Care and Education. A Case Study: Understanding Professional Roles and Identities of Teachers within a Welsh PRU

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the professional work of teachers within Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in Wales. Traditionally neglected by both policy and research, PRUs have become a focus of attention due to debates around attainment and the 'off rolling' of pupils from traditional schooling. Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of one Welsh PRU, this paper illustrates how teachers working within PRUs see themselves as occupying a hybrid space between teacher and social worker within a social pedagogic approach to teaching. We illustrate how this approach is underpinned by a strong moral and ethical account of their professional work. From this we illustrate how policy scrutiny and Welsh educational reforms have resulted in changes to teachers' perceptions of their working role and identity. While this policy focus is welcomed we suggest that any accountability frameworks introduced to judge Welsh PRU success need to adopt a highly contextualised approach which recognises the complex needs and backgrounds of PRU pupils and does not reduce success to only measures of academic attainment. By recognising the hybrid nature of professional practice and developing metrics of success which capture the social as well as academic needs of pupils within the Welsh PRU setting, Welsh Government (WG) will reinforce the social pedagogic approach of Welsh PRU teachers.

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the professional role and identity of teachers within an under-researched educational area – Pupil Referral Units. Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) have, traditionally, existed in the shadows of policy and research in the UK (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014). However, increasingly, they have become the focus of media and political attention through debates around school exclusions and the abuses of 'off -rolling'[1] (tes, 2018; The Guardian, 2018), and concerns about the educational outcomes of pupils who attend (Education Select Committee, 2017). While there has not been the level of academic scrutiny of gaming and strategizing through off rolling in Wales, there has been increasing media attention on the issue (BBC, 2018). What has been researched, however, is that Wales has not followed England in its precipitous increase in levels of exclusions from mainstream schooling (Power and Taylor, 2018). However, Power and Taylor (2018) rightly caution against often facile system comparisons which use exclusions as a benchmark of inclusivity; instead they highlight strategies which exclude pupils while, at the same time, keeping them on the school register, in a process known as a managed move (see Carlile, 2011; Macrae, Maguire, and Milbourne, 2003).

As well as concerns over exclusions and off-rolling, increasing attention has been paid to pupil outcomes in Wales (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014) and the quality of provision more generally (Estyn, 2015; McCluskey et al., 2015). As such, Welsh Government (WG) is currently working with others to develop future policy strategies for PRUs in Wales, which consider their current implementation of broader national education policy reforms (WG, 2017a). Recently it has been suggested that these broader reforms have contributed to a change in the professional role and identity of mainstream teachers and head teachers working within the Welsh education system (see Connolly et al., 2018a; Connolly et al., 2018b). These changes which are associated with a greater degree of external accountability measures and an increase in bureaucracy, have reframed teachers' and headteachers' professional practice. To what degree

this reframing has occurred for staff in Welsh PRUs has not been researched, although political reform and external accountability has resulted in a significant shift in the professional role and identity of teachers working within PRUs in the English education system (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016).

In this paper we address the gap in academic study of Welsh PRUs by considering: 1. the professional role of teachers working in the PRU setting; 2. the professional identity of these teachers; 3. whether recent Welsh educational reforms have impacted upon the structure and professional work within PRUs and whether these have resulted in the reframing of the professional role and identity of teachers working within this hybrid educational context.

Pupil Referral Units in Wales

In the 2016/17 academic year, PRUs were the most commonly used form of alternative provision or Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) in Wales, accounting for 44.3 per cent of the total EOTAS population (WG, 2017b). [2] As with mainstream schools, PRUs are required to meet external inspection requirements in Wales (Estyn, 2017), whilst their main priorities include the re-integration of all pupils back into mainstream schools at the earliest opportunity, after a period of support and guidance. Within this, effective strategies for pupil behaviour management are implemented, alongside the delivery of a curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils (Estyn, 2015).

One of the most notable differences between PRUs and mainstream schools are the pupils who attend. PRU pupils, who have previously attended a mainstream school, are likely to face far more challenges in their lives when compared to their peers within the mainstream setting. For instance, many will have been excluded or be at risk of exclusion, often due to a variety of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and mental health issues (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). Additionally, during the 2016/17 academic year in Wales, 88.5 per cent of pupils in EOTAS had been identified as having some form of special educational need (SEN), whilst 33 per cent were eligible for free school meals (an indicator of social deprivation) (WG, 2017b). Indeed, pupils who attend PRUs are far more likely to have come from deprived backgrounds, experienced difficult home lives, and/or been placed in the care of local

authorities, all of which can relate to the difficulties being displayed (Brodie, 2001; Hart, 2013).

Pupil Referral Unit Practice: A Form of Social Pedagogy?

The social difficulties described above which young people are likely to face in Welsh PRUs have traditionally been the focus of pedagogic practice within PRUs (Lloyd-Smith, 1984). The role of staff was one which aimed to support and improve, primarily, the social skills and self-esteem of pupils, before re-entry into a mainstream school (Lloyd-Smith, 1984). This focus on the social needs of young people has continued to be recognised by staff as an important aspect of their PRU role (see Solomon and Rogers, 2001; Meo and Parker, 2004) and can also be found within the Welsh context when it comes to good practice (see Estyn, 2015). The next section of the paper provides some further insights into these traditional practices of PRU staff, which we argue are underpinned by the central tenets of a social pedagogy approach.

In order to support and improve pupils' self-esteem and social skills, PRUs have become a setting where informal, child-centred, relational practices exist (Pomeroy, 1999). It is important to note here that these kinds of informal, child-centred approaches also exist within mainstream schools. Indeed, many mainstream schools have a strong emphasis towards pastoral aspects of learning (see Sellman et al., 2002) and those who teach in PRUs are likely to have some experience of mainstream teaching, as our data will highlight. In addition, the child-centred approaches of PRU work can often be a continuation of initiatives found within mainstream schools, where vulnerable learners are supported through Individual Development Plans (WG, 2017c) and levels of inter-agency working. However, and as we will argue in this paper, whilst PRU teachers often come from backgrounds in mainstream schooling, in the PRU setting they have formed their own distinct practice. This practice resembles an enhanced level of child-centred therapeutic work due to the relatively small number of pupils found in PRU settings, but who display a distinct level of SEBD.

Indeed, due to the personal social difficulties which pupils are likely to face, guidance often recognises the need for some degree of respite, where young people have the time to recover, through a responsive form of provision (Taylor, 2012). Building positive, stable, caring relationships with

pupils is therefore viewed as an integral part of the professional role (Pomeroy, 1999; Solomon and Rogers, 2001), aimed at mitigating the often chaotic dysfunctions in the pupils' home lives. The importance of such work is usefully depicted in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which highlights how young people develop through direct face-to-face relationships within their own microsystems of daily life, with friends, families, and teachers. Recognising the importance of these experiences at the micro level, the staff in PRUs aim to compensate for a lack of stable, positive relationships in the pupils' lives.

More recently it has been suggested by Kyriacou (2015) that teachers within residential settings and alternative schools such as PRUs have adopted a form of 'social pedagogy' to carry out their work. Social pedagogy is a form of educational learning which incorporates approaches towards supporting social issues. It is concerned with the whole child, promoting their active engagement in decisions affecting their own lives (Cameron et al., 2011). As such, social pedagogy brings together the work of caring and education professions, viewing them as inseparable. Whilst there are a number of understandings and interpretations of a social pedagogic approach, Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011: 37) provide a useful framework in their 'Diamond Model', which incorporates many of the shared principles of social pedagogy. Central to this model is the need for social pedagogy to provide positive experiences in peoples' lives, through wellbeing, learning, relationships and empowerment. Within this model social pedagogy aligns closely with the sociology of childhood (Wyness, 2015). Children are viewed as 'active and competent learners rather than empty vessels to be filled' (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011: 40). A social pedagogue will therefore have a profound respect for human dignity and will bring their whole being into practice (Pithouse and Rees, 2015: 51).

On a broader level social pedagogy is concerned with supporting the improvement of life chances for individuals, by providing the necessary life skills for successful engagement in society. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) believe that by concentrating on the four elements within their Diamond Model, these core aims of social pedagogy can be achieved. The kinds of relationships that Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) refer to within social pedagogy are particularly relevant to our discussion here. A pedagogue will have a strong affection towards the child, being primarily interested with the child's needs over any external aims. However, within this professional role, the social pedagogue will also set out clear rules or boundaries. These provide a sense of security to the child (supporting their

wellbeing) and enable them to learn to act responsibly (supporting their social learning and empowerment) (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). Social pedagogy can therefore be seen to have a strong socialising function, which aims to develop both the autonomy and dependency of vulnerable young people (Kyriacou, 2015). Whilst certain rules and boundaries exist, relationships are still informal and non-hierarchical, where all views are valued equally in 'shared living spaces' (Cameron et al., 2011:15).

This brief description of social pedagogy provides some useful insights into the shared principles of the approach. These include an acknowledgement that relationships are non-hierarchical with young people, where their views are valued and listened to. This supports an attentive form of practice towards the social and wellbeing needs of clients, which take precedence over other goals. These principles can be drawn upon when reviewing the literature of PRU staff practices. Although the literature on PRU staff practices rarely acknowledges social pedagogy itself, the work does highlight how these tenets of social pedagogy exist within the professional working practices of PRU staff.

For instance, difficulties which young people face in their lives are often dealt with by PRU staff in a timely manner, in an environment where pupils feel respected and listened to, as trusted equals (Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015). Staff can therefore be viewed as being responsive to, and respectful of pupils' needs, within a horizontal rather than hierarchical relationship. Such work resembles the relational ethos described in social pedagogy (Cameron et al., 2011). These acts require supportive listening skills, an attentiveness to need, and an openness and respect for the young person's lived experiences, all of which highlights the genuine valuing and caring of the other, through a child-centred approach to practice (Te Riele et al., 2017; Cahill et al., 2018). The creation and maintenance of positive, strong relationships with young people is therefore perceived by staff as an important and necessary part of their work (McGregor and Mills, 2012; Te Riele et al., 2017).

In addition, through this approach to practice the PRU can act as a stable, safe environment for vulnerable young people, supporting their emotional and social development (Hart, 2013). Again, these findings resonate with the secure base associated with social pedagogy (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011), which aims to provide positive life experiences to people.

The practices of PRU staff can therefore be viewed as sharing the social imperatives of social pedagogy, which are also evident in the literature on

best practice within alternative forms of education, where therapeutic and social tendencies have traditionally been acknowledged (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014: 20–2).

Another concept that has recently been drawn upon within the practices of alternative education is the 'ethic of care' (Te Riele et al., 2017). Similar to social pedagogy in many respects, the ethic of care also acknowledges an attentiveness to need, over and above any other aims (Held, 2006). Non-hierarchical relationships are valued, along with the creation of a space for clients' (pupils') voices to be heard (Lloyd, 2006), within 'moral qualities' towards practice (Tronto, 1993). It is important to acknowledge here that pupil voice is also actively encouraged within mainstream forms of schooling, particularly through the introduction of school councils. However, within alternative settings, it could be argued that pupil voice is given greater precedence, due to the lower number of pupils enrolled, and the professional approach taken by staff, which prioritises the immediate emotional needs of learners over academic goals (Hart, 2013; McCluskey et al., 2015).

The work of Te Riele et al. (2017) highlights how the practitioners from alternative provisions in Australia practiced using an ethics of care in order to engage with and support the pupils. Practices here were based on the centrality of trusting relationships, where staff afforded an unconditional positive regard towards the pupils, before their own interests or any academically driven goals. In this sense, staff identified with 'a strong commitment to the social and emotional well-being of their students' (Te Riele et al., 2017: 68).

It appears then that both social pedagogy and an ethic of care as concepts, have strong moral obligations instilled within them. These moral imperatives can be likened to certain teaching practices (Day, 2000), which have recently been theorised as a form of 'occupational professionalism' (Connolly et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018; Evetts, 2012). Such forms of professionalism are contrasted with professional work that is underpinned by realising external targets through a form of 'organisational professionalism' (Freidson, 2001).

Occupations which draw on these moral underpinnings regularly entail a degree of 'emotional labour' (Kolb, 2014; Te Riele et al., 2017), where staff are required to perform a level of emotion management, which is regulated and understanding towards the emotional needs of their clients (Fineman, 2003). Hochschild (1983), who is widely acknowledged with creating the concept of 'emotional labour' suggests that for some

professionals, this practice becomes too costly, leading to psychological damage. However, not all emotional labouring is oppressive. For those working within professions which are morally orientated, challenging work can be compensated for due to the moral rewards which they gain. Known as 'moral wages' (Kolb, 2014), these rewards equate to the improvements that staff can witness in their clients' lives, due to work being carried out. Staff therefore gain a sense of pride and moral worth from their work. Intrinsically linked, the challenges that staff face in their working environments are also what make it rewarding for them. With both social pedagogy and an ethic of care instilled within the practices of PRU staff, we suggest that these professionals value the moral obligations of their work.

While staff within PRUs have traditionally drawn on practices associated with social pedagogy, an ethic of care and a strong moral imperative to carry out their work, research has suggested that this has begun to change, particularly within the English education system (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). This work has illustrated how this informal, socially driven or therapeutic form of schooling has been challenged by recent policy changes which have exposed PRUs to more external accountability measures, reframing how they are run and changing the practices within them (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). For instance, in Thomson and Pennacchia's study (2016), processes for proving effectiveness of the profession were in place, where 'progress had to be visible and measured'. With this new emphasis on monitoring embedded within practice, the more traditional pastoral approaches became side-lined (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016: 629).

Education Policy in Wales

Since devolution in Wales, Welsh education policy has diverged from England and other parts of the UK, through WG reforms (see Power, 2016). As noted by Connolly et al. (2018b), within the context of Wales, accountability measures have been introduced following narratives that reported declining educational quality (Dixon, 2016). The publication of school performance data as part of these measures have been justified by WG as a genuine concern with struggling schools, and a useful way of understanding how best to support struggling schools in Wales. The rhetoric of this approach stands in contrast to the competition and standards narrative found in England (Connolly et al., 2018b; Power, 2016).

In relation to Welsh PRUs, WG has shown similar concerns around the quality of provision (McCluskey et al., 2015). Good practice guidelines have acknowledged these concerns with provision quality, providing insights from specific PRU case studies (Estyn, 2015). A growing interest and narrative around the improved quality of PRU and EOTAS provision has therefore been noticeable in Wales in recent years, alongside a more recent introduction of accountability measures. WG commissioned a Task and Finish Group to oversee the transformation of the sector, with a framework for action published at the end of 2017 (WG, 2017a). Consistent with much of the current PRU inspection criteria (Estyn, 2017) the Framework For Action emphasises the need to improve both the wellbeing and learning outcomes of pupils, whilst leadership and management systems are also identified as an area for support and improvement. The need for clearer accountability structures and mechanisms are also outlined. An example of this is the recently released attainment data for pupils at Key Stage 4 in PRUs across Wales (WG, 2017a).

Within this latest Framework For Action there is also an acknowledgement for the need to identify how PRU practices are enacted, within the current educational reforms, before any non-statutory or statutory requirements are introduced to the sector. These implemented changes and planned frameworks are beginning to align Welsh PRU policies with the broader educational policy reforms of Wales.

Methods

One PRU in Wales was selected as a case study for this research. Identified as a Portfolio[3] PRU, the provision educates pupils between the ages of seven and eighteen years old with a range of SEBD. As a Portfolio, the PRU is distinct from most other PRUs in Wales, offering short-term provision for pupils with behavioural needs at key stages 2 and 3, as well as pupils with mental health or medical needs on a part-time or full-time basis. These pupils are also reintegrated to mainstream schools where appropriate. At the time of the study 66 pupils attended the PRU, 36 per cent of whom were eligible for free school meals. 35 staff worked in the setting, including core curriculum teachers such as English and Maths teachers, classroom assistants, councillors, and behavioural psychologists.

Six staff were interviewed in the initial phase of a wider study into PRUs in Wales, over a two-week period, concentrating on teachers' roles

and identities. Fourteen further staff were then interviewed across one academic year, which also incorporated questions about their roles and identities. The participants (n=20) were selected through purposive sampling, and all interview schedules covered themes on daily routines, and perceptions of good practice. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, their specific roles are not distinguished within the data, other than to highlight members of the senior management team, which included pathway leaders and the teacher in charge. The participants included eighteen females and three males. The participants' length of service at the PRU ranged between three months and eighteen years, whilst 14 of the staff had some experience of working within a mainstream school setting.

All of the interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one and a half hours, which were recorded and then transcribed. A manual approach to data management was adopted for analysis, which was conducted from a neutral position, where emerging themes were able to appear from the text (Seidman, 1998). Whilst we recognise the researcher's own subjectivity towards analysis, having an awareness of this supported the requirement to avoid preconceived ideas about potential findings. The analysis was therefore data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Initial themes within the text were identified and labelled before concepts or codes were generated, leading to a greater interpretation of the text (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

The following section provides insights into the interviewees' perceptions of their roles within the PRU.

Findings

The data provided a number of themes concurrent with findings outlined in previous research on the practices and identities of staff within alternative forms of educational provision. We group our findings here into three main categories: (i) social aspects of the profession, (ii) emotions and rewards, and (iii) external accountabilities. Firstly, we focus on the social aspects of the work, which the participants consistently identified with.

Social Aspects

The welfarist concerns that participants described highlighted the PRU role as one that lay beyond the traditional pedagogic aspects of teachers'

work. Indeed, the social aspects of the PRU role were embedded within the PRU's values, articulated here by one of the management team:

> … because it's about a smaller environment where they're completely respected, they feel safe and they can just be for themselves and recover their learning and their well-being. So, we're not a mainstream school, and so, all of that doesn't fit, atmosphere, environment, rules. And when they want a good … blast I suppose, the difference is, and cry, they're allowed … When they have a meltdown we're here. But they stay here and cope with it, and they learn to cope with it. They don't have a meltdown and leave school, they have a meltdown and then they get support to cope with it here. And learn from it. (Pathway Leader 1).

> … if the student says, 'I need something, I need to tell you something,' they [staff] know it's going to happen sometime during that school day. So, they have to be there for them, to listen. (Pathway Leader 1).

This member of the senior management team provides insights into some of the core values at the PRU, which align with concepts of social pedagogy, where staff are required to provide an unconditional level of care and respect towards the pupils, in order to support their needs (Cameron et al., 2011). As identified through the concepts of social pedagogy (Eichstellar and Holthoff, 2011) this ability to work through pupils' difficulties requires a strong positive relationship, which is created through a non-hiearchical environment that is mutually respectful and valued by the social pedagogue. These central tenets of social pedagogic practice with an emphasis on the social were also recognised by the PRU staff as integral to their practice. They viewed their roles as far wider reaching than teachers, encompassing elements of social care:

> I teach using nurturing principles because I feel that they've already got fragile home backgrounds … And I think that, these children are used to people giving up on them … they have a lot of negative experiences with staff in their schools from my personal experience, and they have a lot of trust issues because they've been let down by a lot of people. And it's about building up a relationship where there's trust and confidence. And also, that unconditional support. (Practitioner 1).

> … If some pupils are feeling angry and upset, they will allow you to put your hands on their shoulders and say look, it's going to be ok, let's talk about it, let's have a cup of tea. Others, if you slightly touch them, or try to console them, that will make things ten times worse. So, you've got to know the child and know how you can manage the situation. (Pathway Leader 2).

Staff recognised the importance of having an in-depth knowledge of each child's needs, in order to work through any challenges that arose. In this

way the work was child-centred, as other research has suggested (Cahill et al., 2018), as well as respectful and sensitive, towards the individual needs of each pupil.

Similar to the findings of Te Riele et al. (2017), these PRU staff foregrounded social responsibilities within their practices, situated within an overriding ethic of care:

> … sometimes you come in and you've got your planning and everything and … you've got a child whose upset, you know, wellbeing is very important here. So, you just start talking … and maybe your plan has gone out of the window, but it's more important that the child is happy and safe, you know. (Practitioner 2).

> And the one thing that I hope they come out with when they leave my class is … they have a choice, and they are responsible for their behaviour. And I can't make them do anything. I can help them make the right choice, but they are responsible, and they are in control. (Practitioner 1).

This final quote highlights how staff viewed themselves as facilitators in the young people's lives. The working environment and the staff's approach to their work, provided space for the pupils to take ownership and responsibility for their own actions, alongside the support of staff. In this way, as facilitators, the practice points towards the autonomy and dependency dyad of social pedagogy described by Kyriacou (2015). Pupils were responsible for their behaviour, but staff could help them to make the right choices. These social care priorities were viewed so centrally through the descriptions of daily work at the PRU, that interviewees regularly defined their practices in opposition to the teaching practices within mainstream schools, highlighting this overtly social dimension of their work:

> You have a greater number of pupils in mainstream, so you have less time to spend with individuals and you don't really get to know them so well. Here we are very clued up on their background and how they're feeling that day … so you understand their situation … you're there again consistently supporting, ensuring that you're giving them the right message that they're worth it. (Practitioner 3).

> So yeah, it's that communication and we can see it a mile off, because we know our children, we know by looking at them, that something's going on. Body language, we know everything about them, which is something you might not necessarily get in a mainstream school … and we don't hide away, so I'll say 'well I'll tell you about a difficult time in my life', it's making us a bit real, we're not the sort of teacher types, even though we are teachers. (Pathway Leader 3).

The participants contrasted their profession with teachers in mainstream schools through the kinds of relationships that they felt existed in the PRU.

These were described variously as much more informal, mutually respectful and non-hierarchical in comparison with their experiences of teaching in mainstream schools, due to the primary focus of their work in the PRU, towards the personal needs of pupils. Again, these priorities align with the underpinnings of social pedagogy (Eichstellar and Holthoff, 2011) and an ethic of care (Lloyd, 2006). The young people were active participants in decision-making processes, which provided them with a sense of empowerment in their lives:

> … they absolutely love the way that we work with them … it's like how do you rate the teachers at mainstream school and how do you rate our approach and there's no comparison … and they feel, as though they're treated as equals, and I guess that's the philosophy here you know, we erm, our sort of motto here is 'we've got no problems, only solutions' and so we talk, talk, talk it through until it's done. And they appreciate that because we're listening. And for lots of these children they've not been heard … (Practitioner 4).

Whilst the relationships were viewed differently to those in mainstream schools by the staff, the comment above also highlights how staff viewed these experiences of positive relationships in the PRU as part of the pupils' social learning and healing process, similar to the findings of Thomson and Pennacchia (2014: 22). The pupils needed to be respected and listened to, because these sorts of experiences had been absent from their lives. They needed to learn about how these sorts of relationships could be created in their own lives:

> … I want them to care about each other because that's a stepping-stone to successful relationships when they've left … so we work really hard on that, empathy and skills like that. (Practitioner 1).

> I love the relationship I've got with them you know, because erm … they care about me, because I care about them … (Practitioner 4)

The social aspects of the role were therefore what staff identified with the most as professionals in the PRU. Although traditional aspects of the teaching role such as academic outcomes were recognised, these were secondary in comparison with the caring, social aspects of the role. Having this approach, the staff felt that pupils would learn about the necessary social skills required to get on in life, which would also allow them to engage in learning:

> Even though our job is to teach academic subjects, we have to take these children first, make sure they're in a good place, in order for them to learn anything.

> … But what we do here is, our emphasis isn't about academic achievement anyway. We do that bit but it's not a priority, our priority is well-being, three days a week. (Pathway Leader 1).
>
> Sod maths, sod English, they need to be able to put their bum on a seat. They need to be able sit on a carpet. They need to be, if they are lining up, keeping their hands to themselves. They need to have the skills that, I am not watching them every two minutes before they do something wrong. General social skills, and they haven't got them. So, I would say what's realistic for me is getting them ready to engage back in learning. (Practitioner 1).

The comments above also highlight what staff recognised as successful practice in their daily routines at the PRU. For them, success was centred on notions of improved social and wellbeing outcomes for the young people, rather than academic outcomes:

> … it's not like I say, results driven. I think we all feel the same. You know, we all want to get the best out of them but at the end of the day we all appreciate that the wellbeing is integral to their happiness and learning. (Practitioner 5).
>
> … as long as we've all come out of the lesson, and everyone is relatively calm and happy, that's good enough for me, you know … (Practitioner 6).

It is these sorts of understandings around success by the staff that are consistent with the traditional 'best practice' aims of alternative education settings, which focus on pastoral outcomes (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014: 22). At an institutional level therefore, the social aspects of social pedagogy, underpinned by a strong ethic of care, were central to the success of the provision.

Emotions and Rewards

The levels of commitment towards relationships and the social needs of pupils were, as has been noted elsewhere (Te Riele et al., 2017), emotionally demanding for the staff. As an institution, the PRU relied on the investment of staff in degrees of emotional labour which were apparent in several ways. Staff described instances of verbal and physical abuse which they had to deal with, whilst maintaining patience in their practice:

> … there might have been a difficult weekend [for the young person] when things haven't quite gone the way you'd like to, they come in and can be very aggressive, very verbally abusive, they can throw resources and can be quite physical you know. (Pathway Leader 2).

> … I'm calm, I'm always very calm … you know, and quiet … you don't raise your voice with any of them … you've got to be very calm and everything. (Practitioner 2)

These kinds of experiences were a regular part of the role for staff who, with their knowledge of the young people's backgrounds, understood the reasons behind these kinds of behaviours and dealt with them in a patient and emotionally managed way (Fineman, 2003). Being aware of these social difficulties in the pupils' lives were another form of emotional labour that staff had to manage as part of their role:

> … they [pupils] may … significantly self-harm in school, or they will, you know, attempt to take their own life. So, we have to deal with that, and that's very hard on the staff. (Pathway Leader 1).

> I wish we could do more outside of school time … I sometimes think it's a bit sad, particularly through the holidays as well, and it does go all Pete Tong [wrong] in the holidays, and we have to pick it up again in September … holidays are a nightmare but we have to have a break … (Pathway Leader 1).

> … I try to detach myself, but you still wake up in the middle of the night, worrying about a kid … you are emotionally attached to it. I don't think you could do this job … and be emotive-less you know, you couldn't do it … so you can get a bit too involved, it's having that disconnect and being able to shut off would be a magical trick, you can't just push a button, you can't do it … It's a labour of love … (Practitioner 7).

These final two comments also highlight how emotional labour was a constant challenge for staff. Even away from the PRU environment, and due to the amount of emotional care and support that staff invested into their working relationships with pupils, staff remained concerned about the welfare of pupils, as part of their moral imperatives (Cameron et al., 2011) towards the work.

This emotional labour was, however, viewed more favourably by the staff in comparison with their experiences of mainstream schooling. For them, it was these social aspects that gave their profession its meaning and purpose, which they felt had been lacking from mainstream provision, and had therefore left them feeling unfulfilled:

> I just got a bit disengaged with mainstream education to be honest … I quickly realised it … wasn't what I thought it was … it was a lot about pupils being listed as numbers … and it just felt like a … data crunching machine … you couldn't build up the same relationships with the pupils … and so coming into the PRU … it's just a different challenge, and I find it much more rewarding. You can work

> with pupils who really need your support and you can see the noticeable difference as well. (Practitioner 8)

> … well I was in mainstream … very high achieving school … and I suppose the weight of work, I wasn't getting weekends and it was affecting my home life … and I can remember driving to work one morning and thinking 'I don't know how much longer I can do this' so I took a year out … I was particularly interested in smaller class sizes, in getting to know individual kids and trying to help them … here … you see in a very short amount of time, just how much of a difference you are making. It's rewarding … (Practitioner 7)

Indeed, as noted by Kolb (2014), the PRU profession and the emotional labour experienced, was intrinsically linked to the rewards of the work that staff experienced. One could not exist without the other. The difficult work provided rewarding outcomes for the staff or a degree of 'moral wages' (Kolb, 2014):

> Well there's many things I love about this job. Just seeing how the children come on … how they just evolve into these lovely people, that they weren't when they came in, some of them [laughs] … it sounds dramatic, but we save lives you know in this place. And whereas I see accreditation as very important, we do save these people's lives, and we give them hope. And the rewards from that are amazing … (Pathway Leader 3)

> … I drive to work some days, and I've got a very busy life outside work, and I drive to work and think 'oh god, I'm so tired,' and I get through the door and I see them and I'm like, as bright as a button, because they're so motivational. I mean, what they've been through … they are inspirational. Just that they come every day, and keep coming … (Practitioner 3).

> … if you can see positive changes, then I know I've done something really right. That's why I do the job. It might not happen so often, it might not happen all the time, but when you see that difference you know you've changed that child's life. That's amazing. (Practitioner 6).

Staff recognised the value of their work, and the differences that they could make in people's lives. For them this was the reason they came into the PRU each day. They were able to witness these changes in the pupils' lives first hand, due to the nature of the small provision and the close relationships that had been formed there. Again, it was these priorities that orientated towards aspects of social pedagogy and an ethic of care, which were most central to the PRU staff's understandings of successful practice.

External accountabilities

Whilst staff prioritised the social aspects of their work, traditional forms of schooling associated with academic achievement and external accountability measures were also present. The new teacher in charge was fully aware of these responsibilities for the PRU:

> You're getting money to drive the performance of particular underperforming groups, so … you've got to meet the same rigorous standards I would say. Erm, we're in school categorisation the same as everyone else … we have to function as a fully functioning school. (Teacher in charge).

> I'm the person who keeps the strategic view in their head … we must have a high sense of teaching and learning … a high standard of care, support and guidance … (Teacher in charge).

Whilst the teacher in charge recognised the need for care and support, there was also the necessity for improved educational outcomes. These external pressures were clearly more apparent to the head teacher, who articulated a shift in focus at the PRU like practices elsewhere (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016). The head outlined a more traditional form of schooling that they were now aiming for, with an emphasis on learning and academic performance:

> … I think the big change has been … creating a team of staff who see themselves as a team … and we've had to accelerate that because of external pressures to improve, from Estyn and organisations like that … But bringing the focus on … teaching and learning has been the other really big change. Because all of these people [PRU staff] were very good at taking care of children and young people, supporting them, but … the purpose of school is to get a passport to something, to take you to the next step. And that's been the big change … bringing that in to add to the care, support and guidance, and not leave it behind … because we've got to be responsible for the children … spending the money we've got responsibly, to get them on a pathway where they're lifelong learners. We can't just look after them because the real world isn't like that … (Teacher in charge).

Here we gain an insight into the current focus and priorities of the PRU. The purpose is very much in line with external policy reforms for PRUs (Welsh Government, 2017a). The teacher in charge emphasises how the educational needs of learners at the PRU should be given an equal status to their wellbeing needs, through the establishment of more traditional academic learning within practice. However, when it came to accountability measures and academic outcomes/performance the teacher in charge

voiced concerns, as it was felt that contextualised factors related to the PRU pupils' lives were being ignored:

> Estyn have got five areas now, and they've got care, support and guidance and wellbeing, they are interested in that. But there's no measure of it … it's quite tokenistic isn't it, because who publishes that … there's no measure of wellbeing. Or did I do a good job of putting you back together, even though you only got one GCSE … There was one girl who got a B in Art. What an amazing achievement … she'd been sectioned, she'd got out of bed, she'd come in … and her work … was commended by the examiners. Erm … doesn't make level one threshold, or level two threshold[4] … and the director said to me 'your results are zero …' the point is, in level two threshold Welsh Government are effectively saying 'I'm only interested in your exam results'. They are not measuring the wellbeing, the health of those pupils, their ability to cope with life at all … some of them have thought about and have tried to commit suicide … I'd love them all to get five GCSE's, but the achievement is relative to the starting point. (Teacher in Charge).

The quotes above highlight a shift that was taking place in relation to the PRU's priorities and the expertise which the teacher in charge felt PRU staff now required, as part of their working role. This was therefore a transitional period for the PRU and its staff. This transition was recognised and articulated by a member of staff, who described the ways in which the curriculum was changing, with a greater onus on academic subjects and achievement:

> we're becoming more like a mainstream school, with more subjects, more teaching staff … I think it's going that way. They talk about what level are they at, are they going to get five C grades at GCSE … we never really had that prior … it might have been there, but it was never really brought up. (Practitioner 7).

Following on, the participant described how these changes were having an impact on their role and priorities. With the PRU's new priorities towards academic achievement, they felt unsure about how this could be achieved in their daily work, alongside the wellbeing aspects of the role:

> … it's becoming more to the fore, is the onus that is now being placed on academic achievement … it has to be about the wellbeing, and the time that that takes … means that academically … you haven't got the class time … yet the management team want academic results and they want the wellbeing and you kind of go, 'well hold on a minute … (Practitioner 7).

As the data indicates, whilst staff members articulated and associated with a strong moral and social ethic towards their work, they were also experiencing a transitional period within the PRU, towards a more organisational

form of profession (Freidson, 2001). As such, the practices of staff also incorporated a greater focus on academic subjects and outcomes.

Discussion

The data from this study illustrates how teachers within a PRU setting view their professional role as a hybrid between social worker and teacher. Their accounts are consistent with a social pedagogic approach to teaching (Eichstellar and Holthoff, 2011) which is underpinned by a strong moral purpose and a developed ethic of care. This social pedagogic approach was juxtaposed with mainstream teaching in a number of ways: non-hierarchical; holistic and empathetic. While traditional academic outcomes were recognised as important, for PRU staff these were secondary to the social aspects of the role. These findings were consistent with the work of Thompson and Pennacchia (2014) within the English context where they located the traditional professional role and identity of PRU teachers within a social, pastoral framework. However, Thompson and Pennacchia's (2016) work has highlighted how, within the English context, external accountability mechanisms have resulted in the reframing of the professional work and identity of teachers within English PRUs. A key feature of this has been the encroachment of alternative logics of managerialism and bureaucracy which have reduced the social element and, for some teachers, ethical underpinning of their practice. While this has not been the case in Wales, the data suggested that the increased political and external scrutiny of the PRU setting has resulted in some moves away from what PRU teachers viewed as the key social element of the role.

Certainly WG are rightly concerned about the outcomes of students attending a PRU setting and it would be an abdication of duty on their and PRU teachers' part not to be concerned with these students' educational attainment. However, it is imperative that when developing metrics of success, WG should not reduce outcome measures to decontextualized data on achievement and continue to promote the highly contextual dimension to any performance data on students outside of mainstream provision (WG, 2017a). They should also recognise that the core social element of PRU teaching is difficult to measure and that there is the danger, within the highly politicised educational environment, that a crude interpretation of this data will result in the narrowing of PRU practice and the professional role and identity of those working there. It is also

important that data is owned by the profession to inform their practice and increase their sense of agency (Connolly et al., 2018ab; Davies et al., 2018; Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015). It is encouraging that in its most recent report on PRUs WG (2017a) highlight any data generated should be owned by professionals working within the sector. In addition, the report recognised the complexity of this hybrid professional work and the need to develop structures for inter-agency collaboration through the development of EOTAS panels which will, ideally, help realise students' social as well as academic needs.

Without this recognition and celebration of the hybrid professional work of social pedagogy, there is the danger that the work of teachers within a PRU will be redefined through accountability to narrow performance metrics which would reduce PRU's social pedagogy, reframe PRU teachers' professional role and identity and, potentially, cleave PRU pedagogy from its core ethical concerns.

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Notes

1 The term 'off-rolling' refers to the movement of pupils off the register of a mainstream school, and into an alternative form of schooling provision such as a PRU. Doing so means that a pupil's exam results no longer count towards the performance measures of that school but are not categorised as an exclusion.

2 While the acronym EOTAS generally refers to *Education Other Than at School,* WG use the initialization of *Education Otherwise than at School*. We use the former more common initialization in this paper.
3 A Portfolio PRU is an amalgamation of several different provisions which support pupils who display a variety of mental health difficulties and/or physical difficulties.
4 Level 1 and 2 thresholds relate to GCSE qualifications and a range of non-GCSE qualifications including vocational courses (which are capped). To meet the level 2 threshold a pupil must gain 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C which includes GCSEs in mathematics and English or Welsh.