101-103)

Pupils being pushed to the limit

All but one of the pupils felt that their exclusion was due to a particular incident which happened as the result of the pupil experiencing difficulties for a longer period of time. Pupils K and E described how they had been pushed to their limit of tolerance of a situation before they had reacted in an extreme way.

For some pupils this extreme reaction seemed like a cry for help in the absence of support from others in school:

T: I took a knife in...

I: Did you think that would help?

T: (shrugs) It made it worse. I wanted people to leave me alone.

(Pupil T, lines 74-77)

Lack of trust in school

Pupils felt let down by schools when their experience did not match how the school presented itself. I feel that this affected how pupils then positioned themselves in regards to the school and affected the pupil's ability to put trust in the school:

Well they say it's an anti-bullying school but yeah whatever!

(Pupil O, lines 61-62)

Other pupils felt that their trust in individual teachers had been betrayed by teachers' comments to them and about them:

The teacher in French said to my class when I wasn't there, that my mum and dad didn't bring me up properly, Jesus that was the most unprofessional thing to do!

(Pupil A, lines 173-176)

I felt that it was this kind of incident which inevitably led to a lack of trust, and ultimately break down of positive relationships, between teacher and pupil.

Some pupils did not feel satisfied that they could trust school to help them when they were in need and were left feeling frustrated that they had no adult support:

I went to see people in pastoral support, and they'd say "It will be alright K just go". So I thought fine and just walked out.

I: And were you fine?

K: Not really. If they had something other to do then I'd go back later, or sort of the next day. I went in, they were busy. "Come back another time"...it did my head in.

(Pupil K, lines 15-22)

Pupil not part of school

It seemed that pupils did not feel part of the school community. As a result of their difficulties, pupils often appeared to be distanced from the other pupils, often being taught in a separate area from the rest of the class. Pupil A described spending most of her time in isolation. It seemed that even if pupils, such as A, were physically in the lesson they were sometimes not really involved as part of the class.

It was also clear that the pupils I spoke to did not view school as a welcoming environment where they wanted to spend their time; S appeared to find the whole school building hostile and described the school as dirty.

PRU staff subordinate themes

Academic pressures in mainstream school

Staff at the PRU appeared to believe that mainstream schools may find it difficult to include and support vulnerable pupils because the pressure to meet academic targets was detrimental to the inclusion of such pupils. In the PRU focus group it was voiced that if a teacher's targets are based around academic measures then this has to be their focus, rather than the wellbeing of all pupils.

They also appeared to believe that adults in the mainstream school are not able work in the way they can at the PRU due to the pressures they are under. This again highlights the view that mainstream schools will find it difficult to provide an environment which supports more vulnerable pupils.

Secondary schools are held accountable for so many different things, all the pressures that they have, you know, the way their performance is measured, the things that they are accountable for...it just doesn't support them being able to do the sort of things we are free and able to do.

(PRU focus group, lines 49-54)

PRU staff also felt that the way the mainstream curriculum was organised did not always meet the needs of all pupils. They felt that it was important to be flexible, and work with pupils' strengths, something that would be very difficult to do in a mainstream school with large number of pupils and a prescribed curriculum.

School systems difficult to change

Although, PRU staff clearly felt that mainstream schools found it difficult to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils, they believed that mainstream staff would find it very difficult to change how they work. In this view the PRU staff are suggesting that it is the child's responsibility to 'change' in order to fit in with school systems

by learning new skills and developing coping strategies. I felt that this view did not feel comfortable with the PRU staff but they were accepting a pragmatic stance as to how the situation may improve. Ultimately, I felt that the PRU staff accepted that they would never have the power to influence school systems in the way they would like:

We're not going to change schools, like I said before, all those pressures and accountability that we, you know, are blithely unaware of...so I don't think we are going to change the hole that the kid fits in...

(PRU focus group, lines 157-162)

Superordinate theme – Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment

| Superordinate Theme | Parent subordinate themes | Pupil subordinate themes | PRU staff subordinate themes |
|--|--|--|--|
| Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment | Appropriate academic and emotional support | Appropriate academic and emotional support | Appropriate academic and emotional support |
| | Positive behaviour management | Positive behaviour management | |
| | Small gestures make a big difference | Small gestures make a big difference | |
| | | Positive attachments between adults and pupils | Positive attachments between adults and pupils |
| | | A calm environment | |
| | | Positive peer relationships | |
| | | Opportunities to bolster self-esteem | |

See appendix 8, pages 156-161

Parent, pupil and PRU staff subordinate themes

Appropriate academic and emotional support

In the PRU focus group staff described their work as putting ‘round pegs into round holes, by saying this they I believe that they felt they were giving pupils the individualised support they needed.

When I shared the pupil and parent themes with the PRU they felt that was pleasing evidence that they were providing what the pupils and parents were saying they needed. All the pupils appeared to have had positive experiences at the PRU and reported feeling relaxed and well supported.

Pupils seemed to feel more supported academically and appreciated extra help from adults:

He came home one day and said “they're really helping me you know mum”. I said “are they darling?” and he said “yeah, if I'm stuck we go through it bit by bit”, he said, “and it's good because I get a little bit more of one to one”.

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 304-308)

The practical nature of the PRU curriculum also seemed to appeal to pupil S and others. This is not surprising since many of them found it difficult to cope with the academic demands of mainstream school if their needs were not being adequately met.

Pupils also seemed to feel that the PRU supported their emotional well-being more than mainstream schools, Pupil A felt that the teachers in the PRU understood her needs well:

...teachers, they understand my ways, in mainstream they expect every kid to be, not normal but, mmm, I'm normal, in my head I'm normal...they expect every kid to have nowt wrong with them and it doesn't quite happen really does it?

(Pupil A, lines 268-271)

Mr and Mrs O also felt that PRU staff had more knowledge and understanding about their son's diagnosis, and consequently were able to support him better.

In the PRU focus group staff discussed the need to equip pupils with the skills to deal with issues they found difficult in mainstream school:

If we've given them the confidence and started to build their self-esteem and their self-confidence and their self-belief, given them aspirations, we then need to really make sure they are properly equipped with the skills to cope cos they are not going to go back into a different situation, they

are going to face exactly the same issues that they faced before. We just have to give them different ways of dealing with them and handling it.
(PRU focus group, lines 164-172)

Parent and pupil subordinate themes

Positive behaviour management

Parents and pupils noted the importance of having clear boundaries and consequences for unacceptable behaviour:

If they have sanctions they have to stick to them, and they've got to make them clear to him from the start, and if they don't he'll not stick to anything.

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 467-469)

Pupil O appeared to respect clear boundaries and sanctions regarding bullying. I felt that this allowed pupils to know what was expected of them and helped them to feel confident that other pupils would be dealt with fairly if they did something to hurt them.

All parents seemed to feel strongly about the importance of praising their child:

They boosted him all the time everything that he did right they praised him and things like that and obviously it's changed him.

Mr L: That's what he didn't get at the other school.

(Mr and Mrs L, lines 308-312)

Parents also saw the benefit of tangible rewards in helping their child to succeed and feel confident at school; Mrs S described how she valued the number of certificates and awards that were sent home to celebrate her child's success.

Pupils also seemed to feel it was important that the reward systems were transparent and dependent upon their behaviour rather than unknown criteria.

Small gestures make a big difference for pupils

For both parents and pupils it seemed that it was the small gestures that helped them the most. They did not expect or demand complex interventions to support them; just some personal attention and the feeling that someone cared was often enough to improve the situation.

Mrs Y valued being able to share information with her child's teacher through a quick phone call. Mr and Mrs L had also felt supported when someone simply helped their child recover lost uniform, something that would have previously been a problem and source of conflict.

Parents appeared to highly value the basic emotional support some adults in school gave to their children:

There was one occasion where he spoke to one of the ladies who do the cooking and she said "Are you all right K" and he said "No I miss my brother" and she gave him a hug and said "Come on darling it will be alright, let's do this then you can show your mum what you have been doing".

(Mr and Mrs L, lines 240-248)

Similarly, pupils found that simple things teachers could do were particularly effective. Pupil A described how simply keeping her attention, by using her as an example in a history lesson, enabled her to participate in, and enjoy, the lesson. I felt that although some mainstream teachers were sensitive to pupils needs and attempted to do this, the majority did not.

Pupil and PRU staff subordinate themes

Positive relationships between adults and pupils

PRU staff noted the importance of giving pupils a fresh start and getting to know them:

It can be quite different, you know, if you actually bother to talk to them, it's positive from the word go really.

(PRU focus group, lines 38-40)

PRU staff also noted the importance of having positive aspirations for pupils:

...as I said, they've had so much change, I think you've got to be as supportive as you possibly can and as positive as you possibly can for them to, to get them back into mainstream.

(PRU focus group, lines 137-141)

I felt that above anything they believed it was important to show pupils that they believed in them.

All pupils felt that, even in the mainstream school, they had an approachable adult who they could discuss problems with. This seemed to be an important factor for these pupils because it seemed that even if this adult could not help them directly, it helped to have someone to talk to about the things that were bothering them.

Pupil subordinate themes

A calm environment

Pupils appeared to find the PRU environment helped them to succeed. Pupils and parents both noted that having fewer pupils enabled pupils to concentrate and learn more. Mrs Y also commented that the physical environment of the PRU was more suitable for her child as they were based in a small unit.

It seemed that the majority of pupils interviewed found the large busy environments of a mainstream school difficult to cope with, and preferred a small base where they knew all the staff and pupils and did not have to cope with many changes of building, room, peers and teachers.

Opportunities to bolster self-esteem

The pupils' confidence and self-motivation appeared to increase as a result of the new challenges set by the PRU. An example was K's charity bike ride, a huge achievement for this pupil.

Parents also noted the increase in self-confidence and willingness to try new experiences in their children:

*He loves it. Whereas before, if owt like that would have happened at **** he would have just sat there and said I'm not doing it. Whereas now he wants to have a go, he'll try owt.*

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 436-439)

Pupil M also seemed to feel an increased sense of self-confidence in his academic abilities; this appeared to be linked to feeling able to concentrate on his learning in the more supportive PRU environment.

Positive peer relationships

Pupils valued the support of their peers. In the PRU it seemed that many pupils felt that they fitted in well with the other pupils because they had something in common. It seemed that in mainstream school these pupils often felt that they were different from other pupils:

...all the kids here are pretty much the same, I know some of them are worse than others but they've all got summat wrong with their behaviour so you're not just one person and you've got something wrong with you. I never got picked on or anything, like, I don't know...

(Pupil A, lines 240-245)

Some pupils also valued the support of their peers in helping them to manage their own behaviour. Pupil A felt that her peers were the best support for her when trying to manage her anger.

Superordinate theme - Parents have a role in exclusion

| Parent superordinate Theme | Parent subordinate Theme | PRU staff subordinate theme |
|---|--|---|
| Parents have a role in exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Importance of home-school relationships● Failure in parenting● Feeling victimised● I want to be heard● Fighting a battle | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Importance of home-school relationships |

See appendix 8, pages 162-165

Parent and PRU staff subordinate theme

Importance of home-school relationships

It appeared that parents saw having regular communication with school as being highly important. PRU staff believed that they could communicate with parents a lot more than was possible in mainstream. Mr and Mrs N seemed to particularly value daily face to face communication rather than letters, perhaps because it helped to establish relationships.

Parents felt that if school shared information with them they could work alongside school and support them by praising or reprimanding their child at home:

*We've found it all right because they have been letting us know from the **** if he's done anything good, and it's a good thing. And obviously if he does do something good and they praise him, if they let us know, we praise him as well...I just think plenty of information from the school about it, that all, school to keep in touch.*

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 554-548 and 551-553)

Mr G also highlighted the importance of parents and schools working together;

he felt that schools nowadays could be quite impersonal and did not persevere in working with parents to help their child succeed.

It seemed important for parents to feel that school staff were not giving up on their child. Mr G valued the PRU teachers continued support after their involvement with his child had ceased. I felt that parents valued this as they felt that someone else genuinely cared about their child and wanted them to succeed, rather than just passing on the 'problem' to another school.

Some parents seem to feel that their “expertise” or unique knowledge was not recognised in school meetings as is shown in the quote below:

...they'd say to me, we sending him home because he's aggressive but if I woke him up on a morning I'd know if he was going to be aggressive so I wouldn't send him to school and then I'd get grief for not sending him to school.

(Mr G, lines 254-258)

Parents also appeared to value school being accessible. Mr and Mrs N felt more involved in their child's schooling when they were actively welcomed into the school and felt comfortable to visit the school if they needed to.

I felt that parents sometimes needed both practical and emotional support when their child was experiencing difficulties. It seemed in most cases that parents did not receive this from mainstream school staff. Mr and Mrs L and Mr and Mrs N contacted the Parent Partnership Service for support and found having someone to talk to was beneficial.

Parent subordinate themes

Failure in parenting

Mr and Mrs O appeared to feel a sense of blame and responsibility regarding their child's exclusion.

Another parent voiced how she felt other professionals had questioned her parenting ability and blamed her for her child's difficulties:

The psychologist sat there and said to me, there's nothing wrong with this child, it's you with the problem. So I said right suit yourself and away we came.

(Mrs Y, lines 268-270)

Mr G, in particular, seemed to present to me a desire to be a successful parent and take responsibility for their child. Interestingly, parents did not only highlight how professionals may blame parents, but also how parents can blame other parents:

I think education needs to get more people harassing these parents to basically keep these kids in school and if they're not in school to get off their arses and find them.

(Mr G, lines 412-415)

I felt that by drawing attention to others faults; parents were re-affirming to themselves that they were, in fact, being successful parents themselves.

Feeling victimised

Four of the parents interviewed appeared to feel personally victimised by staff at the mainstream school. Three parents in particular seemed to feel that past experiences with older siblings had given them a reputation which was difficult to change:

*I went to speak to Mr ***** on 1st March to ask him if he could change his decision in excluding her. He turned round and said "no. I've got one of your children out, here is another one." Because he had already got my oldest son out.*

(Mrs S, lines 53-56)

Mrs Y described how she had seen a note passed between school staff warning

them to be aware of what she might say. It seemed that this felt like a personal attack on this parent.

I want to be heard

It appeared that all parents felt that they were not fully involved in their child's education, often only being involved when the situation had reached a crisis point:

*The only meeting I had was the one where they wanted to get him excluded.
(Mr G, lines 157-158)*

Mr and Mrs N felt that schools had made decisions about excluding their child without speaking to them. When parents were involved in meetings it seemed that they often felt ignored and unable to challenge teachers' opinions:

*...but some of them, like his head of year, err, I just thought...he would just have his say and that would be it, he didn't want to listen to anyone else's problems, so in the end we just got sick of it and said all right do what you want to do.
(Mr and Mrs N, lines 248-252)*

Fighting a battle

For parents it often seemed that they were fighting an on-going battle to ensure their child was provided with suitable educational provision. Mr and Mrs L felt like they had won the battle, however, others were still struggling to find a provision which they felt would meet their child's needs:

*I don't want her back in mainstream school. If she can have specialised schooling I will fight with that all the way...
(Mrs Y, lines 441-443)*

Superordinate theme – Anticipation of change

| Superordinate theme | Pupil subordinate themes | PRU staff subordinate themes |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Anticipation of change | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reservations about a new school• Positive aspirations for the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PRU staff committed to improving their practice• Anxiety about new authority developments• Feelings of ostracization• Importance of forging relationships with other professionals |

See appendix 8, pages 166-168

Pupil subordinate themes

Reservations about a new school

Pupil A seemed to be anxious both about the prospect of moving to a new school and leaving the PRU setting.

Some of the pupils were in the process of planning, or had just moved to a new school. For some pupils it was clear that their past experiences were at the root of their anxiety. For M, the negative relationships he had had with teachers at his old school were still a concern for him:

*I: What would help you in the transition to ****?*

M: I don't know...teachers, I don't like teachers.

(Pupil M, lines 226-227)

For K, his concerns about bullying seemed to be a major factor in the decision about which new school to go to. He chose one which was bigger with more open spaces where he thought it would be more difficult for people to bully.

For some pupils it felt like they, and adults around them, had had to fight to give them an opportunity to go back to mainstream school. I felt that this may have put further pressure on the pupil to succeed, adding to their anxiety about the

transition:

*They have fought for this place for me. They put me on a trial period, so if I mess up I go back to **** or somewhere else.*

(Pupil S, lines 160-162)

Positive aspirations for the future

All pupils in this research had aspirations for the future. Although they were anxious about moving on they all expressed that they did want to go back to a mainstream school and succeed. Some had further aspirations of gaining good qualifications, attending further education and getting a particular job:

...I just want some GCSE's, I'm not fussed about owt else. I want to go to college, I want to work with kids like me.

(Pupil A, lines 312-314)

PRU staff subordinate themes

PRU staff committed to improving their practice

Adults from the PRU also shared pupils' anxiety about the task of re-integrating pupils into mainstream schools. I sensed that they felt a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the transition and wanted to ensure they were doing the best job they could:

if we've done all this hard work and if the pupils and the parents have worked hard and we've had this positive impact and we've got to the point where they are going back into school, that is a big issue for us, a lot of apprehension about that next transition and I think it means we have to really skill ourselves up to, sort of reflecting on this, finding out what the issues are, and finding ways of supporting pupils and parents with that next transition

(PRU focus group, lines 125-133)

The PRU head teacher spoke strongly about her wish to offer a professional and coherent service to mainstream schools. However it seemed that the PRU staff felt a little helpless in their quest and that ultimately they were fighting against school systems.

Anxiety about new authority developments

PRU staff also appeared to be anxious about new developments that were happening in the authority. A new team responsible for behaviour support and reintegration in secondary schools had been set up but the PRU staff felt uncertain about how this team would work and how their roles would complement each other.

Feelings of ostracization and the importance of forging relationships with other professionals

As a result of changes in the authority the PRU staff appeared to feel ostracised from other professionals and agencies, having to constantly find out what was happening in the authority:

...we're not attached to any pyramid, we've been left very, sort of, isolated and outside of things that go on...we are finding out about all these agencies all the time, and then the job is to find out the mechanisms for getting these people on board (PRU focus group, lines 261-266).

It appeared that the PRU staff felt strongly about having good lines of communication with other professionals and spoke favourably about the past outreach team whom they had a good working relationship with. Their hope was that in the future they would work more closely with other agencies, and schools, to meet the needs of pupils:

*But I would hope down the line that we will be able to offer a very, all I want to do is offer a very professional and coherent service, ourselves and **** (KS4 PRU), and this support team and everybody else*

(PRU focus group, lines 236-240).

Parent superordinate theme – Issues of blame and responsibility

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate themes |
|---|--|
| Issues of blame and responsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blame attributed to external factors• Blame attributed to school systems• Blame attributed to pupil• Parents defending pupil• Contradictory views of pupil |

See appendix 8, pages 169-171

Blame attributed to external factors

All parents partly attributed the cause of their child's exclusion to issues not directly related to the school. Four parents felt that peer relationships were at the root of their child's difficulties. One parent felt that their child's difficulties stemmed from a difficult family relationship and another parent felt that their child's mental health difficulties and lack of clear diagnosis was the cause.

Blame attributed to school systems

It appeared that while not necessarily perceiving school as the initiator of their child difficulties, all parents felt animosity towards the mainstream school for their omissive role leading to their child's exclusion.

I felt that these parents saw the school as largely to blame for their child's exclusion as school staff had not managed to support their child's needs and had ultimately let them down in excluding them. Some parents felt that the exclusion would have been avoided if school had put more interventions in place to meet their child's needs:

But I do think if things would have been put in place it just wouldn't have

happened.

(Mrs Y, lines 148-149)

Four parents felt that bullying was at the root of their child's difficulties; it seemed that these parents felt that anti-bullying, and behaviour policies and procedures were ineffective or not adhered to.

Blame attributed to pupil

Despite placing the majority of blame with the school, all parents appeared to express the view that their child was ultimately at fault and that they had to take some responsibility for their own behaviour:

If she'd have been allowed to leave the classroom it wouldn't have happened, erm, but like I say at the end of the day, you know, the buck stops at A, she shouldn't have done what she did, you know, but it happened.

(Mrs Y, lines 150-153)

Parents defending pupil

Some parents seemed to justify their child's behaviour and attempted to exonerate them of any blame by rationalising their actions, or even turning their behaviour into a positive attribute:

They've been bullying him haven't they but because he hasn't reported it at school nothing had been done so in the end he's lost his temper and actually hit the kids, but to me he's done right, the kids been having a go at him so our M's hit him too and flattened him.

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 20-24)

In these cases it seemed that by doing this, parents were giving the pupil permission to behave badly and consequently supporting them rather than the school.

Similarly, other parents attempted to normalise or make light of their child's difficult behaviour, saying that it was just 'the confrontation of being a teenage boy' (Mr G, lines 62-65). It felt that doing this made the parents feel better about the exclusion and took away the responsibility from them as parents.

Contradictory views of pupil

Parents' again seemed to try to challenge negative school portrayal, by expressing how professionals had said complimentary things about their child:

*Same again at ****, they said he's an absolute angel. They can't, this is what we said, we can't understand.*

(Mr and Mrs N, lines 123-125)

I felt that by doing this, parents were trying to make sense of why their child was excluded. Mrs L felt that her son was not a 'bad lad' and reported that the head teacher agreed with her but the school still decided to uphold their decision to permanently exclude him.

Parents enjoyed talking positively about what their child was like at home. For example, M's parents referred to their son's camping skills. I felt that such parents found it difficult to reconcile the difference between the child they know at home and the pupil at school.

Parent superordinate theme - Consequences of exclusion

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate themes |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Consequences of exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Physical and emotional effects of exclusion on parents● Positive effects of exclusion for pupil● Negative effects of exclusion for pupil● Positive aspirations for the future |

See appendix 8, pages 172-173

Physical and emotional effects of exclusion on parents

Some parents found that the experience of their child being excluded took its toll on them physically:

*I missed the deadline to appeal, to go into County Hall...Because I had had fit after fit after fit with all the stress and the pressure I was under.
(Mrs S, lines 67-69)*

Parents also felt the emotional effects of their child's exclusion. They appeared to feel upset and ashamed because of the stigma of having a child excluded from school.

Positive effects of exclusion for pupil

Although the exclusion was a difficult experience all parents felt, in retrospect, that it led to a positive improvement in their child's situation. Mr and Mrs L described K as being like a different child after the exclusion as he was much happier and more confident.

Negative effects of exclusion for pupil

Parents felt that the negative effects of exclusion were that their child had often missed quite substantial amounts of schooling as a consequence of the exclusion and that the exclusion may have had a negative effect on their child's

academic progress. Mrs Y seemed to have perceived that impaired academic success was the cost of being happy at school, she felt she would rather her daughter be happy out of school than gain qualifications.

Positive aspirations for the future

Parents appeared to accept that the PRU could not offer their child a suitable long term placement and hoped to re-integrate them back into a mainstream school or other suitable provision:

*Mr ***** said we'd rather have him back in mainstream school sooner rather than later, he said, because he needs to...we can only do so much for him...*

(Mr and Mrs L, lines 248-251)

When pupils had already started a new school, such as pupil S, parents appeared to feel positive about their child's new start and their future education.

Pupil superordinate theme – Relationship difficulties

| Pupil Superordinate theme | Pupil subordinate themes |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Relationship difficulties | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strained home-school relationships● Problems with peers● Negative relationships with teachers● Importance of mutual respect |

See appendix 8, page 174

Strained home-school relationships

Pupils were often aware of their parents having negative relationships with school staff. I felt that this would affect the pupil's relationships with adults in school and hinder any attempts at dealing with issues in school:

Cos when I think my mum was getting a bit peed off with it and she said he's just not going for a few weeks, and I didn't go to school for a few weeks.

(Pupil M, lines 108-111)

Problems with peers

All bar one pupil interviewed had some difficulties with peer relationships. For three of the pupils (Pupil O, Pupil K and Pupil S), bullying was seen as a serious issue which, in part, resulted in their exclusion:

From day one I were at that school, from when it was my first day, I got bullied by loads.

(Pupil S, lines 64-65)

Negative relationships with teachers

It seemed that pupils often felt victimised by teachers in school. Pupil A felt that teachers had been trying to get her 'kicked out' of school for the past six months.

It seemed that even when pupils did try to improve their behaviour they felt that teachers still expected the worst of them and did not give them a chance:

I've still got my report at home, with all the excellents on it and everything like that. They said I tried to forge signatures and write my own excellents on it and stuff like that.

(Pupil M, lines 147-150)

Importance of mutual respect

It appeared that some pupils felt that they experienced a lack of respect from teachers in their initial mainstream schools. Pupils described how teachers addressed them in a disrespectful manner:

They wouldn't say, err; please can I have your planner...give me your planner you're late! So you couldn't explain, you just got in trouble.

(Pupil K, lines 74-76).

For some pupils this lack of respect from adults seemed to cause further poor behaviour on their part:

The only reason I was being bad in school was because of the school really, I didn't like it so I just decided to be bad.

(Pupil M, lines 194-196)

It seems that mutual respect was important to pupils; they did not feel they should behave well if adults had behaved, in their perception, wrongly towards them.

Pupil superordinate theme – I want to be heard

| Pupil Superordinate theme | Pupil subordinate themes |
|----------------------------------|---|
| I want to be heard | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Importance of feeling listened to● Pupil passivity● Meetings tokenistic |

See appendix 8, page 175

Importance of feeling listened to

I felt that pupils, generally, did not feel listened to in school. Even if someone did listen to their problem, it seemed that they did not take it seriously enough or take appropriate action to solve the issue. It felt like some pupils, and their parents had accepted this fact:

I: Did you have meetings at school before you were excluded to discuss the problems you were having and stuff?

O: No, cos nobody listened.

I: Did your parents go into school to try and sort things out?

O: Nobody would listen so she gave up.

(Pupil O. lines 101-107)

Pupil A discussed her trial day at a new mainstream school, although she had a good understanding of her difficulties, it was clear that these had not been considered, and consequently she was set up to fail.

Pupil passivity

Pupils seemed to present themselves as being passive in the exclusion process. Some pupils, particularly pupil E, felt that he was uninvolved and that discussions about him were between school and his parents.

It seemed that some pupils chose to be passive in the meetings about them; I felt that this was because they felt powerless and had accepted their fate:

E: I didn't really speak much...

I: Was that because you weren't given the opportunity to speak?

E: I just didn't want to.

(Pupil E, lines 81-84)

Meetings tokenistic

It seemed that meetings around a pupil's exclusion were seen as negative or unhelpful in the exclusion process. For pupils who attended meetings about their behaviour, it seemed like the meetings were procedural rather than putting any plans into place to support the pupil:

*When you get excluded you have to go back in for a meeting, in the morning, just like with miss ****, that's her who wanted me to get kicked out of school. And they just say are you ready to go back in and I'd say yeah, and then they were just kicking me out every single day*

(Pupil M, lines 167-172)

In some cases pupils felt that decisions about their future had already been made by school and meetings were purely perfunctory.

Pupil superordinate theme – Evolving Identity

| Pupil Superordinate theme | Pupil subordinate themes |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Evolving identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regret and shame• Reputation• Increasing self-awareness• Striving to create a new identity |

See appendix 8, pages 176-177

Regret and shame

Although all pupils felt that the exclusion had led to an improvement in their situation, they felt a great amount of regret about their actions which led to the exclusion. Pupils also felt ashamed about their exclusion and were concerned about how others saw them as a person:

*...I would rather if possible that I would have got a managed move rather than being kicked out. Really, you know, so it didn't go on my record.
(Pupil A, lines 74-76)*

Reputation

Many pupils felt that they had gained a reputation in school as a problem pupil and that this had become embedded as part of their identity,

*Like all the teachers seem to assume that because you got some behaviour that it's you that does it all the time
(Pupil A, lines 162-164).*

Two of the pupils, S and O, seemed to be holding onto their bad reputation and it felt like they liked being known as a 'bad' pupil. I felt that they were using their reputation as a front to protect them against further difficulties as these pupils had experienced bullying in the past.

Increasing self-awareness

Pupils seemed, in hindsight, to accept that they had to take some responsibility for their actions and were accepting of the punishment.

Pupils appeared to have a good understanding of their needs and what they find difficult in school:

I know here they try to do the same work that they do in schools but there's a big difference between going my strong points English and my weak points are maths but it's alright saying that when you go into a bigger class again, it's like it still doesn't matter what it is now because I still can't concentrate.

(Pupil A, lines 300-305)

Striving to create a new identity

Pupils seemed to want to present a new more positive side of themselves, which often was the opposite of behaviour they had previously presented:

If I kick off it affects somebody else's mental health which I wouldn't because I wouldn't ever do anything to hurt someone that's got something up with them anyway, it's horrible.

(Pupil A, lines 338-341)

Pupils also tended to present themselves as being unlike other pupils in the PRU, Pupil A described PRUs as being full of 'no hopers'. By doing this I felt that pupils were rejecting the identity of an excluded pupil.

Pupils also appeared to appreciate being treated like everyone else:

...they just treat me normal, not like I've got summat wrong with me. Just normal really.

(Pupil A, lines 335-336)

Chapter 5: Discussion of Interpretative Findings

This chapter shall examine how the research process has addressed the research question, with reference to key points in the Literature Review chapter. Consideration will be given to the joint experience of the parents, pupils and PRU staff. I will attempt to discuss each superordinate theme in relation to the literature review and further interpretations; however, four key superordinate themes will be discussed in more detail. These four themes were more significant than others as they were shared by two or all participant groups and are the themes I interpret as being most illuminatory in addressing the research questions. Two of the superordinate themes were shared by all participant groups (parents, pupils and PRU staff) and were, therefore, most significant. They were:

- School systems failing pupils
- Pupils need a protective nurturing environment.

One superordinate theme was shared by the parents and PRU staff, this was:

- Parents have a role in exclusion.

The final superordinate theme was shared by pupils and PRU staff, this was:

- Anticipation of change.

I will attempt to use these four key superordinate themes to address my research questions.

Research question 1

What are parents' reflections on, and understandings of, their child's experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their permanent exclusion and subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit?

Research question 2

What are pupils' experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their permanent exclusion and subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit?

I will now attempt to address research questions one and two by discussing the

key superordinate themes, 'school systems failing pupils' and 'parents have a role in exclusion', however as this chapter develops it becomes clear that deeper interpretation of all four superordinate themes shows they are closely interrelated.

School systems failing pupils

The interpretative analysis suggests that parents seek to attribute their child's exclusion to single or multiple causal factors: the pupil, the school, external factors, peers or difficult family relationships. This was similar to findings by Hayden and Dunne (2001). Souter (2001) states that traditional school approaches to dealing with emotional and behavioural difficulties have been based on psychological theories such as behavioural or psychodynamic, and have viewed problems as located within the individual and have, therefore, put blame onto the child and focused on modifying individual behaviour, therefore, traditional approaches to dealing with emotional and behavioural difficulties may have not taken into account other causal factors. The interpretative analysis also suggested that parents had recognised that schools had attempted to intervene and prevent their child's exclusion, although again, such interventions were largely focused on the individual child rather than the school as a larger system. This research suggests that re-thinking the way schools define, and respond to difficulties, and looking at the practices and perceptions of schools, may be more effective for pupils. The emergence of 'school systems failing pupils' as a key superordinate theme in this research highlights that looking at the phenomenon of exclusion from a systems perspective may help me to make sense of my participants' experiences.

Systems theory

As highlighted in the literature review chapter, systems theory may be a useful way of theoretically examining parents' and pupils' experiences of experiencing difficulties in a mainstream school. Before examining the interpretations in light of a systems theory approach, I will present a further overview of the nature of systems theory.

A systems theory approach attempts to broaden the view of a problem so that

blame is removed from the individual. Systems Theory has been 'largely ignored by educators' (Upton and Cooper, 1990a) for a number of reasons. Souter (2001) believes that one explanation for this is that teachers prefer to locate the responsibility for the problem elsewhere. Other factors are thought to include teacher's perception of their own role (Nias, 1985) and threats to their competence (Lortie, 1975). Upton and Cooper (1990b) note that a key tenet of general systems theory is that simple notions of causation are inadequate, and that living organisms are purposive and act upon stimuli rather than responding in a linear way, implying a circular causation. Dowling and Osborne (1985) believe that this circular causation implies a different epistemology, the question 'why' (linear - cause and effect) is replaced by 'how' the phenomenon occurs, attention is paid to the interactions that occur, and repetitive patterns which surround the event. Souter (2001) describes how problems can be seen as indicators of dysfunction within the system. Intervention then occurs in the context of the dysfunction (i.e. the dyadic relationship, whole class, or school policy) rather than at the level of the individual (the pupil). She believes that;

Since a systems view results in generations of solutions it will foster an environment where differing explanations of problems can be formulated, tolerated and encouraged
(Souter, 2001 p 39).

However, there are critics of systems theory who believe it is a naïve approach which looks at problems in a simplistic and mechanistic way (Dyson and Stiles-Quinton, 1989). Quicke (1982) also argues that in systems approaches the world is taken as having an objective reality (that the 'school system' is a real entity) as opposed to being the construction of those who are part of it. Quicke would argue that school system structures do not have to be taken as a given, with approaches based on a mechanical metaphor which may unhelpfully reify the status quo. Tyler (1992) suggested that;

A systems view needs to take the distinctly human phenomena expressed in personal interaction into account: Individual's behaviours and experiences cannot be simply translated into the language of mechanistic systems models without destroying their uniquely human

character

(Tyler, 1992 p 4)

An ecosystemic approach

Tyler suggested that we need to take a phenomenological approach to systems theory as when individuals interact with a human system, their own expectations and interpretations become part of that system. This has been termed an ecosystemic approach (Upton and Cooper, 1990b) which sees problem behaviour as a product of social interaction. In this way the school system is not seen as an object or concrete reality as there are likely to be many different constructions and interpretations of the system. In the literature there are many different interpretations of systems theory and Golderberg and Golderberg (1996) outline at least eight. For the purposes of this research I will attempt to discuss the findings in terms of an ecosystemic approach which takes an appreciation of the pupil in the school context.

Participants in this research felt strongly that mainstream schools had a poor understanding of pupils' needs. It could be argued that for many mainstream schools their aims are not synonymous with meeting all pupils' needs, particularly those described as having SEBD. Literature around schools as organisations identifies that schools are presented with a number of dilemmas regarding their aims (Cooper et al, 2000). One of these dilemmas is around the rights and needs of the *collective*, opposed to the rights and needs of the *individual*, the demands of the National Curriculum and the Ofsted Inspection framework driving schools to meet the needs of the *collective*. Another dilemma was the tension between the responsibility for *student wellbeing* and *staff wellbeing*. This was a theme highlighted by the PRU staff in this research; they felt that because of the pressure to attain academic standards, teachers could not afford time to support the needs of more vulnerable pupils. It seemed that they saw the inflexibility of the National Curriculum as detrimental to the education of pupils who may need a broader education in terms of developing pupils' social and emotional competence as well as academic competence. The PRU staff appeared to understand and empathise with the pressure that mainstream teachers are under and appreciate that they were not under such pressure and could work with vulnerable pupils in a way that may better

address their needs.

Another dilemma identified by Cooper et al (2000) was the issue between the need for pupil correction and the need for pupil understanding. A dominant theme in this research, for both pupils and parents, was that teachers did not have a good understanding of the excluded pupil's learning needs. Similar to the work of Harris et al (2006) it seemed that although learning difficulties were not a primary contributor to the pupil being excluded, many pupils felt that they would have benefited from academic support, and absence of support in lessons contributed to their feelings of disaffection. Parents and pupils in this research felt a sense of ignorance on the part of teachers around SEBD and mental health difficulties. I sensed that participants felt that the teachers aim was to correct these difficulties rather than strive to understand the pupil, a point made by Jull (2008). It seemed that teachers did not want to see these pupils as their responsibility and would rather remove them from the classroom as they threatened the classroom environment they were trying to create.

Prior research found parents cited peer relationships, particularly bullying, as an underlying factor to exclusion (Hayden and Dunne, 2001, McDonald and Thomas, 2003). This was reflected by parents and pupils in this research and they felt that teachers did not have a good understanding of the severity of the problem, choosing not to notice, or deal with, bullying appropriately. I feel that this may have been linked to teacher's lack of understanding of these pupils; I feel teachers may have lacked sympathy towards these children as they saw them as a threat to the functioning of their classroom.

A systemic approach to meeting the needs of staff and pupils

Teacher's lack of understanding of pupils can be related to a systems perspective. Sutoris (2000) states that the complex organisation structure of mainstream schools demands some means of integrating the experiences of pupils and staff into a more meaningful whole. He believes that this requires the expression of a set of shared values which function symbolically to relate individual experiences to the whole. Reed and Bazalgette (1977) stated that where this does not happen, pupils may be put under such pressure that they start to show signs of 'social disintegration' (Reed and Bazalgette, 1977, p.77).

This may relate to this research in that, in mainstream schools, all the processes and activities that occur within it are thought to contribute to one 'aim' (the whole); for many schools this appears to be providing pupils with the academic skills to gain formal academic qualifications. Sutoris (2000) explains that if a system is functioning effectively then the 'aim' should describe the output of the system. Parents', pupils' and PRU staff experiences in this research indicate that some school systems may be ineffective because some pupils have needs which cannot be met by an academic aim. The experiences of such pupils result in them deviating from the schools 'aim' and being seen as a failure in terms of the school as a system. This idea is echoed by Tattum (1984) who identified an imbalance between the perceived importance of academic and pastoral aspects of education. He believed that in schools pastoral care is linked with discipline and control, rather than meeting the needs of pupils, in order to facilitate the smooth running of the school system. This explains why schools may feel the need to 'correct' rather than understand pupils as it draws attention away from educational organisation and the need to change practices (Hamblin, 1986). This was also echoed in these interpretative findings as one parent seemed to feel that being happy at school and achieving academically were mutually exclusive and that it was impossible for her child to achieve both.

This issue is particularly pertinent for pupils in the first few years at secondary school as they must interact successively with more and more increasingly diverse and complex systems. In a secondary school, with many subsystems, pupils must be able to adapt their behaviour in response to changes in the context as they move from one subsystem to another and learn to take up many roles within the same system (Sutoris, 2000). For pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties this may be a major challenge.

This also relates to the view of Ogden (2001), that inappropriate behaviours for some pupils are adaptive; they can be described as a pupil's response to a threatening environment. In this research the PRU staff described vulnerable pupils as being like round pegs in square holes when they were in mainstream secondary school, and described how they felt that there was a need for either the school systems or the pupil to change in order for the environment to better

meet the pupil's needs. This can be related to Sternberg's (1997) Triarchic Theory of intelligence. I believe that for the pupils in this research, the third option was chosen – opting out of a poor fit environment in favour of a more optimal setting. These may be the pupils labelled as having emotional behavioural difficulties, who are excluded from mainstream schools.

The impact of relationships and roles within the system

Poor relationships between teachers and pupils was emphasised in this research as an important part of pupils' mainstream school experience. Pomeroy (2000) also highlighted that pupils' relationships with teachers had a powerful impact on their school experience. Research shows that pupils frequently commented on lack of respect from teachers as being a particular issue (Williamson and Cullingford, 2003). This was mirrored in this interpretative analysis as pupils felt that teachers spoke to them in an antagonistic manner which often provoked a negative reaction on their part. I felt that for these pupils the teachers' words conveyed a message that they were not valued, having potential effects on their self-worth. Research also suggested that pupils sometimes feel victimised by school staff (McDonald and Thomas, 2003), a finding replicated in this research. Pupils reported on-going negative relationships with teachers, often feeling that the teacher wanted to get them out of the school. I felt that these pupils found it difficult to change teachers' views of them once they had gained a reputation for bad behaviour. Parents also seemed to feel that teachers were impersonal, and lacked compassion towards their child, not helping them to deal with problems in school when they needed it. I believe that this lack of compassion may at times reflect the teacher's resentful feelings towards such pupils who cause them daily difficulties in the classroom. This is a problem recognised by Day (2004) who believes that teaching is a profession which demands a high level of emotional labour. He states,

To be warm and encouraging to a student who is persistently rude or uninterested requires emotional work.

(Day, 2004 p. 37)

These relationship difficulties may be explained by how teachers and pupils

take up a role within a school system. A role is described as;

An idea or conception in the mind through which a person manages himself and his behaviour in relation to the system of which he is a member, so as to further its aim or purpose.

(Reed and Armstrong, 1988 p.11)

Sutoris (2000) states that when roles are prescribed, there is little room for personal interpretation, so there is an inevitable tension between individuals needs and external demands of the system. This may be the case for some pupils in mainstream schools. Once in a role the pupil needs to work out how they relate to the system as a whole, identifying relevant skills and knowledge and how to use these to perform their role. In terms of a pupil's role they must be able to constantly adapt and regulate their behaviour to different situations, and adequately contain their feelings in order to carry out their task. Sutoris (2000) believes that taking up such a role carries an element of risk for both the teacher and pupil as it is putting to the test one's capacities. For the teacher this may be managing the class and ensuring pupils are learning and motivated. For pupils, there are many risks inherent in the learning process and many youngsters are reluctant to expose themselves to such risks. The extent to which a pupil is successful in containing such anxieties is dependent upon the teacher's ability to provide a classroom environment which is supportive of pupils taking up their role.

For the pupils in this study it seems they were not adequately supported in taking up their role and they were displaying patterns of behaviour which protected them from the emotional demands of taking a role. Bion (1961) first described such patterns of behaviour, describing the survival behaviour (or the 'basic assumption' level) of role avoidance as a response to situations that feel unsafe because the emotional demands of a role become too great to endure. Sutoris (2000) believes that when the aim of a system is unclear or when individuals are not supported in meeting the aim, a greater proportion of individuals will display survival behaviour more of the time. Therefore, good pupil-teacher relationships are crucial. Hargreaves (2000) emphasises the need for both students and teachers to understand their own feelings and those

of others, and be able to handle and express those feelings appropriately. Teachers may struggle to take their role in a school system when challenged with difficult behaviour and may feel a sense of frustration, panic, anger and threat. This may affect how the teacher responds to the pupil. Price (2001) believes that teachers and pupils may experience anxiety about feeling ignorant, lacking power and the possibility of being subject to a 'malign authority' (Price 2001, p 169). Teachers may feel an unconscious tension between the desire to live up to their ideal of being a good teacher and the need to resist the vulnerable position of lacking skills to deal with a situation. According to Bion's theory, the process of containment will be difficult in such situations, and people are likely to relate to one another in an all-powerful or punishing way, inevitably resulting in a breakdown in the relationship.

Corrective measures within the system

Parents and pupils also emphasised that school systems regarding behaviour management and discipline were problematic, stating that some pupils were treated unfairly. Literature highlights that many pupils dislike school rules and how they are applied, some pupils feeling school rules can be petty or inconsistently applied (Williamson and Cullingford, 2003, Cullingford, 1999). This feeling was echoed in these interpretative findings. Some pupils felt that there was a general lack of discipline in school, leaving pupils feeling vulnerable. Parents and pupils both felt that sanctions were often inappropriate and disproportionately applied. There appeared to be a lot of frustration that the rules regarding behaviour and discipline had not been applied consistently for the excluded pupils as they were often punished when other pupils had not been for the same offence.

An ecosystemic perspective would state that in any social system there are a set of rules governing the way people should behave towards one another and what should and should not be done. Galloway et al (1982) suggested that rigid and inflexible rules in schools have been associated with serious discipline problems. Problems with discipline in schools can also be understood in terms of roles within the system. Armstrong (1985) believed that when pupils have been able to take up the pupil role, the rules represented by the school can be given meaning (contributing to the achievement of the school aim) rather than

being experienced as the arbitrary expectations of adults. Sutoris (2000) states that difficulties in taking up a role can be described in terms of the problem of understanding the nature and use of authority. Authority is thought to be legitimate in the context of having taken up a role; however in contrast, authority is illegitimate when based on one's status within a system. When pupils in this research were seemingly punished unfairly, this exercise of authority was experienced as hostile, punitive, and fostered feelings of anger. Sutoris suggest that when adults use authority in this way they may be struggling to take up their own role within the school system. Similarly, the fact that some pupils expressed the need for greater discipline could also reflect the pupils' reluctance to assume responsibility for their own behaviour, and also their understanding of the role of the teacher, who they see as having the ultimate responsibility for instilling, and monitoring, rules to control the pupils' behaviour.

Significance of 'pupil voice' impacting on system change

Linked to issues of power and authority, research suggests that the voices of pupil with EBD are seldom heard, both within the school environment and in academic research (Sellman, 2009, Cooper, 2006). This interpretative analysis yielded similar findings. Pupils felt that, on the whole, their views were not considered worthy of being listened to in school. It seemed that pupils often gave up trying to be heard when they felt their efforts were futile. When asked about the process of being excluded, particularly meetings, pupils seemed to feel that they were a passive participant and did not see that they should have any involvement in the process. This may be understood in the framework of hierarchy within schools. Interactions in school are framed by a hierarchy of worth, teachers at the top, able or better behaved pupils in the middle and pupils with SEN or behavioural difficulties at the bottom (Pomeroy, 2000). This hierarchical imbalance in teacher-pupil relationships shows that teachers possess an unequal and greater amount of power. The criteria for determining one's place in the hierarchy are entirely defined by the aim of the school. As discussed earlier, excluded pupils may find it difficult to take up their role in a system, and therefore, opt out of striving to meet the aims of the system as the demands on them are too great. This renders such pupils a subordinate group.

Parents have a role in exclusion

For both the parents and PRU staff, another significant superordinate theme arising from the interpretative analysis was that parents have a role to play in their child's exclusion. This mirrored prior research about the parent's position (Munn et al, 2000, McDonald and Thomas, 2003, Hayden and Dunne, 2001), in that the parents interviewed seemed to feel a sense of blame and responsibility for their child's difficulties, which was often compounded by their experience of speaking with professionals. Parents in this research also appeared to be stigmatised in the eyes of professionals, sometimes having gained a family reputation from experiences with older children from the same family. Parents described the experience of feeling like they were fighting a battle. I think that this accurately describes the emotional and practical struggle they went through when their child was excluded, in their feelings towards the child, inconvenience in their lives, feelings of frustration in dealing with the school and local authority systems, stress in the family home, as well as their own feelings about themselves as a parent. Munn et al (2000) discussed these effects of exclusion on family life. These interpretative findings similarly illuminate how exclusion took its toll on parents' physical and mental health, some parents experiencing ill-health and a great deal of emotional stress.

Home-school relationships

Parents in this research noted the importance of having good home-school relationships, recognising that in their situation these positive relationships were often strained or absent. Macdonald and Thomas (2003) found that many parents experienced inadequate home-school relationships. The major issue of a lack of communication was shared by parents in this research. Parents often felt that information about their child was not shared with them until it was too late. They did not feel involved in working together with the school and sensed that schools did not recognise them as experts in dealing with their own child. This seemed particularly problematic for these parents as they all valued regular communication with schools and had a great desire to be successful parents. Parents described the school as inaccessible; it felt like they saw the school as a disparate system to their family system which they could not easily gain entry to.

Miller (1996 p.173-176) describes how, in terms of systems theory, perceived barriers between home and school can be construed as 'boundary issues'.

Different aspects of boundary issues may be:

- The system maintaining internal functioning – maintenance functions (a common identification with a set of beliefs, values and norms) enable the systems members to contribute to the primary task rather than having to divert their energy to preserving homeostasis within the system. When parents and teachers share different beliefs about a child, or parents had previous poor relationships with certain people within school this can create a difficulty in the system.
- The negotiation of shared meanings – In order to function a system must arrive at a shared definition of a problematic situation, this is often difficult to achieve and is therefore a significant barrier to successful parent-teacher relationships. It is often the case that children identified as a problem in one setting are not seen as such in the other, so parents may be unwilling to accept there is a problem at school. This may make attributing causes for difficult pupil behaviour confusing and mutually antagonistic.
- Uncertainty over the predictability of aspects of the environment – uncertainty in the environment is taken to be a major contributor to decreasing homeostasis in the system. There may be perceived barriers linked to perceptions about the parent's lifestyles, emotional stability and intellectual ability, these will have an effect on how teachers judge and work together with parents.
- Uncertainty over the location of the barrier with the environment – A common uncertainty concerns the extent to which teachers and parents construe each other's responsibilities, this can lead to a difficulty in deciding the exact location of the boundary itself. Teachers and parents being unsure as to how much interaction is necessary or beneficial.

However, it could be seen as a little simplistic to see home and school as systems in this more mechanical sense. Issues with home-school relationships

need to be looked at in terms of complex interpersonal interaction. As discussed earlier, it is important to consider how each individual is making sense of the situation and what meaning and significance it has for them.

Significance of 'parent voice' impacting on system change

Parents in this research expressed that they wanted their voice to be heard. They felt that they could not challenge professionals' views about their child and consequently did not feel involved in decisions about their child's education. This relates to research findings which showed that parents often found meetings in school a negative experience as they felt intimidated and found the meetings were focused on problems rather than solutions (McDonald and Thomas, 2003). As discussed earlier Miller (1996) believes that antagonistic relationships between teachers and parents are often caused by teachers' and parents' differing identification of problem behaviour. It is clear that such misconceptions can flourish in the absence of communication. However, it is problematic that in mainstream secondary schools teachers and parents seldom meet formally unless there is problem with their child. It was apparent that such meetings often became a confrontation between adversaries where parents may feel alienated or blamed. Miller believes that because parents are not part of the school systems it is difficult for them, in a couple of meetings to understand the school systems definitions around pupil behaviour. It is also important to remember that sometimes parents themselves have had poor experiences of school, and because of this may already feel anxious and unduly victimised by being invited into school for a meeting.

Despite the overarching theme of school systems failing pupils, there was an interesting ambiguity around how parents' saw the effect of exclusion on their child. All parents' felt that the exclusion had, in retrospect, been positive for their child. They appeared to feel that the exclusion brought about a change in their child's situation for the better. The parents had positive aspirations for the future and spoke positively about their child's current, or impending, new school placement. Although it seemed that a change in the child's situation was deemed positive; this change did not necessarily need to be a result of exclusion. Changes to the pupil's situation could have been brought about by adults around the child making changes which would enable the pupil to

function more effectively within the mainstream school environment. It seemed that these parents were able to use their own personal resources to reflect on their situation and find something positive in what had been a difficult time for them, and look forward to a more positive future. It could be argued that if parents were meaningfully involved in joint work with mainstream schools when their child was experiencing difficulties which put them at risk of exclusion, this motivation to find a positive outcome may have also contributed to preventing the exclusion.

Summary of parents' and pupils' experiences of exclusion

In summary, both parents' and pupils' experiences of exclusion centred around a feeling that school systems had failed them and led to situations which resulted in a permanent exclusion. The parents and pupils did not feel that schools had a good understanding of their needs and pupils often felt that they were treated unfairly; this consequently led to strained relationships with teachers. Parents felt that they had a significant role in their child's exclusion; they often felt a sense of blame and did not feel involved in their child's education. This often led to them feeling disempowered, angry and frustrated with the school.

This interpretative analysis suggests that what pupils need is a supportive, nurturing environment, this superordinate theme will be discussed in the next section, along with the superordinate theme anticipation of change, in order to address research question three.

Research question 3

How can key themes arising from interviews with parents and pupils help PRU staff to reflect on how they work in partnership to support pupil's reintegration into mainstream schools?

Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment

This interpretative analysis has highlighted that a key superordinate theme for the pupils, parents and PRU staff was pupils need a protective, nurturing environment. From hearing the lived experiences of my participants I felt that

the mainstream school was not providing this nurturing environment, however, it seems that the PRU was able to provide the type of environment these vulnerable pupils need. In this section I will attempt to interpret what these participants felt would support vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools. This has implications for the work of the PRU staff, and other professionals in their mission to re-integrate pupils.

School and PRU- a contrasting ethos

All parents and pupils appeared to feel that the PRU had provided the pupil with an experience which had met both their academic and emotional needs well. It seemed clear that the ethos of the PRU was very different to the reported ethos of the mainstream school; they seemed to have very different guiding beliefs and aims for the pupils. The PRU's aim appeared to be developing pupils' social emotional competence and boosting their feelings of self-worth.

The dictionary definition of ethos is;

The guiding standards, beliefs or ideals that characterise or pervade a group, a community, a people...the spirit that motivates the ideas, customs or practices of a people
(Websters, 1986).

This definition is helpful as it highlights the pervasive nature of ethos and also illuminates how ethos underpins practice in school, what school staff do and how they do it. This definition also focuses on a collective understanding. In this way it links with the aims of a school, when taking an ecosystemic perspective. It is, therefore, important to consider ethos when trying to understand how schools (and PRUs) vary in their approaches to meeting their pupils' needs.

Munn et al (2000) believes a starting point for considering a school's ethos is exploring the schools purpose and the role of the teacher. Participants in this research valued appropriate academic and emotional support for pupils. At the PRU it appeared that pupils received more personalised academic support than they had done at their mainstream school, increasing their self-confidence. These pupils also valued a more practical curriculum which valued a wider

range of skills as opposed to purely academic skills. As discussed earlier, many schools have an ethos or aim which values equipping pupils with good academic qualifications, this narrow view having the scope to isolate those who do not conform. Munn et al (2000) found, in their investigation into the differences in ethos between low excluding and high excluding schools, that in low excluding schools head teachers believed that it was their job to educate all pupils, not just the well behaved and well-motivated; they recognised the importance of offering all pupils the opportunity to experience success and acceptance as part of the school community. Low excluding schools also tried to experiment with the curriculum on offer, showing flexibility in the number of subjects a pupil was required to study, and drawing upon help from others to ensure appropriate differentiation for all pupils. My interpretations also highlighted that pupils and parents valued the pastoral support they received in the PRU; this support appeared to a part of the ethos of the centre and a responsibility for all staff. In mainstream schools the effectiveness of some schools has been undermined by the development of separate pastoral systems, identifying certain adults as having pastoral responsibilities and removing responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of pupils from subject teachers (Galloway, 1985). Therefore, it seems important that all adults in school see it as their responsibility to see all pupils as individuals and attempt to understand and provide for their needs. The case study of twelve schools carried out by Munn et al was not statistically robust in the way of a large scale survey, however, I believe it is for the reader to gauge the validity of the findings by reflecting on the resonance of the readers own experience of schools.

Pupil-teacher nurturing relationships

This interpretative analysis strongly supported prior research which highlighted the important role of pupil-teacher relationships (Cooper, 2006, Smith, 2006). The PRU staff emphasised the importance of showing an interest in and getting to know pupils. Ramvi (2010) defines a good pupil-teacher relationship as,

A relationship built on trust, where both show that they care about each other, the student by being open and willing to talk about himself or herself and the teacher by offering care and concern.

(Ramvi, 2010 p. 333)

All pupils appeared to highly value having an adult in school who they saw as an ally, someone whom they could speak to regularly and who would support them if necessary. This attachment figure was usually a member of the pastoral support team in school as opposed to teaching staff.

The PRU staff also acknowledged the importance of supporting pupils and having positive aspirations for them. Lewis (1999) looked at the personal qualities a teacher needs to be able to act as a role model for resilient behaviour and to be able to transmit self-belief to others. He believes that this will be achieved when teachers interact with pupils in ways which exhibits unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness (Rogers, 1980).

Teacher containment of anxieties

As discussed earlier, many teachers find the behaviour of pupils described as having SEBD threatens their ability to create and maintain an orderly classroom system. Consequently, teachers may find it difficult to take up their role when challenged with such behaviour. Sutoris (2000) believes that a teacher's ability to remain in touch with their role, through keeping the school as a system with an aim in mind, allows attacks to be considered as a pupil's survival behaviour in the context of the system, rather than a personal attack. Teachers need to be able to contain their own feelings and separate in their mind the pupil from the behavioural episode they have become involved in, as all problem behaviour has to be seen as a cyclical chain of actions and reactions between participants. Upton and Cooper (1990b) state that pupil behaviour which is labelled problematic is always goal directed, and from the pupils view understandable and necessary. This interpretative analysis emphasised how pupils desperately want adults in school to take time to understand them. Upton and Cooper (1990b) believe that when constructing a picture of a problem situation it is necessary for a teacher to establish an awareness of his or her phenomenological interpretation of the situation and set this against the interpretations of others involved. This process is described as 'sleuthing' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989). Upton and Cooper (1990b) believe that a way of increasing teachers' reflexivity is to increase opportunity for peer support, or

supervision; they believe that peer group support would facilitate the development of new perspectives on difficult situations. This idea is supported by Ramvi and Roland (1998) who found that special education teachers showed a great need to 'let off steam' with other adults after difficult experiences and that this helped them to reflect on their feelings.

However, Miller (1996) found that teachers still attributed 57% of the causes of problems to factors outside of themselves, even after they had changed a pupils challenging behaviour through a successful within school intervention. This shows that teachers may find it difficult to reject the idea of within child factors, still underplaying their own role and that of the ecosystem in changing behaviour.

Security through clear, consistent procedures and positive perceptions

Closely linked to the issue of positive pupil-teacher relationships, this interpretative analysis also brought to light the parents' and pupils' desire for a clear, consistent behaviour policy to be used within school (also noted by Harris et al, 2006). Kinder et al (1996) also found that suitable rewards and sanctions were an important solution for disruptive behaviour and this was a point exemplified by parents in this research. Parents felt strongly that positive praise and tangible rewards were successful and led to an increase in confidence in their child. For pupils it seemed important for reward systems to be specific and meaningful, so that they felt they, and other pupils, were being fairly and genuinely praised. However, I felt that the use of praise and rewards was more hinged upon the quality, and genuineness, of the relationship between the pupil and the adults than on particular systems set up within schools. This can be linked to an ecosystemic approach as Upton and Cooper (1990b) argue that traditional sanctions used by teachers (punishment, detention, withdrawal) can serve to maintain and promote the behaviour they are trying to alter. Upton and Cooper (1990b) suggest that instead of trying to change the behaviour overtly, teachers could change behaviour by using systemic principles which sustain interactional patterns. They believe that the purpose of ecosystemic intervention is to offer participants ways of breaking out of destructive cycles of interaction, through creating new cycles. Molnar and Lindquist (1989)

described the technique of 're-framing' where the teacher is required to seek a new positive, plausible and possible interpretation of behaviour, and behave in strict accordance with this. This means that the meaning of the behaviour is changed for the pupil encouraging them to respond in different ways. As a result the interactional relationship between the pupil and teacher, and how they make sense of each other's behaviour has changed offering the possibility of a more positive relationship.

Creating a nurturing environment within a school system

Throughout my interpretations of parents and pupils experiences, it appeared that parents and pupils did not expect schools to undertake anything extraordinary in order to achieve this nurturing environment. Parents and pupils valued the small things that may often have been overlooked because of demands on adults in schools. They simply wanted to: be listened to, for someone to care enough about the pupil, a little support, an understanding of what the pupil needs, and regular open lines of communication – a 'human' relationship.

This reminded me of a conclusion made by Masten (2001) whose quest to understand the 'extraordinary' phenomena of resilience in children revealed the power of the 'ordinary'. He stated,

Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.

(Masten, 2001 p.235).

This view rejects the traditional view that resilience is a within child factor and looks towards investigating resilience in a way which looks at how the individual as a complex living system interacts effectively and ineffectively over time with the systems in which it is embedded.

I believe this concept of 'ordinary magic' applies to the things adults in school can do to make pupils feel valued and able to play a collaborative role in school

life. However, I would argue that although these interpretations point to the 'ordinary' things schools could do, these are anything but 'ordinary' in the context of many mainstream schools. Unless schools change their ethos these 'ordinary' measures will remain in the realm of the almost impossible and 'extraordinary' for schools with inflexible systems and narrow academic focused aims.

Anticipation of change

For both the pupils and PRU staff, another significant superordinate theme arising from the interpretative analysis was that there was anticipation about change. The interpretative analysis suggested that for pupils re-integration back into a mainstream school was a source of worry for them. It seemed that they had all felt comfortable in the PRU setting and had experienced success and gained in self-confidence. For these pupils I could see that they had reservations about joining a new mainstream school as, for them, the issues they had with their prior mainstream school would still exist. I also felt the pressure these pupils were under to succeed; it seemed that the pressure was all on them to change their behaviour and fit in with the new school's systems rather than the other way around. For some pupils this would inevitably set them up for failure. Munn et al (2000) also notes that when a pupil is re-integrated into a school they may also be subject to negative reactions from peers and the stigma of having a negative reputation among teachers. The prospect of this may further heighten a pupil's anxiety about reintegration. Despite this pressure, all pupils had positive aspirations for the future and wanted to succeed at their new school.

Anxiety around challenging school systems

It was interesting to hear that the PRU staff had similar reservations about re-integrating pupils into their new mainstream school, they felt a lot of responsibility for the success of the re-integration yet it seemed that they had very little control over the mainstream school systems. I could sense the frustration in their position as they could see the positive impact they had had on the pupil but knew that this may not be enough for the pupil to succeed in a less supportive environment. The PRU staff appeared to feel powerless at a time of change in the authority when new teams were being developed to

support the re-integration process. I felt that the PRU staff may have felt some anxiety about their own role identity in the new systems. I felt that they may not feel secure enough in their role to effectively challenge school systems for the good of the pupil.

Developing new relationships

The PRU staff also appeared to feel very isolated from other professionals. Despite wanting to forge good working relationships with other agencies, it seemed that the PRU staff largely worked alone in trying to re-integrate pupils back into mainstream school. It appeared that they were constantly trying to make useful links with other professionals but were meeting barriers. Despite such feelings of ostracization it was comforting to hear that the PRU staff were extremely committed to forging positive working relationships with other professionals and offering a professional and coherent service to schools.

Summary of PRU staff reflections on key parent and pupil themes

In summary, the need for a protective nurturing environment has implications for PRU staff supporting excluded pupils in their reintegration into a new school. It would be useful for both PRU and mainstream school staff to reflect together upon this key superordinate theme in order to help plan more successfully for reintegration. The superordinate theme of anticipation of change is also significant as it highlights the emotional response to reintegration felt by both pupils and PRU staff. This relates to anxiety in feeling sufficiently empowered to enable a successful re-integration and the need to develop new relationships as key to this success. Reintegration needs careful thought and planning in order to reduce the anxiety of pupils, and school staff and ensure the most successful outcomes.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

This chapter is concerned with the conclusions drawn from the research, implications for future practice and research and the limitations of the research.

Section one: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to examine parents' and pupils' reflections on, and understandings of, their experiences of permanent exclusion and subsequent placement at a PRU. One purpose of exploring such experiences was to inform professional practice by looking at how parents' and pupils' experiences can help PRU staff to reflect on how they work in partnership to support a pupil's reintegration into mainstream schools. The key points relating to these research questions have emerged:

- Parents and pupils felt let down by the systems in school, they felt that teachers' did not have a good understanding of pupils needs and failed to support them adequately. This was often due to pressures on mainstream staff to meet academic targets. Pupils felt that school discipline systems were ineffective and that they were often treated unfairly in relation to other pupils. Pupils and parents did not feel a sense of belonging to the school.
- Pupils often have negative relationships with teachers within mainstream schools; they often feel there is a lack of mutual respect. Pupils, however, value having at least one adult in school that they have a positive relationship with.
- Pupils and parents sometimes feel that they are not listened to; they are often not actively involved in meetings or decisions.
- Parents feel that schools do not always communicate effectively with them and value them as experts in dealing with their child.

- Pupils often felt regret and shame about their exclusion. They seemed accepting of exclusion as a punishment and were keen to create a new, more positive identity.
- Pupils need a protective nurturing environment which engenders a more inclusive ethos. Processes such as, a sense of belonging, caring relationships, active engagement and collaboration, positive beliefs and recognition, need to be characteristic of schools and classrooms.
- Pupils and PRU staff both shared anxiety about pupils' reintegration into a new school. PRU staff felt a great sense of responsibility for ensuring a pupil's success even though they know their impact may be limited.

Recommendations for professionals working with pupils who have been excluded

Whilst this study was based on a small sample, some key points have emerged to help inform practice. These are as follows:

- All teachers need to have a good awareness of the needs of vulnerable pupils. Further sources of academic or emotional support should be identified and made explicit to the pupil. Pupils seen as having SEBD should have a pastoral support plan (PSP) and IEP, both of which should be regularly reviewed and shared with all staff that have regular contact with that pupil. To increase the understanding of school staff, In Service Training (INSET) could be undertaken around pupils' social and emotional needs (for example, training about anxiety in young people).
- Building positive relationships between teachers and pupils is vital. Teachers should take the time to speak to pupils and get to know them. It may be beneficial for key members of staff to receive INSET around active listening skills. Teachers should endeavour to make time to have regular individual contact with pupils who are seen as having SEBD. A whole school restorative practice approach could be adopted to create a congruent whole school approach to relationship building and conflict management. Restorative practice puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame

and dispensing punishment (Howard, 2009); it is therefore focused on maintaining and building positive relationships.

- Pupils need to have an identified member of staff in school that will be proactive in forging strong links with the pupil. Pupils seen as having SEBD should have a key worker who they can meet with regularly and who can be a source of support to them when difficulties arise. This key worker should seek the young person's views and act as an advocate for the pupil.
- Teachers need to be encouraged to become reflective practitioners. By reflecting on their interactions with pupils they may be able to identify and consider new interpretations of a pupil's behaviour, and in light of this reflection, consider new ways of interaction. Teachers would benefit from regular peer or professional supervision to allow time for such reflection. Teachers would benefit from attending regular informal consultation surgeries with an EP or other educational professional with suitable experience.
- Pupils described as having SEBD need to be given the chance to experience success in school in a variety of ways, not just through academic success. Positive praise is vital when used genuinely. Teachers should try to find out pupils interests and strengths, and find opportunities where these can be exploited. It may be beneficial for pupils to be given a responsibility within school (for example, mentoring a younger pupil or looking after the school garden).
- It is important to pupils for schools to have a clear and consistent behaviour policy which is applied fairly to all students. Pupils are accepting of sanctions when they are fair and teachers are using their authority legitimately. The values a school is committed to promoting – such as respect, fairness and social inclusion – should be the basis for the principles underlying its behaviour policy. The behaviour policy should be explicit about how vulnerable pupils, such as those with mental health needs, receive behavioural support according to their needs. The behaviour policy should be shared with parents.

- Communication channels between parents and school need to be clear and explicit. School staff should be proactive in maintaining close communication with parents and emerging difficulties need to be recognised promptly. PSP meetings should be regular and planned, and all parties involved should be invited. The PSP will identify precise and specific targets for the pupil to work towards and should include the child and parents in the drafting process. School staff should be aware of the importance of sustaining communication in difficult circumstances. School may consider using formal or informal mediation when there is disagreement between parents and school staff. Parents should be encouraged to contact the LA's Parent Partnership Service.
- There is scope for increased multi-agency activity when re-integrating pupils back into mainstream school. All professionals need to be clear of their roles and how they can work together to ensure the most positive outcomes for pupils. The Common Assessment Framework process is a useful way of bringing together professionals (medical, Social Care and educational) to identify a pupil's needs early, assess those needs holistically, deliver coordinated services and review progress.
- A transition programme following the principles of person centred planning may be beneficial when reintegrating excluded pupils into a new provision.
- There is the scope for outreach work from a range of professionals (Behaviour Support Teams, PRU staff, Educational Psychologists) to work with schools at a systems level to support pupils who are at risk from permanent exclusion. These professionals could support schools by delivering training to relevant members of staff and assisting schools in developing policies and procedures (e.g. setting up whole school restorative practices or ecosystemic approaches).

Reflexivity

In this section, I am going to consider how I as a researcher may have influenced the data collection, as well as my experiences during the completion of this research project.

The process of using IPA was a positive and insightful one, as it allowed me to successfully engage in qualitative research which is a step away from my previous research experience in quantitative methods. It provided opportunities to be flexible, open and creative. This was anxiety provoking at times, though the fact that there was a clear structure about how to carry out the analysis provided guidance and direction. I felt that one of my personal strengths was being able to notice semantic links between the large quantities of data. The process of writing in a research diary along the journey, supported, informed and added depth to the interpretative analysis. The research project has shaped my views and understandings of permanent exclusion. It has highlighted the fundamental role teaching staff play in supporting the needs of vulnerable pupils and how they are often constrained by whole school systems. I have been fascinated by the impact, consequences and characteristics of a positive school environment for these pupils. When I have been asked to work with pupils described as having SEBD in mainstream schools during the course of this research I have found myself increasingly frustrated when listening to teachers explaining the pupil's problems without considering their role, or the role of wider school systems. This has compelled me to work with such cases in a different way, finding exceptions to the problems in order to create possible ways forward, and encouraging teachers to look at their own practice. I feel that this is not how many teachers see my role; their expectations are often that my role is to 'solve' the pupils' problems, not question their practice. I have found this challenging and frustrating, and I feel that I can further develop my role to be one of a critical friend who can support schools in reflecting usefully on their practice. These learning points, plus many more, have informed by practice which I plan to incorporate and apply when working as a TEP and in the future as an EP.

Section two: Limitations

As previously outlined there are a number of limitations in using IPA. The approach is dependent upon the participants' ability to express themselves. This was an issue particularly for the young people involved in this research as some seemed to find it difficult to articulate their experience. Although all participants' accounts were included, some pupils (O and S) gave less rich descriptions of their experiences than others due to their inability to articulate

their experiences. I felt I had to offer these pupils greater prompts to elicit their experiences and whilst I feel that this was appropriate, this approach may not have helped to identify as effectively the experiences of the pupils who were less articulate. The articulation of the participants may also have been a consideration in the selection processes and may have impacted upon the participants' put forward by the Head of the PRU for this study. The issue of power imbalance is a further consideration as pupils' recollections of their experiences may have been modified, or carefully selected as a result of being asked to speak to an educational psychologist. I tried to counter this by visiting the PRU on several occasions so that the pupils saw me as someone involved with the PRU setting.

An additional vulnerability is that when using IPA, the whole approach is dependent upon the researcher's subjectivity and interpretation, thus making the processes difficult to scrutinise. However, whilst the process is subjective and difficult to assess, the outcomes of the research can be examined. The reader has been provided with information relating to the research process, the IPA analysis techniques and the researchers positionality. Additionally, examples of all levels of themes (including illuminatory quotes) and annotated transcripts have been provided in the appendix. The outcomes of this study have also depended on regular consultations with my university tutor, dialogues with colleagues and friends and the completion of a research diary.

Whilst the views of the parents and pupils were sought using semi-structured interviews, an approach well matched with IPA (Smith and Osborn 2003), an additional focus group was also conducted with the PRU staff. It may be argued that it is difficult to capture the individual lived experience of each participant in a focus group, as IPA assumes individuals have their own ideas, understandings and opinions (Smith, 2003). Whilst similarities may have existed between the views and experiences of PRU staff, there also may have been marked differences in how they made sense of their work. However, whilst there may be difficulties in solely using focus groups within IPA studies, this focus group was used to obtain multiple perspectives providing a more detailed and multifaceted account of exclusion. This can also be argued to be one form of triangulation (Reid et al 2005).

Section three: Recommendations for Future Research

On examination of the research process, including the literature review and limitations of this study, the following areas have emerged as recommendations for future research:

- Future research could investigate how professionals, such as educational psychologists, can work in partnership with mainstream schools in order to support them creating an inclusive ethos which values interpersonal relationships and where all members are included and provided with opportunities to succeed.
- Future research could investigate how professionals can work in partnership with other professionals and mainstream schools in preparing schools receiving pupils following permanent exclusion in order to ensure sustained success following their placement at a PRU.
- The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils in school has been widely recognised as being important in relation to pupils' positive school experiences (Osler et al, 2002). In order for teachers to improve such relationships it is thought beneficial for teachers to have time to reflect on their own feelings towards pupils. Further research could examine how teachers may use professional supervision to improve their competence as reflective practitioners.
- Future research should aim to further examine the views of pupils' and families' about how to make successful and sustained returns to mainstream school following exclusion. This is an area that has been given little attention (Lown, 2005).
- The theme of identity, what it is like to be an excluded pupil, appeared important to the pupils in this research. Further research would be beneficial to investigate further the links between exclusion, behaviour and a pupil's identity. This is important as pupils perceptions of themselves and their behaviour will impact on their perceptions of interactions with others. Pupils differing understandings of their role in the exclusion may have implications for further intervention.

Final Thoughts

The reader is invited to judge the 'credibility' of this research. Within the domain of Educational Psychology, this study has demonstrated how interpretative methods can be utilised to inform professional practice.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Participant information letters

Parent information letter

To _____,

As part of my Doctoral training at the University of Sheffield I am carrying out a research study on the experiences of parents who have children who have been excluded from a mainstream school. The title of this research is:

An interpretative analysis of parents' and pupils' experiences of permanent exclusion and placement in a pupil referral unit: Implications for successful reintegration

I would like to invite you to take part in this research. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the research

It is of vital importance that the views of parents are sought by professionals, particularly in regards to children who have special education difficulties, or encounter difficulties in school. As an educational psychologist, it is key to our role, to form effective relationships with parents, and listen to their views on how we can best meet their child's needs.

I am particularly interested in finding out about parents' involvement in their child's education and what parents perceived as positive when their child was having difficulties.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this project as you meet the criteria for the sample population, and it is felt that your views would be of great value to this research. Several other parents will also be asked to take part in this research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be contacted and a time, date and location for an interview will be arranged. You can still change your mind about taking part at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

What will happen during the research?

If you agree to be part of the research, and a time, date and place will be agreed upon, and an individual interview will take place, in which you will be able to share your views. The interviews should last about an hour. In the interview you will be asked about your experiences leading up to your child's exclusion and what has happened since then. You will only be expected to discuss information you feel comfortable about, and if at any point during the interview you wish to stop, you will be able to do so. If you wish to raise a complaint at any point during or after the research, _____ (University Research Supervisor) should be contacted (for contact details see below).

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that by sharing their views, parents will help other parents in the same situation and inform professionals about what they think is helpful when their child is experiencing difficulties at school.

Confidentiality

All the information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be given a false name so your real name will not be used in any reports or publications.

The audio recordings of the interviews conducted in this research will only be used for analysis. No other use will be made of them without having your written permission.

All records, both recorded and written, will be held and analysed by myself and will be appropriately destroyed when the research is completed. Only anonymised information will be shared with other professionals, unless I was to obtain evidence that a child is, or has been unsafe, and I believe that sharing this information would be necessary to ensure that the child in question is safe.

The findings of this research will be published in my Doctoral Thesis (DEdCPsy Educational Psychology), copies of which will be available at the University Library. A summary of the research may also be fed back to schools in the _____ district and, potentially, the research findings may be published at a later date (e.g. in a journal article). Any information published or shared will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable.

This research forms part of the DEdCPsy (Educational and Child Psychology) course at the University of Sheffield. The research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield School of Education department's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Please contact for further information:

Natalie Wood, Trainee Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service

Supervisor:
Course Director (DEdCPsy)
Sheffield University
School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

If you decide to take part you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep. Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Wood
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Pupil information letter

To _____,

As part of my Doctoral training at the University of Sheffield I am carrying out a research study on the experiences of children who have been excluded from a mainstream school.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Please ask me questions if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the research

It is very important that the views of pupils are listened to by adults. As an educational psychologist, it is key to my role, to listen to pupils to find out how to help them.



I am particularly interested in finding out:

- what your experiences of school were like
- how involved you were in decisions before you were excluded
- what may have helped you when you were having difficulties
- what may help you in the future

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this project as you are attending the _____ pupil referral unit, and it is felt that your views would be of great value to this research. Several other pupils will also be asked to take part in this research.



Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be contacted with a time, date and place for an interview to take place. You can still change your mind at any time. You do not have to give a reason.



What will happen during the research?

If you agree to be part of the research, a time and date will be agreed upon for an interview to take place either at the referral unit, or at your home if you prefer. The interview should last about 30 minutes. In the interview you will be asked to talk about your experiences prior to your exclusion and what has happened since then. You would only be expected to talk about things you feel comfortable discussing, and if at any point during the interview you wish to stop, you will be able to do so. If you wish to raise a complaint at any point during or after the research, _____ (University Research Supervisor) should be contacted (for contact details see below).

It is hoped that by taking part in this research you will be able to tell me what it is like to be excluded from school and about what helps you when you are experiencing difficulties. I hope to share this information with schools, and other professionals with the hope of helping other pupils in your situation.

Confidentiality

All the information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be given a false name so your real name will not be used in any reports or publications.

CONFIDENTIAL



The audio recordings of the interviews will only be used for analysis. All records, both recorded and written, will be held and analysed by the researcher and will be appropriately destroyed when the research is completed. Only anonymised information will be shared with other professionals, unless I was to obtain evidence that you are, or have been unsafe, and I believe that sharing this information would be necessary to ensure your safety.

The findings of this research will be published in my Doctoral Thesis (DEdCPsy Educational Psychology), copies of which will be available at the University Library. A summary of the research may also be fed back to schools in the district and, potentially, the research findings may be published at a later date (e.g. in a journal article). Any information published or shared will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable.

This research forms part of the DEdCPsy (Educational and Child Psychology) course at the University of Sheffield. The research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield School of Education department's ethics review procedure.

Please contact for further information:

Natalie Wood, Trainee Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service

Supervisor:

Dr _____
Course Director (DEdCPsy)
Sheffield University
School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

If you decide to take part you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

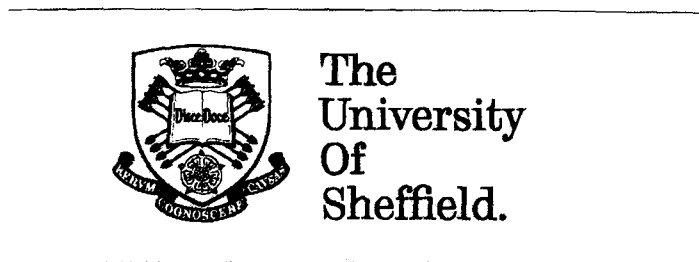
Natalie Wood, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 2 - Pen portrait of participants

| Parent (s) | Pupil | School year | Has pupil been re-integrated into new mainstream school | Known to EPS | Reason for exclusion |
|--------------|-------|-------------|--|--------------|--|
| Mrs Y | A | 9 | No (Had one failed trial at a new mainstream school) | Yes | Serious violent offence against another pupil |
| Mr and Mrs L | K | 9 | Yes (had been in new school 3 weeks) | No | Taking a dangerous weapon into school |
| Mrs S | O | 9 | No | No | Serious violent offence against another pupil |
| Mr and Mrs N | M | 7 | No | No | Persistent disruptive behaviour – had exceeded 45 days fixed term exclusions |
| Mr and Mrs O | S | 7 | Yes (had been in new school 2 weeks) | No | Taking a dangerous weapon into school |
| Mr G | E | 8 | Had one failed reintegration placement at new mainstream school. Back at PRU | No | Persistent disruptive and aggressive behaviour and truanting |

These pupils were from six different mainstream schools in the local authority prior to their exclusion.

Appendix 3 - Ethical approval



The
School
Of Education.

18 May 2010.

Head of School
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JA

Natalie Wood

Telephone: +44 (0114) 222 8087
Fax: +44 (0114) 2228105
Email: c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Natalie

Ethical Review Application: Parents' and pupils' reflections on, and experiences of, exclusion from mainstream school.

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that you can go ahead with your research project. Any conditions will be shown on the Reviewers Comments attached.

This is subject to receipt of a signed hard copy of Part B (Declaration) of the School of Education Research Ethics application form which is available at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/ethics>. This hard copy is then held on file and ensures that we comply with university requirements for signatures.

Yours sincerely

Colleen Woodward
Departmental Secretary

Participant Consent Form (pupil)

What are pupils' experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their subsequent placement in a pupil referral unit?

Name of Researcher: Natalie Wood

Participant Identification Number for this project

Please initial box

4. I confirm that I have read and understand the information letter for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Contact number for researcher: *Natalie Wood: Trainee Educational Psychologist Tel: ******

6. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Date

Signature

Please return to:
Natalie Wood, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Participant Consent Form (parent)

What are parents' reflections on, and understandings of, their child's experiences of encountering difficulties in mainstream schools which resulted in their subsequent placement in a behaviour resource?

Name of Researcher: Natalie Wood

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

7. I confirm that I have read and understand the information letter for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
8. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Contact number for researcher: *Natalie Wood: Trainee Educational Psychologist Tel: ******
9. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Date

Signature

Please return to:

Natalie Wood, Trainee Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service

Appendix 5 - Interview schedules

Parent interview schedule

- Can you tell me about your child's experience at their previous mainstream schools?
(Prompts – academic experience/experience with peers, teachers)
- Can you tell me about the events which led to _____'s exclusion?
What effect did these events and the exclusion have on you and your family?
- Can you tell me about your involvement in your child's education at their mainstream schools?
(prompts – meetings/academic attainment/pastoral support)
- Have you worked with professionals (teachers, mentors, teaching assistants) at your child's mainstream schools?
How successful was this?
- What other agencies have been involved in your child's education?
How did this help?
- What might have made a difference?
For you
For your child
- Can you tell me about what has happened since your child has been excluded from school?
What has changed?
What are the main differences between your child's mainstream school and the pupil referral centre?
- What would you see as a positive development from now on?
For your family
For your child
- In your opinion, what do you think will help in your child's progression back to a mainstream school?
For you
For your child

Pupil interview schedule

- What did you enjoy about your last school?
What did you not enjoy?
- Tell me about how you got on with the adults at school.
- Tell me about how you got on with other pupils at your last school.
- Tell me about your lessons at your last school?
What was most/least difficult for you?
- What helped you at your last school?
- If I could change one thing about your last school what would that be?
- What is your opinion of the rules about behaviour at your old school? What rewards/punishments or consequences did you receive?
- Tell me about what happened to result in you being excluded from school?
Who made the decision to exclude?
Do you agree with decision to exclude you?
What was your involvement in the decision?
- Tell me about your involvement in meetings about you at your old school?
Tell me about your involvement in setting targets to help you progress?
- What has changed since you left your school?
- What are your best hopes for the future?
- How could the adults around you (that is teachers, teaching assistants, parents or other relatives) help you to achieve when you go back to a new school?

Support from peers important

Pupils want to feel protected.

Feelings of shame about exclusion.

Pupil victimised.

Sense of identity as a vulnerable pupil

Lack of understanding of mental health difficulties

School failing to support pupils needs

Emergent themes

65. me angry and they can see me getting angry before I can, so
 66. they could help me before I kick off. Then we can sort it
 67. really, some teachers were the same again, and my brother.
 68. I: Was your brother at the same school? Did he look out for
 69. you?
 70. A: He was, he's left now, he's seventeen. When that bloke
 71. threatened me he went crazy! I felt protected.
 72. I: If you could change one thing about your last school
 73. what would that be?
 74. A: I wouldn't change, I would rather if possible that I would
 75. have got a managed move rather than being kicked out.
 76. Really, you know, so it didn't go on my record. They were
 77. going to kick me out anyway, they had been saying for like
 78. the past six months.
 79. I: So you would have liked for them to have tried a little bit
 80. more before excluding you?
 81. A: Yeah.
 82. I: If you were to go back to your old school is there
 83. anything you would want them to do differently?
 84. A: If they've got kids that are like...so like if you have got a
 85. kid with a disability you can see it can't you? But they've
 86. got problems so you can help them physically but when
 87. there are people with something wrong with them, I'm not a
 88. nutter or owt, but when its mental, not mental as in crazy,
 89. but, you know what I mean?, they didn't do owt for them,
 90. they just pushed them into one corner. Its like they've got a
 91. deaf book, like what all the deaf kids are in, and they've got
 92. pictures and that but for kids with things like what I've got,
 93. they've got nowt. Ours just get pushed into learning support,
 94. or isolation, or stepping stones, that's bad in there!
 95. I: So you feel that children with more emotional and
 96. behavioural difficulties need more recognition and help.
 97. A: Mmmm.
 98. I: What are your opinions about the rules at your old school,

Original transcript

friends help^A, they can see warning sign of her becoming angry and stop her. Some teachers can also do this + brother.

Then issues can be sorted without anger/violence. A acknowledges + wants help to control her behaviour.

Brother protected A at school, he's now left. Enjoys feeling of security - brother leaving added to insecurity. Would not change anything about old sch.

Would have rather had a managed move that be excluded, so exclusion was not on her record. feelings of shame - does not want a poor reputation. feels school were going to exclude her whatever, they had been threatening it for 6 months.

A felt powerless against school - felt they were against her kick out - physical threat.

A feels that school were good at supporting pupils with problems you can see (physical difficulties) but did not support with mental health needs

Makes the point she is not mental/nutter/crazy - aware of misunderstanding around mental health. feels she has to explain what she means - Deaf children are supported - resources used pupils with mental health problems get no support. - just get sent to learning support, isolation etc. ^{to people} _{misunderstanding}

Pushed into - no choice.

Sense of identity as a person with mental health difficulties. ours

when comparing her group to other disabilities feel respected

Exploratory comments

Appendix 7 - Visual map of themes

| Superordinate themes | Parents | Pupils | PRU staff |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Schools systems failing pupils | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Pupils need protective, Nurturing environment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Parents have a role in exclusion | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Anticipation of change | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Issues of blame and responsibility | ✓ | | |
| Consequences of exclusion | ✓ | | |
| Relationship difficulties | | ✓ | |
| I want to be heard | | ✓ | |
| Evolving identity | | ✓ | |

Appendix 8 - Tables of superordinate themes and their relating subordinate and emergent themes, as well as illuminatory quotes.

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">School systems failing pupils (parent)</p> | <p>Lack of understanding of pupils needs</p> | <p>Lack of support for bright pupils with EBD Schools lack of understanding of child's needs Issues of loss for child Schools ignorance regarding mental health issues Schools 'sweeping issues under the rug' Schools lack of perseverance School failing to follow recommendations Giving up on the child Loss of faith in schools</p> | <p><i>You find some of the comments from some of the teachers who used to teach A when she showed her card were "put your card down, there's nowt up with you" you know, they were really ignorant to it, it's annoying. (Mrs Y, line 74-77)</i></p> <p><i>And if they would've walked around with their eyes open, instead of having their eyes closed, than they would have seen what was under their noses. (Mrs S, line 134-136)</i></p> <p><i>They didn't even bother with his ADHD, I had to tell them at the open evening that he had got ADHD. (Mr and Mrs O, lines 90-91)</i></p> |
| | <p>It's not fair!</p> | <p>Lack of discipline in schools Exclusion as an extreme reaction Schools making ultimatums Child treated unfairly by school Schools as dishonest</p> | <p><i>There had been no warnings of him being excluded or anything like that, it was because he took an offensive weapon into school, and that's why he was permanently excluded. (Mr and Mrs O, lines 20-23)</i></p> <p><i>Not having his tie, that was the main one, he'd never fasten his top button for his tie, and because his top button was undone...he actually got excluded for it! And you see some of them going in and the knot of their ties down here and it's all unbuttoned, its cos it's M. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 388-392)</i></p> |

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| School systems failing pupils (parent) | | | <p><i>She's not violent, you know, she's never shown, while she's been in **** erm, any violence towards any member of staff, or any children, or anything. I just think it was the circumstances, or events that happened that took her to that place, you know. (Mrs Y, lines 314-318)</i></p> |
| | Poor relationships between teachers and pupils | <p>Teachers showing lack of respect for pupils Child victimized by certain teachers Schools as impersonal Schools need to protect pupils Schools as unsympathetic Child had no one to talk to Schools as dismissive Pupils proactive in dealing with issues feeling like an outsider</p> | <p><i>Just teachers need to listen more to children, and make sure that the adults stand firm and don't take the crap that they do take. Compassionate...compassion doesn't go...you don't ask for much when you want compassion. (Mrs S, lines 298-301).</i></p> <p><i>It was more or less that he was left alone as an outsider and they...when I rang up to complain about it they said we'll deal with it, that's all you got. But other than that if he said anything to them it was more or less go away. (Mr and Mrs O, lines 14-17)</i></p> <p><i>A had shown her time out card quite a few times, the teacher had ignored her so A had gone to the front of the class and said "I need to leave, I really can't cope with the noise levels" and everything else that was going off in there, erm, so A received a mouthful off the teacher and was told to sit down and stay where she was. (Mrs Y, lines 131-137)</i></p> <p><i>I found it all out from the deputy head teacher and he seemed to be very, how can I put it, abrupt? They never really took the time to look at...well there was an on-going investigation, and there were a number of so-called witnesses that had seen it go off...erm and I said well I'm not being funny but there has to be a reason for him to have snapped, "well I don't know I'm looking into that" he said. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 93-99)</i></p> <p><i>...we got a phone call on the Monday morning saying not to take her into school because it was still pending further investigation. So she had like, the Thursday/Friday off, the two weeks holidays, then she had the next full week off while they were still sorting things out.(Mrs Y, lines 161-166)</i></p> |
| | Schools unsuccessful attempts at | <p>Lessons as positive Acknowledgement of support from some teachers</p> | <p><i>A's head of year, you know, if A had had a bad nights sleep because of her medication I knew that I could ring her and say, you know, A has not gone to bed while five o'clock this morning, just be prepared she might be...in that way it was a really good, I thought it was a good relationship. (Mrs Y, lines 243-248)</i></p> |

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| School systems failing pupils (parent) | dealing with issues | Recognition of support from outside agencies Schools as determined to succeed Schools trying interventions Schools being reactive Positive relationships with some school staff Positive aspirations for future | <p><i>...you know a lot of strategies were put in place, both for at home and at the high school, but I just don't think that the high school took much of what they had said on board to be perfectly honest with you. (Mrs Y, line 37-40)</i></p> <p><i>there's a lot going for it, a lot that don't want to actually sit in a lesson, they have got time out rooms and things like that, but they can't get anyone to do time out if they don't want to or anything. That's what E was like. (Mr G, lines 174-177)</i></p> <p><i>Nothing could have helped him. Everybody tried, he had a youth worker, a care worker, he had a social worker, you know what I mean, it just totally didn't...</i></p> <p><i>I: what about the staff in school?</i></p> <p><i>Mr G: I think they could have understood him a bit more, what he was going through, but I don't think nobody could have helped what he was going through (Mr G, lines 231-237).</i></p> |
| | Expectations of failure | Another failure Low expectations for the future | <p><i>Well they rung me on the Thursday saying, he's been disruptive in lessons and thrown out, and I were like, E isn't at school. And they were like, yeah he is and he's suspended tomorrow. And I were like, E's at a funeral he isn't at school. And I had to go in and we sorted all that out. (Mr G, lines 120-124)</i></p> <p><i>That he's got a school, that's a positive... that he is basically still there (Mr G, lines 333-334)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p style="text-align: center;">School systems failing pupils (pupil)</p> | <p>Lack of understanding of pupils needs</p> | <p>Lack of understanding of academic difficulties Lack of understanding of mental health difficulties lack of academic support academic difficulties lessons problematic difficulties with literacy Schools failing to support pupils</p> | <p><i>They could make the lessons easier (Pupil K, line 62)</i></p> <p><i>We had to do theme parks, making our own theme park; it was just a bit difficult for me to do. My reading is not good and my writing is terrible!</i> <i>I: What help did you get with reading and writing?</i> <i>T: None.(Pupil T, lines 27-31)</i></p> <p><i>But at the end of the day I asked to leave the lesson and she wouldn't let me leave cos she though was taking the mick. And that resulted in me losing my temper with someone(Pupil A, line 155-158)</i></p> <p><i>It stopped for a little while then it started again, stop, start, stop, start. Well I went to see them about it, "Oh just leave it K, it will be alright" I said no it isn't right and the teachers got angry, said get out. (Pupil K, lines 143-147)</i></p> <p><i>If they've got kids that are like...so like if you have got a kid with a disability you can see it can't you? But they've got problems so you can help them physically but when there are people with something wrong with them, I'm not a nutter or owt, but when its mental, not mental as in crazy, but, you know what I mean?, they didn't do owt for them, they just pushed them into one corner...Ours just get pushed into learning support, or isolation, or ****, that's bad in there! (Pupil A, line 84-94)</i></p> |
| | <p>Exclusion as unfair</p> | <p>excluded for petty reasons Sanctions for petty reasons pupil trying to change behaviour is fruitless School could have helped to prevent exclusion</p> | <p><i>Yeah, just for silly little things, like, you get, I got excluded for stuff like being late to lessons, but then there were other kids who were just walking by and the teachers didn't even say anything (Pupil M, lines 104-108)</i></p> <p><i>I was just sticking up for myself. It was unfair.</i> <i>I: Did other people stick up for themselves?</i> <i>O: Yeah...most of the people who stick up for themselves there</i></p> |

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| School systems failing pupils (pupil) | | | <i>get excluded. (Pupil O, lines 86-90)</i> |
| | Problems with discipline | <p>sanctions ineffective</p> <p>teachers powerless over pupils</p> <p>rules too stringent</p> <p>lack of discipline in school</p> <p>exclusion as unproductive</p> <p>Schools not resolving issues</p> <p>exclusion resulting in a lack of education</p> | <p><i>They didn't even get into trouble that is the point. Nobody got in trouble. (Pupil O, lines 55-56)</i></p> <p><i>The rules were all right but you couldn't even play around with your friends or owt like that, and if you touched a teacher by accident they would say something like, that's assault and be really awful to you. (Pupil M, lines 72-75)</i></p> |
| | Pupils being pushed to the limit | <p>Aggression as a coping mechanism</p> <p>using violence to deal with problems</p> <p>Pupil taking extreme measures</p> | <p><i>It was, like, a number of things basically that kept building and building up. (Pupil E, line 61-62)</i></p> <p><i>Well I was being bullied for three years, then they started back in year nine, I brought something into school that I shouldn't have done. (Pupil K, lines 100-102)</i></p> <p><i>T: I took a knife in...</i></p> <p><i>I: Did you think that would help?</i></p> <p><i>T: (shrugs) It made it worse. I wanted people to leave me alone. (Pupil T, lines 74-77)</i></p> |
| Lack of trust in school | <p>loss of faith in school</p> <p>importance of school being trustworthy</p> <p>misrepresentation of schools</p> <p>schools dismissive</p> <p>schools sweeping issues under the carpet</p> | <p><i>Well they say it's an anti-bullying school but yeah whatever! (Pupil O, lines 61-62)</i></p> <p><i>The teacher in French said to my class when I wasn't there, that my mum and dad didn't bring me up properly, Jesus that was the most unprofessional thing to do! (Pupil A, lines 173-176)</i></p> <p><i>I went to see people in pastoral support, and they'd say "It will be alright K just go". So I thought fine and just walked out.</i></p> <p><i>I: And were you fine?</i></p> <p><i>K: Not really. If they had something other to do then I'd go back later, or sort of the next day. I went in, they were busy. "Come back another time"...it did my head in. (Pupil K, lines 15-22)</i></p> | |

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| <p>School systems failing pupils (pupil)</p> | <p>Pupil not part of school</p> | <p>Feelings of hostility towards school dislike of mainstream school school not a welcoming environment school impersonal pupils left to deal with problems reliance on self</p> | <p><i>I didn't really go in a lot of lessons, I had my lessons down in isolation on my own. (Pupil A, lines 47-48)</i></p> <p><i>I didn't really do owt, some lessons I'd just sit down and draw, or sit and read, which isn't really the way to teach is it? (Pupil A, lines 171-173)</i></p> <p><i>I: What would you say helped you at your first mainstream school? Getting away from there.</i></p> <p><i>I: If you could change anything about that school what would it be? Everything...Friends, the whole building. I'd make them clean the floors, it was dirty. (Pupil S, lines 36-38 and 42-47)</i></p> |
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| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| School systems failing pupils (PRU staff) | Lack of understanding of pupils; needs - 'Putting round pegs into square holes' | Vulnerable pupils do not fit into school systems - putting round pegs in square holes Mainstream school cannot provide a nurturing environment for vulnerable pupils Pupils find it difficult to live up to expectations at mainstream school | <p><i>I suppose, that persistent underlying issue that is...round pegs in square holes is the best way I can think of describing it...because they were a round peg in a square hole at mainstream school but we then gave them a round hole but then we try to put them back in a square hole when they go back...whether we can do anything to either change the way schools deal with our sort of child or equip our children better to cope with trying to fit into that square hole...I haven't any answers but I think that's the challenge (PRU focus group, lines 142-152)</i></p> <p><i>In small units, information tends to pass very quickly and quite freely so sanctions and rewards can be acted upon quite quickly...if it's just one teacher they would find it hard. (PRU focus group, lines 55-58)</i></p> |
| | Lack of time to build relationships | Mainstream schools do not have time to spend with vulnerable pupils | <p><i>...because of the staff pupil ratio it's so different isn't it. That's the problem in mainstream isn't it? They maybe have it with one child, but it's usually the more academic child that they'd get that with, not the sort of child that would come to us. (PRU focus group, lines 43-48)</i></p> |
| | Academic pressures in mainstream schools | Mainstream schools are under pressure to perform academic success is seen as more important than supporting pupils emotional well-being Difficulties in mainstream to deliver individualised curriculum | <p><i>You can base a whole project around, if a kid has a really good set of ideas, you can go with them...which I like to do sometimes, but you couldn't do that in mainstream cos you have got to stick to the plans. (PRU focus group, lines 67-71)</i></p> <p><i>Secondary schools are held accountable for so many different things, all the pressures that they have, you know, the way their performance is measured, the things that they are accountable for...it just doesn't support them being able to do the sort of things we are free and able to do. (PRU focus group, lines 49-54)</i></p> <p><i>If you're a teacher and your performance management depends on you getting 85% of your children to get an A-C...Well it's hard isn't it? (PRU focus group, lines 59-62)</i></p> |
| | School systems difficult to change | Acceptance that school systems will not change Some schools have more inclusive systems than others | <p><i>We're not going to change schools, like I said before, all those pressures and accountability that we, you know, are blithely unaware of...so I don't think we are going to change the hole that the kid fits in...(PRU focus group, lines 157-162)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (parent)</p> | <p>Appropriate academic and emotional support</p> | <p>Importance of academic support High expectations for pupils Child known as a vulnerable pupil Importance of emotional support Pupils increase in confidence and self esteem Small class sizes beneficial</p> | <p><i>A loves it there, she would stay there till she's sixteen. She's really settled there, she gets on really well with the majority of the staff (Mrs Y, lines 377-379)</i></p> <p><i>He came home one day and said "they're really helping me you know mum". I said "are they darling?" and he said "yeah, if I'm stuck we go through it bit by bit" he said "and it's good because I get a little bit more of one to one". (Mr and Mrs N, lines 304-308)</i></p> <p><i>Mr O: They understand more about his disability than **** did, that's the main thing isn't it? (Mr and Mrs O, lines 142-143)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive behaviour management</p> | <p>Importance of respect and boundaries Importance of praise and rewards. Importance of routine</p> | <p><i>He loves it. Whereas before, if owt like that would have happened at **** he would have just sat there and said I'm not doing it. Whereas now he wants to have a go, he'll try owt. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 436-439)</i></p> <p><i>She's got certificates. She even got a head teacher's certificate . She got a bronze award and a silver award. She keeps getting little postcards through the post saying excellent work, and that's a lot, her self-confidence and esteem has been built back up in the period of time, she has been there. (Mrs S, lines 176-181)</i></p> <p><i>They boosted him all the time everything that he did right they praised him and things like that and obviously it's changed him. Mr L: That's what he didn't get at the other school. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 308-312)</i></p> |

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| <p>Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (parent)</p> | <p>Small gestures make a big difference</p> | <p>Small gestures make a big difference</p> | <p><i>There was one occasion where he spoke to one of the ladies who do the cooking And she said "Are you all right K" and he said "No I miss my brother" and she gave him a hug and said "Come on darling it will be alright, let's do this then you can show your mum what you have been doing". And she got him out of it, didn't she? She said don't worry, come to me if it is bothering you she said and we'll deal with it. They worked with him like that all the way through. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 240-248)</i></p> <p><i>...there's more support there isn't there? Because he lost his tie after the first week, then he lost his jumper the other week...But it's been absolutely brilliant (Mr and Mrs L, lines 345-347)</i></p> |
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| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (Pupil)</p> | <p>Appropriate academic and emotional support</p> | <p>pupils needs a supportive environment for learning enjoyment of practical activities positive academic experience in PRU</p> | <p><i>I: What did you enjoy? S: Everything. Learning new lessons, learning how to play table tennis, cooking, going out on trips, biking...mountain biking round the fields.... (Pupil S, lines 109-111)</i></p> <p><i>Teachers, they understand my ways, in mainstream they expect every kid to be, not normal but, mmm, I'm normal, in my head I'm normal...they expect every kid to have nowt wrong with them and it doesn't quite happen really does it?(Pupil A, lines 268-271)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive behaviour management</p> | <p>Importance of rewards systems importance of consequences and boundaries lack of reward systems</p> | <p><i>They are stricter if you don't do summit right. So if there are bullies they are expelled for a week, then if they come back and pick on someone else, they will get put in isolation for two weeks (Pupil O, lines 115-115)</i></p> |
| | <p>Small gestures make a big difference</p> | | <p><i>once we did this thing where they were showing you like, how, erm, hospitals in the olden days and stuff. And we were like messing about with rulers and that, and like I was used as an example, like, so I was getting involved and keeping my mind off being led away. (Pupil A, lines 222-227)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive attachments between adults and pupils</p> | <p>Importance of having someone to speak to positive relationships with some school staff positive relationships with some teachers positive relationships with non-teaching (pastoral) staff link between favourite lessons and favourite teachers</p> | <p><i>She helped me with the learning stuff. She sorted stuff out for me. (Pupil O, lines 26-27).</i></p> <p><i>There was one occasion where he spoke to one of the ladies who do the cooking And she said "Are you all right K" and he said "No I miss my brother" and she gave him a hug and said "Come on darling it will be alright, let's do this then you can show your mum what you have been doing". And she got him out of it, didn't she? She said don't worry, come to me if it is bothering you she said and we'll deal with it. They worked with him like that all the way through. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 240-248)</i></p> |

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| Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (Pupil) | A calm environment | pupils need a quiet environment small numbers of pupils beneficial | <i>There weren't many kids in the lessons at all; it was quieter so you got to learn more. (Pupil S, lines 116-117)</i> |
| | Positive peer relationships | Support from peers important relationships with close friends important | <i>Some of my mates, some of my mates know what gets me angry and they can see me getting angry before I can, so they could help me before I kick off. (Pupil A, lines 64-66)</i> |
| | Opportunities to bolster self esteem | Taking pride in achievements at PRU Pupils increase in confidence and self-esteem after PRU experience | <i>We had to do an activity for charity, we did a nine mile bike ride to **** and back. We had to go up hills like that (shows gradient with hands). (pupil K, lines, 155-158)</i> <i>I've gone up in my reading age, when I told my dad when he came in yesterday to see it, it's a sixteen plus</i> <i>I: And you're only twelve! Why do you think you are making so much progress?</i> <i>M: Cos I've got stuck in with my work here and learnt a lot, and I just get better in life. (pupil M, lines 206-212)</i> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (PRU staff)</p> | <p>Appropriate academic and emotional support</p> | <p>Pupils need to be given skills to cope Pupils need an attachment figure in school Pupils gain in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief at PRU Recognition of pupils shame Vulnerable pupils find change difficult PRU proud of good practice PRU's practice is beneficial to pupils Vulnerable pupils can be supported in PRU - round peg in a round hole</p> | <p><i>They've probably been shifted from pillar to post and I do think, the type of pupil we actually get too much change does not help the situations cos I think they have had changes at home as well in their situations. (PRU focus group, lines 119-123)</i></p> <p><i>In small units, information tends to pass very quickly and quite freely so sanctions and rewards can be acted upon quite quickly...if it's just one teacher they would find it hard. (PRU focus group, lines 55-58)</i></p> <p><i>if we've given them the confidence and started to build their self-esteem and their self-confidence and their self-belief, given them aspirations, we then need to really make sure they are properly equipped with the skills to cope cos they are not going to go back into a different situation, they are going to face exactly the same issues that they faced before. We just have to give them different ways of dealing with them and handling it. (PRU focus group, lines 164-172)</i></p> <p><i>It's quite heartening to hear what we think about our practice, and the benefit it has for pupils, is actually borne out by pupils and parents themselves...it's very reassuring (PRU focus group, lines 4-7)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive attachments between adults and pupils</p> | <p>PRU understands the importance of resolving conflict and building relationships Importance of giving pupils a fresh start Having positive aspirations</p> | <p><i>It can be quite different, you know if you actually bother to talk to them, it's positive from the word go really. (PRU focus group, lines 38-40)</i></p> <p><i>Or...maybe it's about us finding the people when our children are going back in. They said somewhere about having a person that they could talk to, the attachment person. If we could just do that, if we could, when we negotiate them going back into a school...and we do to some extent don't we? (PRU focus group, lines 178-183)</i></p> |

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| <p>Pupils need a protective, nurturing environment (PRU staff)</p> | | <p>for pupils important It is important to take time to get to know pupils PRU staff find pupils are often different to what they expected</p> | <p><i>As I said, they've had so much change, I think you've got to be as supportive as you possibly can and as positive as you possibly can for them to, to get them back into mainstream (PRU focus group, lines 137-141)</i></p> <p><i>I think the thing there is the positive aspirations for these children, which some of them do have; it's just, kind of, trying to support them in that. (PRU focus group, lines 135-137)</i></p> |
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| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Parents have a role in exclusion (parent)</p> | <p>Importance of home school relationships</p> | <p>Importance of regular communication – positive and negative reports PRU is accessible to parents Schools need to be accessible Importance of joined up working Parents as experts Importance of trust Parents need practical and emotional support PRU's perseverance – continued support</p> | <p><i>He had one teacher who used to come out every day to tell us that he had had a good day and that he'd enjoyed himself, and they were all like that. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 386-388)</i></p> <p><i>If I skived as a kid, my family were chasing me, the school bobby was chasing me and most of the time half of the teachers would chase you out of the yard, you know what I mean? It doesn't seem that way no more. They just walk out of school, you get a phone call and if you don't answer that's it. That's where the school and family should team together, well there doesn't seem to be that at the minute at all between family and school. (Mr G, lines 417-424)</i></p> <p><i>I think they make you so welcome when you go as well, like when I went to that parents afternoon thing, the day after they had been strawberry picking, and as soon as I walked in, it was come on lets go and have a look at his science stuff (Mr and Mrs N, lines 611-615)</i></p> <p><i>He was so... understanding and he said "we will just go and have to see what they have to say and we'll take it from there". But he was good and I'm glad she put us in touch with him actually... it's made us deal with it little bit better. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 179-183)</i></p> <p><i>it's usually the case as when one school gets rid of you, they give up on you then, but the **** didn't, the **** centre followed him all the way there, helped them with information, told them bits that they need to know about E's anger and things like that (Mr G, lines 397-401)</i></p> |

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| Parents have a role in exclusion (parent) | Failure in parenting | <p>Desire to be a successful parent</p> <p>Failure in parenting</p> <p>Parental responsibility</p> <p>Self-blame</p> <p>Parents as a poor role model</p> <p>Parents not supporting schools</p> | <p><i>I think it our fault really, to be honest, sending him to **** high school in the first place. (Mr and Mrs O, lines 163-165)</i></p> <p><i>I just want him to be good at school and that's it, I've told him anything he wants to do after school, I've told him anything he wants to do after that stage is up to him. Simple as. If he makes wrong decisions when he leaves school then that's up to him but if he wants to live with me he makes the right un. (Mr G, lines 220-225)</i></p> |
| | Feeling victimised | <p>Victim stance</p> <p>Personal attack on parent/family</p> <p>Effect of family reputation</p> <p>Family history of school</p> | <p><i>I went to speak to Mr ***** on 1st March to ask him if he could change his decision in excluding her. He turned round and said "no. I've got one of your children out, here is another one." Because he had already got my oldest son out. (Mrs S, lines 53-56)</i></p> <p><i>...actually on a piece of his paper it said A's mum? And I can't remember the exact words but more or less like, beware of what she'll say, you know, that sort of thing. You know, you think, at least be a bit discrete. (Mrs Y, lines 195-198)</i></p> <p><i>I had my head down the toilet more times than I went to school. It wasn't a nice experience and I did exactly the same as she did... (Mrs S, lines 258-260)</i></p> |
| | I want to be heard | <p>Parents do not challenge professional views</p> <p>Parents not involved in decision making</p> <p>Parental involvement – a last resort</p> <p>Parents' lack of involvement</p> <p>Parents powerless in decision making</p> <p>I want to be heard</p> <p>Feeling like an outsider</p> <p>Parents as helpless</p> <p>Strained relationships between home and school/professionals</p> | <p><i>But some of them, like his head of year, err, I just thought...he would just have his say and that would be it, he didn't want to listen to anyone else's problems, so in the end we just got sick of it and said all right do what you want to do. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 248-252)</i></p> <p><i>we were supposed to have another meeting within fourteen days of them kicking him out but we didn't. We didn't get the letter until about 20 days after.</i></p> <p><i>I: Was that the letter about your right to appeal?</i></p> <p><i>Mrs N: Yeah, it was whether he could stop in school or whether they said he's out.</i></p> <p><i>Mr N: But they had already made their decision without us being there so...he's out. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 261-268)</i></p> <p><i>We went to the open night and it was as if, because we're</i></p> |

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| Parents have a role in exclusion (parent) | | | <p><i>not from this area, we were shoved to one side and there were kids from all that end that were going into school and it just seemed that because they had siblings in that school they would teach more to them (Mr and Mrs O, lines 86-90)</i></p> <p><i>The only meeting I had was the one where they wanted to get him excluded. (Mr G, lines 157-158)</i></p> |
| | Fighting a battle | 'Winning the battle' A battle for education Parents proactive in dealing with issues Parents making ultimatums | <p><i>You know, I do feel that it is a constant battle to get her some sort of education, it's a constant battle. (Mrs Y, lines 336-338)</i></p> <p><i>I don't want her back in mainstream school. If she can have specialised schooling I will fight with that all the way. . (Mrs Y, lines 441-443)</i></p> <p><i>It's been a long haul but we've got there, and we've gotten him through it. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 381-382)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Parents have a role in exclusion (PRU staff)</p> | <p>Importance of home school relationships</p> | <p>Parents value support of PRU staff in dealing with their child Good communication between parents and staff in PRU Parent and pupils need to feel supported</p> | <p><i>Yes they are in communication with staff a lot more here than they are in mainstream I think they spend a lot of time in mainstream defending a kid up until a certain age, then they can't control the kid then they call out for help and wonder why things have changed, it seems to be the way.</i></p> <p><i>I think a lot of it boils down to when relationships have broken down between home and school. (PRU focus group, lines 107-114)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Anticipation of change (Pupil)</p> | <p>Reservations about a new school</p> | <p>anxiety about new school past negative experiences may hinder new beginning fight for a place in mainstream school</p> | <p><i>If I could stay here forever I would, put it that way! Yeah, but it's like with the same teachers, same kids, erm, but I can only stay till the end of the year like, I've only got 3 weeks left. They need to decide what I'm doing before I go back. I don't even want to go...but if I can't get in there, I'm not off to **** (EBD School) at all, not **** (KS4 PRU). (Pupil A, lines 348-355)</i></p> <p><i>I: What would help you I the transition to ****? M: I don't know...teachers, I don't like teachers. (Pupil M, lines 226-227)</i></p> <p><i>I went to have a look round, more spaced out so I thought lets go there then (Pupil K, lines 172-174)</i></p> <p><i>They have fought for this place for me. They put me on a trial period, so if I mess up I go back to **** or somewhere else. (Pupil S, lines 160-162)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive aspirations for the future</p> | <p>pupil thankful for a second chance A new start pupil involved in planning for new school</p> | <p><i>I just want some GCSE's, I'm not fussed about owt else. I want to go to college, I want to work with kids like me. (Pupil A, lines 312-314)</i></p> |

| Superordinate themes | Subordinate themes | Emergent themes | Illuminatory quotes |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Anticipation of change (PRU staff)</p> | <p>PRU staff committed to improving their practice</p> | <p>PRU feel helpless in supporting pupils reintegration into mainstream school PRU feel responsible for success of reintegration PRU fighting against school systems</p> | <p><i>But I would hope down the line that we will be able to offer a very, all I want to do is offer a very professional and coherent service, ourselves and **** (KS4 PRU), and this support team and everybody else, it needs to be...you've got to present that professional, coherent front to mainstream schools otherwise you have no professional credibility...it's my passion...but nobody listens! (lines 236-243)</i></p> <p><i>if we've done all this hard work and if the pupils and the parents have worked hard and we've had this positive impact and we've got to the point where they are going back into school, that is a big issue for us, a lot of apprehension about that next transition and I think it means we have to really skill ourselves up to, sort of reflecting on this, finding out what the issues are, and finding ways of supporting pupils and parents with that next transition (lines 125-133)</i></p> <p><i>They said somewhere about having a person that they could talk to, the attachment person. If we could just do that, if we could, when we negotiate them going back into a school...and we do to some extent don't we? And where we have got those sort of systems, it works doesn't it? Yeah, it works when you have got those systems in place. Schools vary so much. (lines 179-187)</i></p> |
| | <p>Anxiety about new authority developments</p> | <p>Uncertainty about how new systems will work Important role of the Behaviour Support and Reintegration Team – BSRT</p> | <p><i>the plan is for them to be connected to schools and I think in the re-organisation they have been waiting to do this, I think it's supposed to be coming out shortly, I think this has been done, or perhaps we will all get a surprise in January... I don't know. Err...It just seems to be ridiculous how we've made do without any links. (lines 203-209)</i></p> <p><i>Well there is no mechanism in place for them to sort of let us know about these children. (lines 217-218)</i></p> |

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| Anticipation of change (PRU staff) | Feelings of ostracization | PRU feel they have not been involved in new authority developments PRU staff want to know about vulnerable children in schools PRU feel ostracized PRU have to actively seek support | <i>I offered the new team a base here and they didn't seem especially...they probably want to set themselves up in their own right without being interfered with. (lines 231-234)</i> <i>we're not attached to any pyramid, we've been left very, sort of, isolated and outside of things that go on...we are <u>finding out</u> about all these agencies all the time, and then the job is to find out the mechanisms for getting these people on board (lines 261-266)</i> <i>the plan is for them to be connected to schools and I think in the re-organisation they have been waiting to do this, I think it's supposed to be coming out shortly, I think this has been done, or perhaps we will all get a surprise in January...I don't know. Err...It just seems to be ridiculous how we've made do without any links. . (lines 203-209)</i> |
| | Importance of forging relationships with other professionals | Importance of communication with other professionals PRU staff want to have good working relationships with other services Importance of having good relationships with receiving school | <i>there used to be quite a strong outreach team that happened to be based here, and so by default, it wasn't particularly our staff, it was a whole another team of staff, but by default, because they were here we spoke to them, so if a child was coming to us because they had been permanently excluded, or for six weeks, then the staff in the outreach team were aware of them, and could tell us and could get the paper information and the anecdotal information that you need. (lines 221-230)</i> <i>But I would hope down the line that we will be able to offer a very, all I want to do is offer a very professional and coherent service, ourselves and **** (KS4 PRU), and this support team and everybody else</i> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Issues of blame and responsibility (parent)</p> | <p>Blame attributed to external factors</p> | <p>Attributing fault to external factors Bullying as a trigger Peers taking advantage of vulnerability Being pushed to the limit Attributing fault to family member Attributing fault to medical diagnosis Importance of a diagnosis</p> | <p><i>It's everybody, it's this estate, to be honest I'd say it this estate because there's just hundreds of kids and nobody's mums care. They are just everywhere, wherever he goes and he's just tempted to go with them. (Mr G, lines 10-13)</i></p> <p><i>we were under the ADD clinic, we had an appointment there...they diagnosed and medicated her straight away, they said she should have been on medication a lot sooner (Mrs Y, lines 16-18)</i></p> |
| | <p>Blame attributed to school systems</p> | <p>Attributing fault to school Parents presenting evidence that school is to blame</p> | <p><i>Yeah, there's a lot of people who don't like ****(school), we've got friends here whose kids went there and they absolutely hated that school. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 411-413)</i></p> <p><i>But I do think if things would have been put in place it just wouldn't have happened. (Mrs Y, lines 148-149)</i></p> |
| | <p>Blame attributed to pupil</p> | <p>Recognition of child's faults Recognition of child's responsibility for own behaviour School blaming child Pupils dealing with issues inappropriately Acceptance as a response</p> | <p><i>everybody knows about E's problems, and E's sisters problems, you know what I mean, everything they have been through so, like, everybody's trying to help. The only person not trying at the moment is E, like, do you know what I mean? (laughs) (Mr G, lines 359-3630)</i></p> <p><i>if she'd have been allowed to leave the classroom it wouldn't have happened, erm, but like I say at the end of the day,</i></p> |

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| Issues of blame and responsibility (parent) | | | <i>you know, the buck stops at A, she shouldn't have done what she did, you know, but it happened. (Mrs Y, lines 150-153)</i> |
| | Parents defending pupil | <p>Child exonerated Making light of issues Normalizing child's behaviour Turning bad behaviour into a positive attribute Parents condoning inappropriate behaviour Normalizing child's behaviour Turning bad behaviour into a positive attribute Parents condoning inappropriate behaviour</p> | <p><i>they've been bullying him haven't they but because he hasn't reported it at school nothing had been done so in the end he's lost his temper and actually hit the kids, but to me he's done right, the kids been having a go at him so our M's hit him too and flattened him. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 20-24)</i></p> <p><i>she was right in his face and M stepped back and said 'phew...halitosis' and when he came home and told us I was rolling with laughter and I thought it was really funny. But it got him a days exclusion didn't it? (Mr and Mrs N, lines 101-104)</i></p> <p><i>He'd mess about a bit because he always wants to be the centre of attention but he's a bright kid. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 112-113)</i></p> <p><i>Just his truanting basically, the violence and that at **** high, like I say, there were odd bits of it, but that's confrontation of being a teenage boy I think anyway, isn't it? (Mr G, lines 62-65)</i></p> |
| | Contradictory views of pupil | Son/daughter vs school pupil | <p><i>Same again at ****, they said he's an absolute angel. They can't, this is what we said, we can't understand. (Mr and Mrs N, lines 123-125)</i></p> <p><i>the head teacher said that she was extremely sorry because he wasn't a bad lad but the govemors and her</i></p> |

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Issues of blame and responsibility (parent)</p> | | | <p><i>decided to uphold their decision to permanently exclude him. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 151-154)</i></p> <p><i>The only way to get round M is to mention camping or any outdoor pursuits, he loves it. Did he tell you about the night I went with him? Everything has to be done right with him, I said right you've got your flints, you've got everything, I said you start a fire there. So he went and got a load of rocks put them round, and I went and got some more wood cos we were going to stay out all night. Well I came back and it was like a bonfire! (laughs) I said it's too high that, and he said, it's only just started, he said dad let me get on with it. And within half an hour it had all bumt back down. He cooked me a bacon sandwich, and beans and egg, we had hot dogs, all sorts!</i></p> |
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| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>Consequences of exclusion (parent)</p> | <p>Physical and emotional effects of exclusion on parents</p> | <p>Anger/frustration as a response Climax of emotions A difficult time period Emotional effects of exclusion Parental anxiety Feelings of remorse about incident PRU as secure (negative – imprisonment and attached stigma) Feelings of shame associated with exclusion Physical effects of exclusion</p> | <p><i>We called to see his auntie yesterday after we had been to the hospital, and I was telling her. She said, "how is he doing?" and I said, "he's doing brilliant". She said "well you're more happier in yourself knowing that he's all right"...but it did take its toll on the system. It's not a nice experience to go through. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 402-408)</i></p> <p><i>You know it's an awful, awful feeling, erm, and you've got that feeling of shame as well, that your child's actually been excluded from school. (Mrs Y, lines 175-178)</i></p> <p><i>when I first went to priory, and I saw them locking the doors. I thought, though my god, I am not sending my kid there, erm, you get locked in and you can't get out. It's like a secure prison. (Mrs S, lines 190-193)</i></p> <p><i>I missed the deadline to appeal, to go into County Hall...Because I had had fit after fit after fit with all the stress and the pressure I was under. (Mrs S, lines 67-69)</i></p> |
| | <p>Positive effects of exclusion for pupil</p> | <p>Pupil's desire to be out of mainstream school 'He/she's a totally different child' 'doing really well out of school' Positive improvements at new school.</p> | <p><i>He crosses the road with his head held high, whereas before, it was "I don't want to go to school".....what he did was not right. But in another respect. It got him out of where he was miserable, and he's a happy youngster now. (Mr and Mrs L, lines 369-372)</i></p> |
| | <p>Negative effects of exclusion for pupil</p> | <p>Loss of consistent schooling Academic success Vs. happiness at school – can children have both? Difficulties affecting academic</p> | <p><i>You know her levels have dropped, it's just, it's how it is, and I've had this conversation with **** and you might think that that's an awful thing for a parent to say but I would rather A be happy where she is, erm, and know that she can deal with going everyday than come out of it in two year's time with ten GCSEs. (Mrs Y, lines</i></p> |

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| Consequences of exclusion (parent) | | performance | <p>356-361)</p> <p><i>it were nearly five week that it took them to sort this, well, two week of that was the holidays, so...it was...then the phone call came to say that their decision was that she was being permanently excluded. (Mrs Y, lines 169-172)</i></p> |
| | Positive aspirations for the future | <p>Importance of a new start</p> <p>Lack of opportunities in PRU</p> <p>PRU as unsuitable long term placement</p> | <p><i>Mr ***** said we'd rather have him back in mainstream school sooner rather than later, he said, because he needs to...we can only do so much for him...</i></p> <p><i>They've said he's very hands on, he can do anything...very imaginative, yeah, he's got a good head on his shoulders they've said. (Mr and Mrs N , 627-629)</i></p> <p><i>He got until the holiday to see how he goes but I think he'll end up staying at that school anyway, cause there aren't no problems with him. And if there was a problem they would let me know. It's such a positive development from where he was. He's doing a lot better than what he did. (Mr and Mrs O, lines 195-200)</i></p> <p><i>And then we had to have a meeting with the new school and obviously they knew what had gone off but they don't say anything to anyone and it's just you would think he had been there forever.. cos he has got a lot more friends haven't he? (Mr and Mrs L, lines 327-331)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| Relationship difficulties (pupil) | Strained home school relationships | poor relationship between home and school parents frustration with school parents giving up on school | <i>Cos when I think my mum was getting a bit peed off with it and she said he's just not going for a few weeks, and I didn't go to school for a few weeks. (Pupil M, lines 108-111)</i> |
| | Problems with peers | Peers problematic lack of support from peers concerns about bullying | <i>From day one I were at that school, from when it was my first day, I got bullied by loads (Pupil S, lines 64-65)</i> |
| | Negative relationships with teachers | pupils victimised pupil a scapegoat teachers expect worst of pupils | <i>They were going to kick me out anyway, they had been saying for like the past six months. (Pupil A, lines 76-78)</i> <i>I've still got my report at home, with all the excellents on it and everything like that. They said I tried to forge signatures and write my own excellents on it and stuff like that. (Pupil M, lines 147-150)</i> |
| | Importance of mutual respect | Lack of mutual respect between teachers and pupils | <i>They wouldn't say, err; please can I have your planner...give me your planner you're late! So you couldn't explain, you just got in trouble. (Pupil K, lines 74-76).</i> <i>the only reason I was being bad in school was because of the school really, I didn't like it so I just decided to be bad. (Pupil M, lines 194-196)</i> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| <p>I want to be heard (pupil)</p> | <p>Importance of feeling listened to</p> | <p>speaking to schools about issues is a hopeless cause</p> | <p><i>I: Did you have meetings at school before you were excluded to discuss the problems you were having and stuff?</i> <i>O: No, cos nobody listened.</i> <i>I: Did your parents go into school to try and sort things out?</i> <i>O: Nobody would listen so she gave up. (Pupil O, lines 101-107)</i></p> <p><i>So I was put in with the top set for maths and I didn't know what I was doing at all so I coloured a piece of paper in. And then they put me in French and she made me look like a right pansy because she said "This is O, she's never done a language lesson before. "Here you go! (Pupil A, lines 289-294)</i></p> |
| | <p>Pupil passivity</p> | <p>pupil not involved in exclusion process pupils passive in exclusion process</p> | <p><i>I: What did you think about that decision?</i> <i>E: They didn't say anything to me, they said it to my Dad (Pupil E, lines 65-67)</i></p> <p><i>E: I didn't really speak much...</i> <i>I: was that because you weren't given the opportunity to speak?</i> <i>E: I just didn't want to. (Pupil E, lines 81-84)</i></p> |
| | <p>Meetings tokenistic</p> | <p>meetings about exclusion perfunctory pupils participation in meetings is tokenistic</p> | <p><i>O: I got sent home for a few days then I was permanently excluded.</i> <i>I: Were you involved in that decision?</i> <i>O: No</i> <i>I: Did you have a meeting?</i> <i>O: Yeah, but about five week after. (Pupil O, lines 95-100)</i></p> <p><i>When you get excluded you have to go back in for a meeting, in the morning, just like with miss ****, that's her who wanted me to get kicked out of school. And they just say are you ready to go back in and I'd say yeah, and then they were just kicking me out every single day (Pupil M, lines 167-172)</i></p> |

| Superordinate Theme | Subordinate Theme | Emergent themes from data | Illuminatory quotes |
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| Evolving identity (Pupil) | Regret and shame | feelings of regret about exclusion feelings of shame about exclusion | <p><i>I: If you could change anything about your school what would that be?</i> <i>E: I'd go back and do it all again properly. (Pupil E, lines 31-33).</i></p> <p><i>I would rather if possible that I would have got a managed move rather than being kicked out. Really, you know, so it didn't go on my record. (Pupil A, lines 74-76).</i></p> |
| | Reputation | effect of reputation holding onto bad reputation | <p><i>S: It's alright, there's just people asking me what I've done, I just say I've been a really bad boy.</i> <i>I: And how do they respond?</i> <i>S: They just go "oh" and walk away. (Pupil S, lines 139-142)</i></p> <p><i>Like all the teachers seem to assume that because you got some behaviour that it's you that does it all the time. (Pupil A, lines 162-164)</i></p> |
| | Increasing self-awareness | Taking responsibility for own behaviour self-blame accepting responsibility for behaviour Pupil accepting of punishment pupil recognises own behaviour difficulties pupil understandings own needs sense of identity as a vulnerable pupil | <p><i>I know here they try to do the same work that they do in schools but there's a big difference between going my strong points English and my weak points are maths but it's alright saying that when you go into a bigger class again, it's like it still doesn't matter what it is now because I still can't concentrate. (Pupil A, lines 300-305)</i></p> <p><i>Teachers, they understand my ways, in mainstream they expect every kid to be, not normal but, mmm, I'm normal, in my head I'm normal...they expect every kid to have nowt wrong with them and it doesn't quite happen usually does it? (Pupil A, lines 268-271)</i></p> |

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| Evolving identity (Pupil) | | Lacking self confidence | |
| | Striving to create a new identity | <p>diminishing prior behaviour problems pupils presenting themselves as unlike others in the PRU pupil wants to be treated like everyone else Pupil showing a different, more positive, side</p> | <p><i>At the last day I was at ****, cos I was good all the time I was there, I went down to the Superbowl and had a game of bowling (Pupil K, lines 186-188)</i></p> <p><i>They just treat me normal, not like I've got summat wrong with me. Just normal really. (Pupil A, lines 335-336)</i></p> <p><i>if I kick off it affects somebody else's mental health. Which I wouldn't because I wouldn't ever do anything to hurt someone that's got something up with them anyway, it's horrible. (Pupil A, lines 338-341)</i></p> <p><i>And **** (KS4 PRU), to be honest it's full of no hoppers isn't it really? (Pupil A, lines 359-360)</i></p> |

