This thesis is an exploratory case study that investigates a ‘successful’ pupil referral unit (PRU) for key stage 3 secondary school pupils located in the semi-rural southwest of England. The achievement of the PRU was externally acknowledged by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) with a recently reported overall grade of 1 or ‘Outstanding’. This exploratory study took a social constructionist approach and was informed by the methodology of illuminative evaluation. This study explored the stories and experiences of pupils and staff using interviews, a focus group and video diaries for the pupils. The analysis of these data was from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. The research data suggested that success was in a state of flux for all in the PRU. For pupils there were personal transformations in their attitudes, behaviours and values. Pupils’ social and emotional capital was increased by the ‘deep relationships’ that developed between pupils and staff. The innovative approach to the curriculum allowed pupils to engage positively with education and featured lessons that were routinely based upon experiential learning. This included weekly outdoor learning lessons which provided a rich context for informal learning to take place alongside the formal objectives. Leadership and management appeared to be the keystone of the PRU success. There was a clear well founded educational philosophy that was successfully articulated through the operational systems of the PRU. All of these parts contributed to the holistic success of the PRU. Findings from this case study are not generalisable due to its specificity to one particular setting and small number of participants. However, ‘naturalistic generalisations’ may be arrived at by the reader. For example, the reader may be able to apply some aspects of good practice, such as developing deep relationships, to their own context when working with those pupils who are, or have the potential to be, disaffected.
Editor's comments - [ The above is the abstract from an original PhD thesis; the final publication in the study for the author in pursuit of a doctorate; such works result in the author being awarded a PhD and the title of Dr. by an appropriately accredited University. PhD's are the culmination of a number of years work by the author supervised by two (normally PhD or MPhil qualified) academics and, with the addition of a further appropriately qualified academic (not normally from the same University) as part of a viva-voce examination team. Successful research work at PhD level is designed to add to the body of knowledge in the study area at some level.

A PhD thesis often forms the foundation for journal articles for the author and leads to further enquiry in the form of what is called post-doctoral research. These works are characterised by comprehensive literature reviews, sometimes traditional yet multiple (and often mixed) methods, interesting if not ground breaking discussions and always directional signs toward further research; they provide for undergraduates not only a model for the possibilities for further study but a gift in terms of references in any given subject areas. ]
An Exploratory Case Study of a 'Successful' Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Written by Leather, M. F.
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