Using positive relationships to engage the disengaged: An educational psychologist-initiated project involving professional sports input to a Pupil Referral Unit

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Increasingly large numbers of students who experience emotional, social and behavioural difficulties are subject to exclusion from mainstream schools and consequently receive their education in pupil referral units (PRUs). Common perceptions of PRUs are that they are places where high levels of conflict and relatively few constructive relationships occur. In the regular educational psychologist input to an inner city secondary PRU, ideas from a range of psychological models and theories including humanist psychology, personal construct psychology, solution-focused brief therapy and systemic theory were used to highlight some exceptions to these social difficulties. More constructive social interaction and reduced levels of conflict were observed when students engaged in sports activities together and, therefore, the professional coaching input of a local premiership football club's (XFC's) 'Sport in the Community' programme (SiC) was negotiated and an initial eight-week evaluation project constructed.

This paper considers the importance of relationships within the rationale, planning, implementation and evaluation of the project which developed. One of the central aims of this project was to utilise and support the development of more positive relationships between the pupils, the PRU staff and the professional sports coaches in order to engage the pupils more constructively in their educational experience and to support their social and emotional development and their learning in general. The consistently positive feedback from the students, PRU staff and coaches, which emphasised the importance of the relational aspects of the project is considered in relation to further possible interventions and research undertaken by applied psychologists working in education.

The relational challenge of Pupil Referral Units

EVERY PUPIL attending a PRU is, by definition, disengaged from the mainstream educational setting they would be expected to attend, nearly always as a result of relational challenges with adults and/or other pupils within these settings. A report published by OFSTED (2005) estimated that the placement of students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD) within PRUs, rose by 25 per cent between 2001 and 2003 and at the time of writing 450 PRUs existed in England catering for 25,000 pupils, who were either excluded or at risk of exclusion. More recently a Government White Paper, *Back on Track – a strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people* (2008) is a recognition of the fact that PRU provision needs to be improved in order to better meet the needs of this complex student population. Much of this strategy focuses upon improving learning outcomes and relatively little acknowledgement is made of the key role played by relationships between all involved in the educational context (Ohlsson, 2002).

Available educational literature (Klein, 2000) suggests that despite a large number of seemingly very good initiatives to address the needs of disaffected pupils in North America, Canada, Europe and Australia, the increasing trend for many young people to disengage from their education continues. She also writes that the majority of initiatives happen on a small and local scale and that

the methodologies and conceptualisation behind the initiatives is not described and disseminated. Klein's case study (ibid), which explores effective provision for disaffected students, suggests a number of common elements including school as central within the community, the importance of relationships in the entire school community, accessible, individualised learning arrangements and the teaching of moral and responsibility-based behaviour. Amongst these, she states that relationships between staff and students are arguably the most important factor.

In humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1967) and psychoanalytic theory (Donnington, 1994) relationships are viewed as a core aspect of learning and personal development. Broffenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of child development puts the network of relationships surrounding and affirming the child as key to every aspect of development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional domains. The individual child who does not get this affirmation is more likely to seek it in inappropriate attitudes and activities, i.e. disaffection, anti-social behaviour and inability to control impulsivity and to self-direct. These characteristics are commonly presented by students attending PRUs and it is, therefore, important that any opportunities for them to experience healthy and supportive friendships and adult relationships are cultivated.

Background and rationale for a relationship-based project in a PRU

The idea for this project arose from EP practice in a key stage 3 PRU, which identified football as an activity where students demonstrated higher levels of pro-social behaviour, open-ness to and engagement with learning, relative to their behaviour in the PRU generally. Regular EP work involving observation and assessment of individual students and the PRU system as a whole and consultation with staff, parents/carers and other professionals such as social workers, education welfare officers, psychotherapists and clinical psycho-

logists provided many opportunities from which to formulate, develop and implement the project idea.

This PRU caters for excluded students or for students in danger of exclusion, aged 11 to 14 years with complex individual needs. At the time of the initiative there were 38 students on roll, of whom about 20 were attending well. The aim of this short-term provision is for students to stay for no longer than two terms and to re-integrate into mainstream school. Approximately 25 per cent of the intake achieve re-integration but some students with particularly complex additional needs require a longer period of assessment and/or alternative special education provision. Seven members of staff at the PRU offer a school experience covering a range of curriculum areas, including some physical education (PE) activities, of which football in a local park is the most popular. Whilst social and emotional aspects of learning are referred to repeatedly in PRU policy and curriculum documents, PRU staff mainly engage in directly managing and containing individual and group level student behaviour issues and at least one teacher or teaching assistant is on duty in the 'time out' room throughout the school day, managing and containing behavioural incidents.

In the EP's close and regular contact with staff and pupils in the PRU it was apparent that common staff and student discourse themes and relationships between all individuals and groups within the PRU community frequently featured aggression, conflict, disaffection, anger and poor self esteem. The PRU system as a whole is a fragile one in that frequent staff changes occur, many different professionals from external agencies come and go and the pupil population is a constantly changing and transitory one. Added to this is the fact that this particular PRU had been placed in 'Special Measures' following an unsuccessful OFSTED inspection and was subject to many visits from Local Authority officers. In every respect it constituted a 'complex partnership' work

context (Chrichton & Hellier, 2009) presenting both opportunities and challenges.

The educational psychology input

OFSTED (2005) highlights the need for specialist support in helping schools to solve behaviour problems. EPs who link regularly with PRUs are equipped with applied psychology research skills, professional practice experience in complex educational and community contexts with many different agencies and familiarity with complex case work. They, therefore, have much to offer at individual, group and organisational levels. The project, which is the subject of this paper, arose from consultation with PRU staff and was construed as 'real world research' (Robson, 1993) and 'research in action' (Schön, 1983). It was designed to support the development and well being of all aspects of the complex human system which constituted the PRU.

The EP's practice was underpinned by ethical and professional practice guidelines (BPS, 2002, 2006) and social relationships were viewed as a central issue in all activities (Moore, 2005). This practice drew upon a wide field of theoretical ideas including solution-focused brief therapy, appreciative inquiry, personal construct psychology and family therapy (Cullen & Raomoutar, 2002).

One especially important approach was that of appreciative inquiry (Cooperider & Srivastva, 1987). The basis for this model is that of socio-rationalism (Gergen, 1982), in which social and psychological realities are viewed as dynamic, fluid and un-fixed. Thought and action are perceived as intrinsically related, co-determined and in constant interaction. Appreciative inquiry originated as a form of action research and has developed in two separate but related ways as a form of social research methodology and as a way of facilitating organisational development. In essence, it is based upon a view of the social world that construes organisations and institutions as intricate, complex 'miracles to behold' which constantly adapt and

evolve towards their best possibility and which are essentially pro-social and cohesive entities. It is an approach in which participants' best experiences and views on these are elicited.

Problematic and negative experiences and views are consciously put to one side during this process and participants are involved as co-researchers in order to discover and understand the best of an organisation's practices and characteristics and to then amplify these in order to utilise and expand the best and to find out where the positive change possibilities exist. In the case of the PRU these were:

● The students' love of football and related capacity to engage constructively with each other when playing football.
● The proximity of XFC, a respected, successful and familiar local amenity.
● The flexibility and open-ness of PRU staff.

Previous EP work at the PRU supported the idea that better relationships, communication and the overt expression of humanistic core values, (Rogers, 1963, 1987) based upon respect, were vital for the organisation as a whole and also for the relationships and emotional realities of individuals within it. EP consultation work with PRU staff, based upon these core values, resulted in the EP making contact with the senior development officer for the XFC sport in the community department in order to explore possible input to the PRU's PE programme.

Setting up and implementation

The timing of the initial contact was opportune in that the XFCSiC department was actively seeking to develop their work with young people, deemed to be at risk of involvement in crime, substance abuse and unemployment. This work was part of the *Positive Futures* (Home Office, 2002) initiative, promoted as offering a 'relational strategy, which uses sport and other activities to establish relationships with young people who are regarded as being 'socially marginalised'' (Home Office, 2005, p.8) and to support their overall development and

learning. This Home Office initiative builds upon a range of research investigating the links between sports participation and positive social behaviour (Bailey, 2005).

It was agreed, over a number of weeks, between the PRU staff, the XFCSiC senior development officer and EP that some tangible and fairly immediate input to local young people was a priority. A joint PRU/XFC project appeared to address a number of areas:

● The open-ness to and needs of the particular student group at the PRU for contact with and input from a respected and personally significant sports organisation.

● The potential within the education context generally, for utilising the benefits of working links with XFC in this area. There also appeared to be scope for using the learning derived from this pilot project in other work within education, particularly in relation to personal, social and health issues.

● A wider socio-cultural need for demonstrating a commitment to supporting the processes towards positive change, especially in relation to issues of difference and equality of opportunity.

Possibilities for input to the PRU were discussed and it was agreed that a fairly immediate football coaching provision would be provided by a member of the XFCSiC coaching staff. This would be 'framed' as a pilot initiative in order to inform subsequent work and would be the subject of an evaluation study by the EPs.

The project evaluation study
Aims
The EP committed to produce a summary of the XFC/PRU project, in order to describe the practicalities in setting up, planning, implementing and evaluating the project and to answer questions about:

1. What was needed to carry out the project?
2. What amendments were made during its implementation?

3. What were the successes and challenges during its implementation?
4. What has been learned for future initiatives?

Planning and initial implementation of the project
The XFCSiC coach commenced work with PRU students (all students attending) one afternoon a week for about an hour-and-a-half. The sessions ran throughout a whole term with plans to continue into the autumn term and beyond. The EP provided consultation services to PRU and XFC staff throughout. After two weeks an assistant coach also became involved to work with the coach. Key staff links were the head teacher and the deputy head teacher of the PRU, who organised letters to parents and carers and referral forms (XFCSiC's) for the scheme. At the outset the coach reported that, in general, the students were very positive and receptive to working together, developing their football skills and to engaging in a process of personal/social development. The student group varied and numbers ranged from 8 to 16. The coach described initial challenges as:

● Establishing a firm principle of respect as a foundation for every activity with every participant.

● Integrating new students so that they were aware of behavioural expectations, rules and routines, all of which were in accord with the PRU's usual systems.

● Supporting the development of strong and positive relationships between the students, and the students and staff.

● Maintaining a positive and optimistic ethos/climate and transferring this to other aspects of the students' school/life experience.

Evaluation methodology
It was important to take into account the effects of the roles and relationships that made up the social systems of the XFC/PRU project. Understanding the context of a complex system and becoming aware of the functions and relationships within it can

affect its management and create opportunities for change that is relevant and appropriate for a particular system (Gersch & Noble, 1991). Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is an approach which enables the logical analysis of complicated, hard to define real life problem situations (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). It offers a framework, which enables the representation of the different perspectives and intentions of the key stakeholders in a situation. It is thus concerned with a wide range of perceptions of the situation, which once acknowledged, often expose factors which may not have been thought of as relevant. Considering an entire system necessitates an acknowledgement of the mutual effects of different aspects of the system upon each other and the fact that these interactions add to the totality of the entire system (Gorrell-Barnes, 1985). SSM is a collaborative process (Ajmal, 1990) and, through discussion, debate and argument, encourages a re-examination of initial impressions; the rapid formulation of judgements, decisions and solutions is, therefore, discouraged. Using this approach, and by focussing on the situation to be evaluated, it becomes possible to uncover those views which might play a part in the continued success or otherwise of a project and, in this way, promote greater insight and radical thought. This is an example of how the conversational process can work to create change.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is based around the philosophical theory about the nature of knowledge, the social construction of reality and the creative potential of language (George et al., 1999). 'Listening with a constructive ear' (Lipchik, 2002) and using SFBT type questions during interviews encourages the interviewee to develop a greater insight into their understanding of a situation at the same time as understanding how others may perceive the situation differently. For example, asking the students 'What difference do the football sessions make to the way you are with other students/school staff/parents?' encouraged them to explore the impact their behaviour

has on other people in their lives in an open, exploratory and non-judgemental manner.

One method of collating different perspectives is to integrate them into 'rich pictures'. Rich pictures provide a way of showing the important aspects and views of complex social situations 'in a loosely structured and evocative way' (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). They enable a great deal of information to be displayed, and viewed relatively easily. As a result it becomes possible to uncover causal links between the different perspectives, which would have been much harder to glean from reading through transcripts of interviews. Representing the information in rich pictures provides a safe and non-threatening way of presenting the information for discussion; the pictures tend to reinforce the notion that the information being portrayed is someone's ideas and an interpretation of a situation rather than being facts.

Appreciative enquiry, as a conceptual and philosophical basis for working with the PRU, shaped the entire project design.

Methods
Design
The project had been running successfully for six weeks when the collection of qualitative and quantitative data took place. Information about the outcome and effect of the project was collected in a number of ways by the EP and also with the assistance of an EP in training on placement. Semi-structured 'solution focussed' individual and group interviews were conducted in order to collect the opinions of those involved with the project. Unstructured observations of and discussion with the students in their usual PRU context and in football sessions were also carried out. In this way the importance of the different perspectives was acknowledged, which was consistent with a social constructionist approach (Matthews, 2003).

Examination of attendance data from the PRU roll was used to plot bar graphs to compare the number of half-day exclusions from the PRU and the number of unautho-

rised absences from the PRU, before and after the implementation of the XFC/PRU project. This served, to some extent, to triangulate the conclusions reached from the data collected from the interviews.

Sample

An opportunity sample of 10 boys who were taking part in the project was used. The boys were selected by the PRU staff and all had been excluded or were at risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream schools and had attended the PRU for a variable amount of time. The ethnicity of the sample comprised one white Turkish, four white English, three black Carribean, three mixed/dual race pupils (two white and black Carribean, one Asian and white) which was fairly representative of the PRU population and the local context.

Data

Analysis of the data was carried out through creating 'rich pictures' of the information obtained through the interviews (e.g. Appendix 2 illustrates this process). The pictures were used to explore the context, social aspect and political economy of the project in order to encourage discussion about possible new constructions between these issues (Matthews, 2003). Themes were drawn out and shared with PRU and XFC staff and then further themes elicited within this recursive process of making sense of the many different perspectives.

Procedure

The student interviews were carried out on one day, each interview lasting about 15 minutes (see schedule of questions asked in appendices). In addition to the ongoing discussions which took place as part of the EPs regular unit consultations, the EP and EP in training met with the whole teaching and support staff group from the PRU during one of their regular twilight staff meetings. We gave some background to the project as a whole and the rationale for the evaluation, and shared photographs of the football

sessions and the rich pictures which had been produced from the interviews with the students (e.g. Appendix 2). See Appendix 1B for focus group questions. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with the parents of the students involved in the project during the following week. The questions to parents are contained in Appendix 1C. The XFC staff were interviewed and audio-taped in order to gain their perspectives about the project and regular consultation with the coaches also informed the evaluation (see Appendix 1D).

Results

Examination of PRU student data

Attendance data from the PRU Roll was used to plot bar graphs to compare the following pre and post the implementation of the XFC Project:

- The number of half-day exclusions from PRU – see Table 1.
- The number of unauthorised absences from PRU – see Table 2.

The data which gives the pre-XFC Project figures, presented in Tables 1 and 2, were taken from the PRU's Attendance records 23 February to 2 April 2004, i.e. the period directly before the XFC Project started.

The data which gives the post-XFC Project figures were taken from the PRU's Attendance records 20 April 20 to 28 May 2004, i.e. the period during which the XFC Project took place. The tables include data for students who took part in the scheme who were on the roll at the PRU during both periods, pre- and post-XFC Project. Approximately six students started at the PRU during the half-term after the project, making comparison of their attendance pre- and post-project invalid and data relating to them is, therefore, not included. The number of football sessions attended by individual students (out of the total of six) is written in brackets by the name of the student under the bar graph.

The information from examination of exclusion and attendance data does not indicate or justify the claim that this project

effected positive change for and benefited all students. What can be claimed is that for the majority of those students, i.e. six of the eight students, who attended at least five sessions, fewer half-day exclusions occurred in the half term of the project implementation than in the half term before implementation.

There are three students in particular, Jo, C and O, whose attendance and/or exclusion data reveals an increase in difficulties. These students appear to have had particular difficulties in fully utilising the project at this time and their levels of disaffection appear to have increased – as measured by time outs and exclusions. This group of students required additional provision and support and it is possible that the project may even have exacerbated their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties but very importantly, the identification of their need for something else was facilitated.

The data on pre- and post-project rates of unauthorised absences presented in Table 2, indicates relatively little project effect as only three pupils had a smaller number of unauthorised absences and five of the pupils show increased rates with two remaining at the same level of unauthorised absence. Rate of unauthorised absence on days when football coaching sessions took place is not presented in this table but discussion with staff suggested that rates of unauthorised attendance were lower on these days.

Summary of findings
Project pre-requisites
For this project to take place and to develop, a number of key components appeared to exist including initial identification of a genuine need on the part of the PRU, direct contact and discussion between XFC and education authority/PRU staff and responsive and fairly immediate practical input. The planning and delivery of the initiative was supported by a strong values and principles base which can be summarised as respect, clear project aims and realistic structures and systems for communication, collaboration, organisation and evaluation.

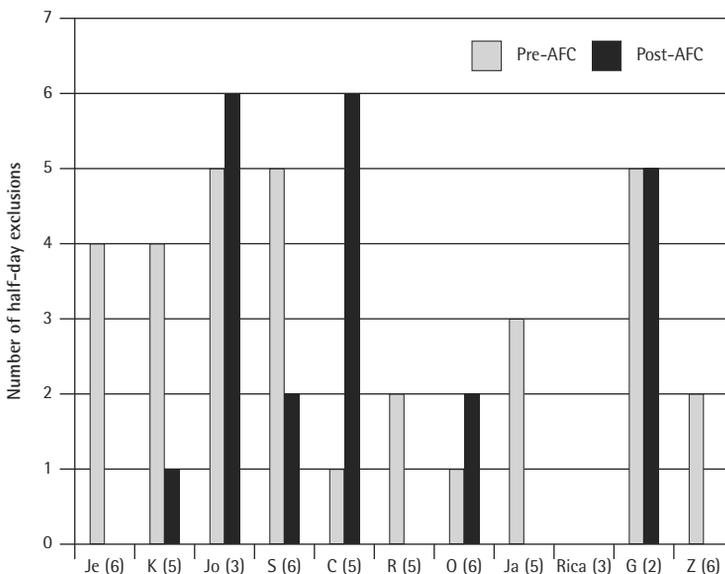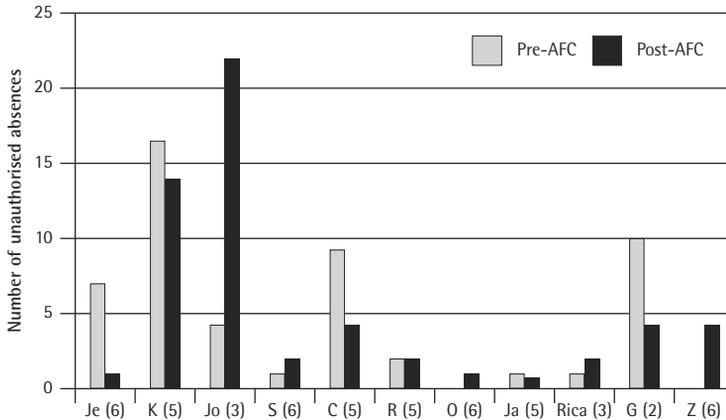**Table 1: Number of half-day exclusions pre- and post-XFC project.**

Table 2: Number of unauthorised absences pre- and post-XFC project.

The XFC coaches' personal characteristics were key and included a generally friendly attitude to the students, appropriate pacing of sessions, plentiful student feedback, mutual respect, clear boundaries, and good communication with PRU staff. Above all, it was important that the coaches enjoyed the work with challenging students:

> *'You get more satisfaction from the challenges of working with kids with difficulties.'*
> XFC coach

Perceptions of positive difference made by the project

PRU staff expressed the view that the football sessions introduced a very positive and particularly meaningful element in the students' educational and personal experience:

> *'It makes a change for this group of students to be with the 'winners' of society and for something good to come their way.'* PRU staff

EP observations of football sessions highlighted student behaviour in which the following characteristics were apparent:

- High levels of engagement and general 'on task' behaviour.
- Good listening and following of instructions.
- Positive interactions between students and between students and staff.
- Dynamics within the student group indicated high levels of inclusion.

- Tolerance of some frustration.
- Increased capacity to wait, take turns and to be helpful.

In terms of the style and organisation of the coaches, they were observed to exhibit high levels of positivity, clarity and generally good quality communication, appropriate pitching, timing and pacing of session content, humour and kindness. PRU staff spoke of their view that the coaches brought with them personal qualities which makes them very good role models for the students and that the sessions also gave the students opportunities to work with different adults from themselves.

Broad areas of agreement existed between students, PRU and XFC staff in relation to the benefits. Everyone valued the regular sessions of football training and increased fitness and skills, the contact with a highly respected, local professional sports establishment, and the opportunities to improve personal and social skills and to learn in general. Enjoyment, teamwork, inclusion and coping better with difficulties were all important aspects for everyone. There was also a view that the sessions gave students opportunities to learn to deal with new and unexpected situations.

The students highlighted their appreciation of being involved in an activity, which required them to work together in a larger group and to get to know and co-operate with

each other better. 'Football is all about team-work' said one student. During training or playing the matches, the students felt that they had had to learn to ignore irritations from others so that they were able to concentrate on the football. One boy summed up with:

> *'Football disciplines you and you have to be more mature, not fight or cause problems – you have to respect yourself and everyone else.'*
> PRU student

Students and PRU staff spoke of how the reward of XFC sessions and the sanction of withdrawal of these supported the general behaviour policy arrangements of the PRU. Many of the students talked of not wanting to get 'time outs' on a football coaching day and of looking forward to attending the PRU on football coaching days.

PRU staff considered that levels of bullying had decreased and that the students were becoming more able to cope with difference and new experiences . The nature of the sessions encouraged different social groups of students to mix with each other, for example, bullied students worked with others that they might otherwise choose not to be with. PRU staff and students referred to the positive behavioural and social models provided by the coaches and described their calm, reliable, respectful and positive manner. One boy said:

> *'These sessions have helped me calm down and concentrate because I want to concentrate on the football and not go over the top all the time.'*

Another student commented:

> *'You can see T's (coach's) face go a bit tense when you've gone too far – we can have a laugh most times – but only so far'.*

Both XFC and PRU staff appreciated the collaboration with each other and the learning potential of this for their own professional development. Topics like management of student behaviour and learning, teaching approaches and arrange-ments all feature here and the wish for skilled facilitation input was expressed on a number of occasions. This is discussed further in the conclusion.

XFC staff highlighted the enjoyment, the learning and the chance to make a positive difference for this challenging student group. They also remarked on the unique potential of every student and their pleasure in getting to know them, to work with staff at the PRU and to experience the development of the group as a whole. They had been interested in how the group process changed over time and how the group formed and the students started to communicate better and to co-operate and develop. They spoke of their appreciation of the professional applied psychology support and facilitation component in this project and of their wish for more (see Appendix 3).

The XFC staff also emphasised the impor-tance of giving the boys a chance to express themselves through the physical game of football and to use up their physical energy so that they could talk in a more relaxed way. They appreciated the respect the students showed right from the start even though they did not at first show each other respect.

Perceptions of the challenges presented by the project

The attempts to elicit parents' views of the project revealed a surprisingly small amount of dialogue between students and parents. Only two of the parents knew about the coaching sessions despite letters home.

PRU staff highlighted the fact that a few individual students actually experienced more pressure and difficulty as a result of the project, such as Jo, whose difficulties with being on the losing side of a football game. However, staff acknowledged that this high-lighted and prompted the need for identi-fying different support and arrangements for different students. In addition there was a view that the XFC coaches had unique personal qualities which would be hard to replicate. Also staff described one possible threat to the project that as a result of the XFC input, the PRU might become too enjoy-able for the students. This would then be seen as defeating the object of trying to get the students to reintegrate back to their schools.

XFC staff found it very difficult to describe any negative aspects of the project but spoke of a small minority of individual students who were particularly closed, disrespectful and aggressive. However, they were aware of the need for individual approaches required for building relationships with different students and for additional time for some students to settle in to the sessions. They were particularly aware of the difficulties inherent in new students joining the group or of students who brought particular differences with them, for example, the one female student who attended three sessions. They expressed their wish for more support and opportunities to receive educational psychology input for this with the PRU staff.

The worry of the project being withdrawn or finished existed for the involved adults and students alike. PRU students and staff and XFC staff voiced their concern that the project would have to end or that sometimes sessions might not happen:

> *'The project is finite. It will have to end sometime.'* XFC staff

The students consistently expressed the wish for more sessions. PRU and XFC staff were also aware of the need to avoid disappointing them and not doing a session:

> *'Missing a session is a very bad idea. … Also, It's very difficult when you have a switch of group.'* XFC staff

Methodology
The quantitative data could have been supplemented with records of unauthorised absence and behavioural incidents in relation to football and to non-football coaching days. A greater number of interviews and video diaries and/or personal journals for all involved students before, during and after the project timescale of six weeks would also have enriched available data. Opportunities to build participant and researcher trust and relationship with individual students over time (Medcalf-Richard, 2008) through repeated interviews over a term or half term would have been especially appropriate for this challenging and complex student group.

However, these aspects would only be practically possible through provision of sufficient, dedicated funding, time and support for the evaluation project.

In conclusion
This project has provided a unique opportunity for utilising relationships with a challenging group of students, categorised as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, in order to demonstrate their more positive aspects and capacities. The participating staff, both PRU and XFC, saw many of the students as being very bright and welcomed the chance to be able to acknowledge this through the project. The project as a whole, raised expectations for staff, students and, to a lesser extent, parents, so that the dual aim of raising educational achievement and increasing social inclusion became more possible and more attainable.

The interface between the two worlds of education and sport appeared to offer a rich potential for supporting challenged students. Many of the points made by the XFC coaches and the PRU staff were identical and seen as good practice by both in developing positive relationships with this cohort of students . They included:

- Having a clear session structure around the activity with a beginning, middle and end.
- Ensuring opportunities for using up the large amount of students' physical energy.
- Consistency, continuity and no cancellations.
- Full, well planned sessions.
- Capitalising on the students' high levels of motivation and engagement linked to their love of football.
- Respect and a genuine approach from adults combined with a personal congruence being modelled by adults in dealing with one's own emotions, stress, struggles, etc. The absence of this quality ensured difficulties as these students were viewed as being skilful in capitalising on adults' own emotional difficulties and occasional lack of congruence.

- As an adult being able to not take abuse/misbehaviour personally.
- Being able to count to 10, bite your tongue, repeat, wait, be patient and remain calm.
- Being a positive role model.
- Taking a non-confrontational approach, i.e. no forcing.
- Getting the kids behind you by finding and working with the leaders and understanding the group dynamics.
- Fairness, no group punishments.

These points, expressed by PRU staff and the football coaches mirror Klein's (2000) list of requirements for forming and maintaining the positive relationships crucial to supporting students, especially challenging students, i.e. empathy, understanding and acceptance, personal congruence, a capacity to personally disengage with conflict/aggression expressed towards them by the student and a range of practical strategies for managing these difficulties.

The weekly football coaching sessions became a part of the PRU's core curriculum, viewed as providing important PE and personal, social and health education (PSHE) learning material. In addition, similar initiatives were envisaged for the Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) PRU and the Key Stage 4 PRU (ages 14 to 16).

It is clear from all involved that the project was seen as a success and to have met its initial wide aims. This project developed out of the practice of one EP. The timing of this work was an important factor and required the educational psychologist to be confident and proactive in making extra time, utilising existing opportunities and capitalising upon her own working relationships with many colleagues involved with the PRU. No dedicated funding, time or support was made available and so the work can be construed as an organic, naturalistically occurring opportunity to blend applied psychology research and practice, i.e. work in the 'swamp' (Schön, 1983) of real world practice. Whilst control and measurement of aspects of the project were difficult to establish it was possible to work in a systematic and theorised way over time and to influence perceptions and expectations of members of the PRU community. In this way a contribution to ongoing pastoral and curriculum arrangements and to the general ethos and the emotional and relational atmosphere of the PRU was made and the possibilities for further work were increased. Learning has been enabled for everyone involved and is summed up by one student's words:

> *'I used to shout and cuss everyone but the sessions have taught me how to work with other people and learn more and anyway, T (coach) looks happy to be here so we can't be that bad.'*

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Appendices

Appendix 1A
Student Interview Questions
- What it was that they most liked about the XFC sessions?
- What changes had they noticed about themselves since the start of the project?
- What had they found difficult about the sessions?
- What would they like to change about the sessions?
- What was it about the XFC coaches that made them show respect?

Appendix 1B
Staff focus group questions
- What do you see as the strengths of the project?
- What do you see as the weaknesses of the project?
- What opportunities for developing the project do you see?
- What might get in the way of these opportunities being realised?

Appendix 1C
Telephone interview questions to parents/carers
- What have you heard about the XFC/PRU project?
- What do you understand about the project?
- Can you see any benefits coming out of the project?
- Have you any other comments to make about the project?

Appendix 1D
Interview questions used with XFC coaches
- What was positive and rewarding for you about the project?
- What was challenging and/or difficult about the project?
- What helped you with your work?
- Do you have any general comments about the project?
- How would you describe your ideal student for this project?

Appendix 2
Rich Pictures of students' views of the project – Thursdays (football session day) produced by Joyce Monroe (EP in Training, UCL).
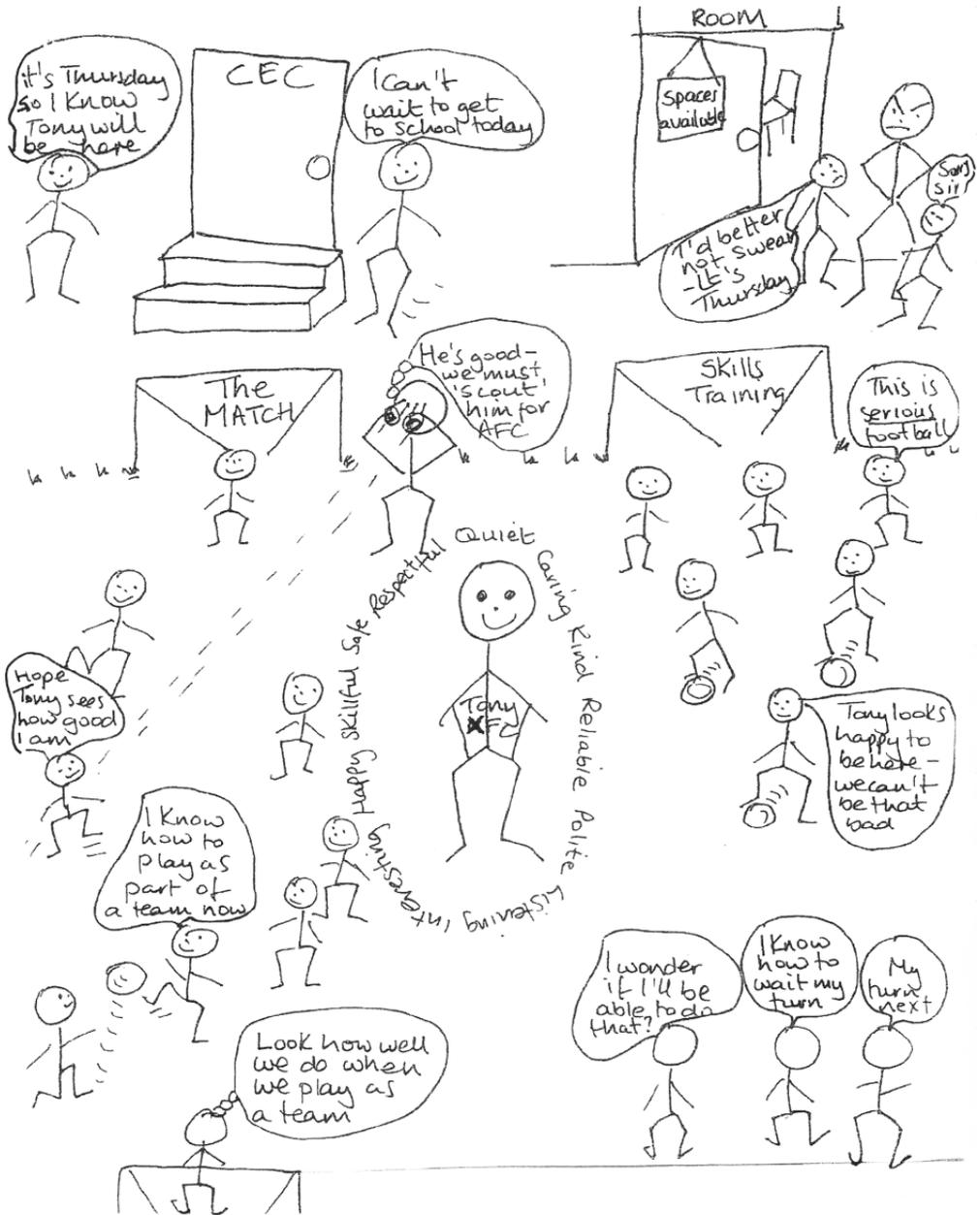
Appendix 3
Ideas for future initiatives
A number of future possibilities were suggested by the findings of this evaluation and have since been implemented:
● Links with curriculum areas utilising a literacy support programme run by XFC.
● An end-of-term presentation for students, parents and staff.
● A session of training at XFC's ground.
● Photographs and posters for the PRU to advertise the sessions and keep them 'alive' in the students' minds between sessions.
● Consideration of a continued course of sessions for students being re-integrated to mainstream school. Possible direct input from XFC staff in mainstream schools for re-integrated students.
● An article written for a newspaper or relevant publication to address any misperceptions about the work, i.e. that the project was a reward for difficult behaviour.
● For students who experiencing difficulties, a well planned programme of alternative activities and additional support. Possible consideration of a buddy system.

Other possibilities, which continued to be considered include:
● Competitive matches with other school teams.
● Follow-up discussion type activities with the students, for example, watching a training video, and/or some sort of study skills development.
● More long term planning to ensure the continuation of the project which would relieve the worry of it stopping and further evaluation over time of the project effects.
● An individual report detailing students' progress with the project from XFC along with a signed team photograph.
● Consideration of an additional session for students making good progress in their PRU experience.
● New students to the PRU could benefit from being paired up with someone established in the group already, someone doing well.
● Active involvement of and linking with parents.
● XFC coaching sessions could be used as a reward for reintegrating back into school, for example, a student would have attend for a certain amount of time at school to qualify for taking part in the sessions.
● Facilitated joint staff development sessions in which PRU and XFC staff could learn from each other and develop the work further.
● Appropriately funded, supported and managed follow-up evaluation research.