INCLUSION FOR THE EXCLUDED: APPLYING CRITICAL REALISM WITHIN AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION ACADEMY FOR EXCLUDED PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

C J FIELDING

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CHRISTOPHER JOHN FIELDING

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Manchester Metropolitan University

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Abstract

This study took place in an alternative provision academy for 40 primary school children in the north of England. All the children attending the centre had either been permanently excluded or were at serious risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream primary schools due to their challenging behaviour. Many of the children had been observed to cease this challenging behaviour quickly on entry to the centre. The aim of this study was to develop the researcher's understanding of the underlying mechanisms affecting this cessation of challenging behaviour and charts the change in both the researcher's developing understanding and his practice.

A three-cycle, first-person action research model was used in combination with critical realism, and a hermeneutic approach was taken to consider the place of the researcher as the professional at the heart of the process. In following this novel methodological approach, the aim of this study was also to offer an explicit example of applied critical realism being used in an educational setting.

The study was instrumental in developing practice within the centre through a set of emerging social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) principles which also provided the basis for the training of student teachers and professionals from other settings. As the study moved through repeating cycles, the researcher proposed an emerging model which applied the theory of social domains to a centre for excluded primary school children. The study supports the view that a child's challenging behaviour may be seen as the outcome of a failing environment rather than because of a flaw in the child. It concludes by suggesting that political and educational leaders raise questions about the enabling and constraining effects that their wider policies have on the ability of schools to meet the needs of children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Context

This study took place in an alternative provision (AP) academy for 40 children excluded (or at risk of exclusion) from mainstream primary schools in England due to their challenging behaviour. Many of the children attending the provision were described as having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. The Department for Education in England use a code of practice to define categories of special educational need (SEN). Historically, behaviour had always been considered a special education need and was used in 2001 by the Department for Education (2001:87) where 'Behaviour, emotional and social development' was described as a category of need. However, in 2015, the Department for Education (2015:98) removed the word 'behaviour' and created the new category of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). This represented a significant change as behaviour was now being recognised as a symptom of an unmet, underlying need rather than a need in itself.

> Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. (Department for Education, 2015:98)

The emphasis therefore shifted from simply managing a child's behaviour to meeting the child's needs.

This study was conducted at a time of large-scale government review of both school exclusion and Alternative Provision in England. In March 2018, the Department for Education (2018a) published '*Creating opportunity for all. Our vision for alternative provision.*' and Edward Timpson CBE was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct a comprehensive review of school exclusion. In July 2018, the House of Commons Education Committee (2018) published '*Forgotten Children: Alternative provision and the Scandal of Ever Increasing Exclusions'.* This committee raised concerns about hidden forms of

exclusion for SEN pupils and a YouGov study was commissioned on behalf of Ofsted to explore the issue. Published in May 2019, YouGov concluded that educational policy, league tables and the pressure of Ofsted ratings incentivise some forms of exclusion and although schools may cite behaviour as a reason, 'teachers personally believe academic achievement is more important in the decision making' (YouGov, 2019: 3).

In May 2019, the Department for Education published the finding of the Edward Timpson's review of school exclusion. Timpson describes:

> the exclusion of children with SEN being the result of a failure to understand and properly identify children's needs or using this information to put in place the right support to help them overcome barriers and engage with the curriculum offer. (Department for Education, 2019a: 38)

When considering exclusions rates over time, Timpson found that the highest rates amongst SEN pupils were those with SEMH difficulties who were not being supported through an Educational Health Care Plan and his review emphasises the requirement for schools to 'make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 and use exclusion only as last resort, when nothing else will do' (Department for Education, 2019a:12).

In their study '.*he was excluded for the kind of behaviour that we thought he needed support with…'* Parker et al. (2016) explored the experiences of the parents of excluded pupils. They found parents who felt that schools began by building a case against their child with fixed term exclusions. Some thought the fixed term exclusion might be issued because the school had something coming up (like a visit to church). Some parents reported informal exclusions where it had been sold like it was best for the child not to have an exclusion on their record. The researchers (Parker et al., 2016:142) and parents had discussions about the school ethos in relation to the 'school routine, disciplinary approach (often reported as rigid), attitudes towards and expectations for their pupils and focus of outcomes (e.g., Ofsted, targets and results)'. Here, parents felt that schools had 'recognisable differences in their approach that meant that pupils were able to fit better in certain schools over others' (Parker et al., 2016:142).

Writing in in the International Journal for Inclusive Education, Mills et al. (2014:5) reported that:

> Policy discourse in England has also tended to locate the reasons for exclusion within characteristics of individuals rather than develop an understanding rooted in the wider context of education, social and health policies, and further reduced the likelihood of taking a holistic approach to meeting a need.

Within the child, exclusion is more likely amongst children with psychosocial and mental health difficulties and cognitive difficulties and behavioural problems have a bi-directional relationship (Parker et al., 2016; Tejerina-Arreal et al.,2020). Within the academic literature, however there is a recognition that exclusion is more likely to result from an accumulation of risk factors (Parker et al. 2016; DfE, 2018b; Paget et al. 2018; Tejerina-Arreal, et al. 2020; Thompson et al., 2021) associated not only with the child but also with the family, school and wider social and cultural setting. For example, Partridge et al. (2020) comment that when situated within an education system where high stakes testing is designed to hold schools and teachers to account, an unintended consequence is the 'the incentive to exclude students whose behaviour might negatively impact upon a school's judgement' (Partridge et al. 2020, 31) resulting in a 'heightened risk that pupils with SEMH can become collateral casualties of policy change evacuated to the social margins of schooling' (Thomson et al., 2021:1). The overall purpose of this study is of improving the lot of excluded children by developing a better understanding of the gamut of underlying causes of the challenging behaviour that has led to their exclusion.

The centre involved in the study

The centre in the study was set up in 2002 as an authority run pupil referral unit (PRU) to serve the local town. Initially, it provided part-time placements, but by 2006 it was providing only full-time provision for children excluded from their mainstream primary schools. The centre moved out of local authority control in April 2016 and became an alternative provision (AP) academy. The local authority commissions placements at the centre for each child whilst their long-term educational provision is determined. Children typically attend for around two terms, and the majority settle

quickly and this settled status continues during their time at the centre. They then either return to mainstream schools or move on to special schools.

The phenomenon of children ceasing challenging behaviour quickly upon arrival at the centre

I arrived as the headteacher in January 2016 following over 20 years of experience as a class teacher and headteacher in mainstream primary education. During my first year of leading the centre, I observed that many of the children arriving at the centre ceased their prior challenging behaviour quickly, and in some cases, did not exhibit this prior behaviour at all. All the pupils in the centre had exhibited behaviour that their mainstream schools had found challenging enough to warrant permanent exclusion. However, I found that incidents involving such behaviour within the centre were uncommon.

I tried to understand this phenomenon but struggled to find any underlying philosophy guiding the provision in the centre. The staff were finding their own way and doing what they felt worked and in some cases were explaining their practice in terms of Rogers' (1957) person-centred approach. I used this as a starting point to developing practice in the centre and devised our first set of SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (see Appendix 1) in an attempt to improve consistency of provision across the centre.

The purpose of the investigation

My initial observations were the motivation behind the main purpose of this investigation, which was to improve the lot of those children excluded or at risk of exclusion from primary schools. In order to do this, I felt that I would first need to develop my own understanding of how this notable change in behaviour may be related to the provision offered by the centre. This led to the first main aim of the study:

1. To develop my understanding of the underlying causal mechanisms which may result in a child entering the centre and quickly ceasing to exhibit challenging behaviour.

Framing the question around causal mechanisms implies an ontological position which should not go without critical reflection. Early in my doctoral programme, I was exposed to critical realism through the 2010 work of Stan Houston. This introduced me to both the critical realism work of Roy Bhaskar (1978) and the social domain theory of Derek Layder (1997). I found a resonance with both. Also, at around that time, Roy Bhaskar wrote the foreword to the book *Studying Organizations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide* (Edwards et al., 2014). I had been seeking examples of applied critical realism in the education sector but, like Bhaskar, I had found a 'dearth' of texts describing the practical process (Bhaskar, cited in Edwards et al., 2014:v). To that end, I also aimed in this study to provide a worked example of applied critical realism for practitioners in the education sector. This led to the second main aim of the study:

2. To provide an example methodology for the practitioner seeking to use applied critical realism within the education sector.

The critical, emancipatory aspect of the study

This study combined critical realism and first-person action research and worked in a cyclical way in order to put plans into action and not simply theorise about them. This thesis deals largely with my own reflexivity and does not explore in depth any changes in practice beyond the development of our SEMH documentation. It does, however, have the ultimate emancipatory aim (Costello, 2011; Goodson, 2012) of developing understanding, enhancing practice in the centre and supporting schools, resulting in fewer pupils being excluded. In order to better understand how these emancipatory aims may affect the process, they were laid out at the outset (McNiff, 2013) and considered using a hermeneutic approach (Bolton, 2005; Hedberg, 2009) as part of each cycle of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This thesis describes an emerging conceptual framework. This framework evolved as I moved through three cycles of action research as will be detailed within Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This chapter sets out to review some of the key concepts that emerged as being particularly salient at the beginning of the action research process. As the research progressed, different concepts and ways of framing the phenomenon came into focus. This chapter will explore the concepts that initially felt most important. As we progress through the thesis these will be interrogated, refined and replaced.

The initial observed phenomenon involved pupils ceasing to exhibit challenging behaviour quickly on entering our centre and led to my construction of an initial conceptual framework in the form of a hypothesis based on my a priori knowledge at that point in time. Development of this initial conceptual framework involved placing the strands or categories of the framework into what Miles and Huberman (1994:20) describe as 'intellectual bins' in order that the multiple facets could be identified, defined and studied alongside the way that the separate facets related to each other.

There is an acknowledgement that although the creation of an initial conceptual framework is useful in providing initial guidance on the research, frameworks themselves are 'malleable, evolving over time as the various relevant entities and relationships become more clearly discernible' (Ravitch and Riggan, 2012:9). As this study evolved through multiple cycles, a position statement of the my conceptual understanding at the time was given in the form of an a priori hypothesis to be studied further in the next cycle.

This review of literature considers the 'intellectual bins' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:20) of behaviour, relationships, emotions and resilience and the language used within them as I developed the initial conceptual framework for the study. These concepts formed the basis of the SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards that I was developing at that time.

Section 2.1 looks at behaviour and considers behaviour as a biological term before considering behaviour as defined by the Department for Education (DfE) and the way the term is used in this study.

Section 2.2 looks at relationships and considers the human need for relationships and prosocial behaviour and also considers the role of relationships in socialisation. It then considers the role of acceptance and unconditional positive regard within a person-centred approach.

Section 2.3 looks at emotions and considers the concepts of both emotional arousal and emotional regulation.

Section 2.4 looks at resilience and the indicators of resilience chosen by those conducting research. It continues by considering resilience as a function of social ecology and associated risk and protective factors.

2.1 – Behaviour

The term 'behaviour' is central to this study and is commonly used to describe a key concept which many have attempted to define. I will begin with behaviour from a biological perspective before moving on to the way the term is used by those driving policy in the educational sector in England.

Behaviour as a biological term

Many behavioural biologists have offered their definition of the term 'behaviour' in different levels of complexity reflecting the nature of their specialism and area of study. These varied attempts to define behaviour were considered by Levitis et al. (2009:103) in their paper 'Behavioural biologists do not agree on what constitutes behaviour', and they found many definitions were 'so vague as to be impossible to apply'.

The simplest definitions at least agree that behaviour is an observable phenomenon which relates to animals (including humans). Davis (1966:2) states that behaviour is 'what an animal does' whilst Tinbergen (1955:2) states that behaviour is 'the total movements made by the intact animal'. These definitions both assume that behaviour is limited to animals (including humans) and involves the animal acting in a way that causes movement. Both also describe behaviour as observable, and Levitis et al. (2009:104) describe this observable nature of behaviour as a 'class of biological phenomenon'. This is both relevant and a useful starting point as this study centres around uncovering the mechanisms which influence an observed phenomenon. However, it may also be useful to consider those definitions which

frame the animal's observable movement (their behaviour) as a reaction to a stimulus of some sort.

This framing of behaviour as a reaction to a stimulus describes the observable way in which an animal's actions are affected by its surroundings. Hall and Halliday (1998:6–7) offer a little more in this vein by stating that:

> …behaviour involves the interactions between an animal's machinery, its bones, muscles, nervous system, etc. and its outside world such as its food, enemies and social practice.

This suggests that the animal is responding to the world in which it finds itself. Raven and Johnson (1989:1119) also state that 'behaviour can be defined as the way an organism responds to stimulation', and this behaviour as a visible response is also summed up by Wallace et al. (1991:Glossary) when they state that behaviour is the 'observable activity of an organism; anything an organism does that involves action and/or response to stimulation'. Understanding what lies behind these responses and the nature of these stimuli is at the core of this study and therefore definitions of behaviour which develop this further would be useful.

There are a group of definitions (Beck, 1991; Levitis et al., 2009) of the term 'behaviour' that state that these stimuli may not come only from the outside world but may also come from within. Starr and Taggart (1992:Glossary) refer to behaviour as 'a response to external and internal stimuli'. This is pertinent to this study as I attempt to uncover the full range of mechanisms which may be driving the phenomenon observed. Beck et al. (1991:Glossary) are in agreement and describe behaviour as the 'externally visible activity of an animal' that is a response to 'changing external or internal conditions'. Levitis et al. (2009:103) suggest that:

> Behaviour is the internally coordinated responses (actions or inactions) of whole living organisms (individuals or groups) to internal and/or external stimuli, excluding responses more easily understood as developmental changes.

Within this study, I will need to explore both the way that children's behaviour interacts with and might be driven by aspects of their inner selves as well as by their

external worlds. In this section, I will consider concepts such as resilience and emotion which are often framed (although many would argue problematically) as internal characteristics which can influence observed behaviour.

As part of their work, Levitis et al. (2009:105) created a list of statements which they saw as essential features of behaviour. It included, 'Behaviour is always in response to the external environment', but also stated that 'behaviour is always influenced by the internal processes of the individual'. In this study I aim to use three cycles of research to challenge and refine my proposed models of understanding and uncover the broad range of mechanisms affecting the observable phenomenon of children quickly ceasing to exhibit challenging behaviour on entering the pupil referral unit.

Behaviour as defined by the Department for Education (DfE)

The trigger for this inquiry was concerned with the phenomenon of a child ceasing 'challenging behaviour' quickly on arrival into a pupil referral unit. I return to it as I use my written accounts as the basis to challenge my hypotheses within each research cycle. There is an important distinction to be made when moving on to the way the term 'behaviour' is used by the DfE and when that behaviour is judged as 'challenging' within a setting such as a mainstream school. Tom Bennett (2017:12) in his external review of behaviour for the Department for Education states that:

> Behaviour in this report means any actions performed by any members of the student and staff communities. It includes conduct in classrooms and all public areas.

This definition introduces the term 'conduct' which is used interchangeably with 'behaviour'. In terms of this study, this is an important distinction. There is a need to be aware that the DfE do not see behaviour simply as a phenomenon resulting from a complex set of underlying mechanisms but as a normative/evaluative judgement where behaviour may be seen as positive or negative (Department for Education, 2014). Bennett says it is about:

> …how members work, communicate, relax and interact; how they study; how they greet staff; how they arrive at school, transition from one activity to

another; how they use social media, and many other areas of their conduct. (Bennett, 2017:12)

These 'social norms' (Bennet, 2017:31) in the form of school routines are used as a marker for whether a behaviour is desirable or undesirable and details how 'any aspect of school behaviour… can be standardised because it is expected from all students at all times' (Bennett, 2017:31). Here, challenging behaviour may be understood to be that which does not conform to the expected social norms of the setting such as, 'walking on the left or right of the corridor, entering the class, entering assembly, clearing tables at lunch'.

Good, positive or desirable behaviour may then be seen as a child's response to a stimulus that adheres to the social norms of the setting. In their guidance *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools*, the DfE (2014:7) states that within law, the headteacher must set out measures in the behaviour policy which aim to 'promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect, prevent bullying, ensure that pupils complete assigned work and which regulate the conduct of pupils'.

The requirement here is for every school to have in place a published policy which uses 'rewards and sanctions' (DfE, 2014:3) to both promote desirable behaviour and regulate that behaviour which is seen as undesirable. It goes on to state that 'teachers can discipline pupils whose conduct falls below the standard which could reasonably be expected of them' (DfE, 2014:7). This may be seen as a clear acknowledgement of recognised social norms being used as a marker to decide whether behaviour is to be seen as good or bad and of the term 'misbehaviour' (DfE, 2014:3) being used. There is a shift in tone here as the responsibility for behaviour is put firmly in the court of the child with the intimation that behaviour which does not conform to the expected social norms is a conscious choice on the part of the child and that a school leader should then hold the child to account for that.

When exploring the expected social norms of a school, Tom Bennett's (2017) work on developing school culture describes the importance of a school having 'a shared identity with shared values' and proposes that desirable behaviour is not simply the absence of undesirable behaviour but 'includes aiming towards students' flourishing as scholars and human beings' (Bennett, 2017:23). In their definition of behaviour, this point is also made by Levitis et al. (2009) where behaviour is always

an observable action and is never characterised by a lack of action. This is a salient point in this study, where my initial observation is characterised by the absence of challenging behaviour.

The term 'behaviour' in this study

For the purpose of this study the initial working definition of the term 'behaviour' will be that of an observable phenomenon which is an animal's response to an external stimulus which is always influenced by the animal's internal processes. In our case this is the observable responses made by a child to their current situation that is always influenced by their own internal processes. The term 'challenging behaviour' will be seen as behaviour which does not conform to the expected social norms of the setting.

2.2 – Relationships

The second main category considered within this review of the literature is concerned with relationships and the part they play in social structures. In his discussion on behaviour, Bennett (2017:12) describes how behaviour 'does not merely refer to how students do or do not act antisocially'. It also includes how they may operate in a prosocial way and develop good quality relationships. This review will therefore consider the language used when discussing the human need for relationships and the role this plays in driving prosocial behaviour. It will go on to consider the socialisation of an individual who is exposed to the shared social norms of a group to which they wish to belong. Finally, it will consider how this need to belong may be met using a person-centred approach based on acceptance and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1956).

The human need for relationships

In 1624, John Donne in his meditation XVII wrote:

> No Man is an island
> Entire of itself;
> Every man is a piece of the continent,
> A part of the main.

He captured the innate importance of human relationships in a way that has remained relevant over the centuries. In his 1996 book, *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur describes human relationships as follows:

> We are only persons with each other: our humanity is 'co-humanity', inextricably involved with others, utterly relational, both in our humanity and our shared life…. The good life is with and for others in just institutions. (Ricoeur, 1996:172)

This view of human relationships has proved to be hugely influential. The Church of England (2016:7) adopted it verbatim in their comprehensive *Vision for Education* document. The think tank, the 'Relationships Foundation' also adopted Ricoeur's view as the central pillar to their thinking on the importance of human relationships. They also cite the work of Ludy-Dobson and Perry (2010) describing 200,000 years of humans living in social, multi-generational groups and how being around familiar people who demonstrate acceptance is central to the 'relationally based protective mechanisms that help us survive and thrive' (Ludy-Dobson and Perry, 2010:26–27).

Anderman and Freeman (2004), Buckley et al. (2004) and Newman et al. (2007) all describe the important association between a child's sense of acceptance and belonging and their behavioural presentation. Baumeister et al. (2005), MacDonald and Leary (2005) and DeWall et al. (2011) all state that children with a strong sense of belonging are much more likely to be able to self-regulate their emotions than those who are socially excluded from a group. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) belonging is described as being central to relational well-being, however Baumeister and Leary (1995:361) describe the low priority that belonging has historically received from school leaders when discussing behavioural issues:

> Discussions of these problems on a policy level seldom focus on students' need for belongingness or the role of the school in meeting these belongingness needs.

Meeting the need to belong has resonance in this study which is taking place in a setting which is charged with the education, including the socialisation, of the children in their care.

The role of relationships in socialisation

Biesta (2009) describes the rearing of children to maintain social norms (socialisation) as one of the core purposes of the education system. He describes how, through its socialisation function, education

> inserts individuals into existing ways of doing and being and, through this, plays an important role in the continuation of culture and tradition – both with regard to its desirable and undesirable aspects. (Biesta, 2009:40)

If children are to be inserted into existing ways of doing and being, the onus is on those exposing them to social norms to ensure that those norms and the relationships behind them are in their best interests.

Talcott Parsons (1951) also describes schools as integral to the socialisation of children by providing a social structure in which pupils learn to play a defined role. He goes on to define socialisation as learning to fulfil the roles that are prescribed to us in a social system: roles which

> ...may define certain areas of pursuit of private interests as legitimate, and in other areas obligate the actor to pursuit of the common interests of the collectivity. (Parsons, 1951:61)

This allows us to be independent but also to act in a prosocial way that goes way beyond our own personal needs. In this study, there is a need to consider relationships not just in the context of face-to-face interaction but also being influenced by the way the roles are defined within a social setting such as the centre.

Socialisation according to the Department for Education for England

Writing for the Department for Education, Tom Bennett (2017:31) discusses the importance of established social norms in the socialisation of children in schools:

> Social norms are found most clearly in the routines of the school… These routines should be communicated to, and practiced by, staff and students until they become automatic.

This is part of a wider piece on developing a culture (seen in this context as a collection of social norms) of positive behaviour in schools. Bennett (2017:46–47) goes on to say that reinforcing and making explicit these norms provides:

> …visible reminders that the school has a shared identity with shared values. They are also an opportunity to usefully instruct or redirect students towards positive social habits.

Here, exposing children to a social structure within an educational setting is being promoted by the DfE as an explicit method of socialising young people to adopt the social norms of the group (Jensen et al., 2014).

As young people within the English education system, this includes the children in this study, who have all presented with extreme behaviour in school and have reached the point where they have either been excluded or are very close to that point. These children are no longer permitted to attend school in their local community and their challenging behaviour may have led them to being ostracised in the area in which they live (Ladd, 1999; Murray and Greenberg, 2000). This sense of isolation may lead to a child seeking out the perceived safety that comes with being the member of a group, resulting in a heightened need to belong (Maslow, 1954; Baumeister et al., 2005; DeWall et al., 2011).

As described in the introduction, in attempting to meet the needs of these children, a number of staff in the study had adopted an approach which they described as person-centred. This approach was based on the work of Carl Rogers and included the key concepts of acceptance and unconditional positive regard and informed my initial attempt to develop a consistency of practice within the centre through the creation of our first set of SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (See Appendix 1).

Acceptance, unconditional positive regard and a person-centred approach to relationships

In the context of this study, and when considering belonging, this review considers the use of the term 'acceptance' and the way it relates to the term 'unconditional positive regard'. Along with congruence and empathy, the term 'unconditional

positive regard' was used by Carl Rogers (1957:98) to describe the attitudes needed to create the space where a client can draw on the resources within themselves to bring about change. The father of the person-centred approach, Rogers (1957) used the terms 'acceptance' and 'unconditional positive regard' almost interchangeably.

Across the literature, 'unconditional positive regard' is seen as a necessary condition for positive change (Handy, 2004; Lloyd, 2001; Makri-Botsari, 2015; Moran & Diamond, 2008). Bomber and Hughes (2013) describe an initial period of rapid progress as a client experiences (often for the first time) a person who is accepting and non-judgemental. This resonates with the observed initial phenomenon in this study where a child arrives in the centre and rapidly ceases their prior challenging behaviour.

This three-word term (unconditional positive regard) is often used freely without consideration of its constituent parts. Each word, however, is seen as having a role in creating a person-centred environment and therefore it is beneficial to take it one word at a time.

In defining each aspect of the phrase, Rogers (1956) uses **unconditional** to describe acceptance of a client without any conditions attached. Rogers (1967a:94–95) goes on to say that the more unconditional the regard is, the more successful the relationship will be. There should be no acceptance of 'certain feelings in the client and disapproval of others'. Mearns and Thorne (1988:59) use the term 'unconditional' to describe valuing the client and resisting 'being deflected in that valuing by any particular client behaviours', with Levitt (2005:11–12) agreeing that there is no need to 'change clients to value or understand them. Clients are embraced as they are'. Within this study, the children enter the centre after exhibiting challenging behaviour and the provision aims to be unconditionally accepting of them. This was the starting point for the study and is described at the beginning of cycle one as I attempted to understand the provision in the centre on my arrival as headteacher. Where 'unconditional' acceptance is not in place, Prever (2010) describes professionals slipping into making judgements about the client which match their own sense of right or wrong. Bomber and Hughes (2013:110–111) discuss how a client can then feel that they are being judged and evaluated and become 'defensive and shut down the ability to learn'.

Rogers (1967a:94–95) describes **positive** acceptance as 'outgoing positive feeling without reservations and without evaluations'. Once again, acceptance is

used as a catch-all term describing multiple aspects of unconditional positive regard. An example of this is Sutton and Stewart (2002:10) describing acceptance as 'a special kind of loving which moves out towards people as they are and maintains their dignity and personal worth'. Mearns and Thorne (1988:59) describe how the attitude manifests itself in the professional's 'acceptance of and enduring warmth towards her client'. This need to both feel and demonstrate warmth if unmet can represent a significant barrier to the success of the work. It may be that the client has in the view of the professional done something abhorrent, and this is a very real consideration in terms of positive acceptance. However, as argued by Bozarth and Wilkins (2001), simply because there are limits to a professional's ability to like a client, this does not constitute a limit to the theory. It is a limitation of the practitioner and not the theory. The work may continue, but without the positive warmth the change may well not happen. On arrival at the centre, I found some staff describing their practice in these terms and unconditional positive regard became an important part of our first set of SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (see Appendix 1) as I attempted to operationalise a consistent level of unconditional acceptance across the centre.

Perhaps the most abstract of the three terms, **<u>regard</u>** is an important condition, meaning that each aspect of a client belongs to them. The therapist recognises that the client is a separate person and entitled to their own experiences and feelings whatever they are. Rogers (1967b:304–311) describes 'regard' as 'prizing the learner, prizing her feelings, her opinions, her person… as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities'. Mearns and Thorne (1988:59) describe an attitude of 'valuing the humanity of the client', and Prever (2010) warns the professional against trying to change the child into the person they should be or would prefer. This is important in a setting such as ours where change is seen as a desirable outcome. The change is not one to be dictated by the professional, but the setting provides the environment where positive change is possible. A fine line when considering the socialisation of children.

Myers (2007) and Stewart (1997) describe clients finding it a relief to drop all their pretences and fronts and know that they will still be accepted. This relief is liberating and decreases anxiety. This has resonance within this study where children are described as entering the centre and ceasing their prior challenging behaviour quickly. The role of the underlying causal mechanisms associated with

acceptance and unconditional positive regard are worthy of further exploration and are a common thread across all three cycles of the research process.

The terms relating to social relationships as used in this study

In this study, the term 'relationships' is used to describe the social connections between a child in the centre and their peers and staff members; the term 'need to belong' describes a causal mechanism which may motivate a child to seek out social connectedness with a group. Social norms are the accepted practices of a group, and culture is made up of a set of those shared social norms. Prosocial behaviour is used to describe cooperative behaviour which conforms to those social norms, and challenging behaviour is used to describe behaviour which does not conform to those norms. In the context of this study, unconditional positive regard is used to describe a warm, non-judgemental acceptance of the child as part of a wider person-centred approach based on the work of Carl Rogers.

2.3 – Emotions

As with behaviour, the use of the term 'emotion' is widespread in research. In *The Many Meanings/Aspects of Emotion*, Carroll Izard (2010) could find no agreed definition amongst 34 researchers whom she considered to be respected experts in the field of emotional research. This built on the 1981 work of Kleinginna and Kleinginna which compiled a list of 92 distinct definitions of 'emotion' used in research. In using the term emotion in this study, there will be a need to 'contextualize the term… and specify the meaning attributed to it' (Izard, 2010:369). Therefore, this review will consider the wider definition of emotion along with the concepts of emotional arousal and emotional regulation. It will also consider the way emotion relates to the concepts of behaviour and relationships before settling on the way the terms are used within the context of this study.

What are emotions?

In this study, whereas the working definition of behaviour concerns the internal processes which influence the observable responses of a child, emotions are more concerned with the internal states that bring about those processes. Lazarus (1991:820) describes emotions as the 'wisdom of ages' in providing 'time tested responses to current and adaptive problems' (Gross, 2002:281). These time-tested

internal responses are made up of a number of factors. Paul and Mendl (2018:203) describe emotion as 'a multicomponent response (subjective, physiological, neural, cognitive) to the presentation of a stimulus or event', with Gross (2002:281) describing emotions as calling forth a 'coordinated set of behavioral, experiential, and physiological response tendencies that together influence how we respond to perceived challenges and opportunities'. The use of the term 'perceived' here is important. Anderson and Adolphs (2014:197) argue that emotions are:

> …a type of central neural state that are caused by sensory stimuli or memories and that, in turn, control a panoply of behavioral, cognitive, and somatic changes.

It can be seen here that emotions can be caused by internal stimuli such as memory as well as those that are happening externally and the emotion experienced will 'depend on the precise nature of the emotive (emotion-producing) event' (Paul and Mendl, 2018:203). In this study, memory and subjective perceptions will play an important role in understanding the multicomponent emotional response of a child placed in certain situations.

Sroufe (1996:15) defines emotion as 'a subjective reaction to a salient event, characterized by physiological, experiential and overt behavioral change'. Bunford et al. (2015:187) draw on the work of Cicchetti et al. (1995), Gross (2002) and Kovacs (2009) in describing emotions as 'reactions to a stimulus or stimuli that involve both a biological response and a conscious and subjective one'. These each pick up the theme of a subjective response to stimuli alongside conscious, cognitive responses. Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981:355) describe some of these cognitive responses as 'appraisals' and 'labelling processes'. In the context of this study, life experience and memory will again play an important part in understanding the way that a child appraises and labels a stimulus and the resulting emotional response created.

If emotions are to be thought of as internal states, then 'feelings' can be thought of as a human subjective experience associated with those internal states (Anderson and Adolphs, 2014; Damasio and Carvalho, 2013; Dolan, 2002). Paul and Mendl (2018:203) recognise the 'centrality of subjective feelings in our everyday use of the term "emotion"'. The terms are often used interchangeably with emotion often being used as a colloquial term for feelings as well as being defined as a class of behaviours associated with these subjective feelings (Anderson and Adolphs, 2014; Damasio and Carvalho, 2013; Dolan, 2002). An emotion may therefore elicit a

behaviour response but 'once the behaviour is out there, it becomes a stimulus in its own right and we get a feedback loop' (Anderson and Adolphs, 2014:188). This may happen, for example when a child sits under a table during a lesson. Emotion may have contributed to the behaviour; however, the behaviour is outside the social norms of the group and this may in turn elicit emotion. The causal direction between behaviour and emotion is ever shifting, and it becomes impossible to say whether behaviour is the cause of an emotion or the consequence (Salzman and Fusi, 2010).

Emotional arousal

An 'emotive (i.e. emotion-producing) event' (Paul and Mendl, 2018:203) occurs when something happens that is important to or affects the well-being of an individual (Gross, 2002; Paul and Mendl, 2018) and these events are considered to have both a valence which is either 'positive or negative' and a level of intensity (Anderson and Adolphs, 2014; Paul and Mendl, 2018:203). This level of intensity is often referred to as 'emotional arousal' and includes examples such as an individual experiencing the transition from mild concern to anxiety and then on to fear or panic (McNaughton and Corr, 2004).

The degree of arousal can be 'intense or mild; long lasting or brief' (Paul and Mendl, 2018:203) and may be viewed as a core process which directs the flow of the body's finite energy resources to best increase the chances of survival (Dodge, 1991). In his work in the field of neurobiology, Daniel Siegal (2001:81) views emotion as 'the fundamental process that regulates the flow of energy', describing it as a 'central process that interconnects many aspects of mental functioning' (Siegal, 2001:80). Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017a:6) also describes the role of emotion as the brain continually predicting the energy the body will need in order to 'budget' (Barrett, 2017b:86) its use. In this respect, the purpose of emotion may be seen as the internal mechanism which drives (or dampens) the flow of energy in the body, manifesting as either arousal or relaxation (Anderson and Adolphs, 2014; Bunford et al., 2015; Deckert et al., 2020). These physiological changes are associated with an individual's subjective experience of an emotional state (Gross, 2002) and are governed by the body's autonomic nervous system, which is made up of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and associated with arousal and relaxation respectively (Appelhans and Luecken, 2006; Bunford et al., 2015; Hjelland et al., 2007; Porges, 2003). The ability to modulate the magnitude or duration of

these emotional arousal responses can be defined as emotional regulation (Gross and Thompson, 2007; Gross et al. 2011)

Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation is a broad and contested field and it is not possible to do justice to its scope within the confines of this review. I will, however, frame emotional regulation in terms of the way it is viewed by policy makers within the English education system. At no point does the Department for Education (DfE) refer to emotional regulation directly; however, it is possible to draw out relevant threads from recent documentation.

The Department for Education's (DfE) 2014 publication *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools* begins with what the law says about the drawing up of a school behaviour policy. It is a long list beginning with:

> The headteacher must set out measures in the behaviour policy which aim
> to… promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect. (DfE, 2014:4)

The tone of this document is very much that schools are responsible for promoting good behaviour and the document is mostly concerned with detailing the legalities of the punishments that schools can and must impose on those falling below the standard expected. This document uses the term 'self-discipline' and in the documents produced by the DfE since that time, self-discipline is used interchangeably with the terms 'self-regulation' and 'self-restraint'. For example, in their 2019 document *Character Education* the DfE describes 'self-regulation' as an 'enabling character trait which can improve educational attainment, engagement with school and attendance' (DfE, 2019b:7). Reading these two documents together, the onus is on the child to be able to regulate, indeed it is seen as a character trait, and it is the role of schools to punish those who cannot.

This tone is not consistent throughout all the recent documentation and there is some recognition within the DfE's 2018 document *Behaviour and Mental Health in Schools* that children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs may have difficulty in 'managing strong feelings' (DfE, 2018b:12). In his 2017 review for the Department for Education (DfE), Tom Bennett (2017:23) describes the necessity for schools to help students in 'coping with adversity' and argues that 'it is the duty of

every adult to help create in students the habit of self-restraint or self-regulation' and to be 'in control of one's own immediate inclinations'.

Within this context, at a broad level, there are two categories of emotional regulation. Both are cognitive and both involve the use of the prefrontal cortex (Gross, 2002; Phillips et al., 2003). The first involves the active suppression of 'the outward signs of inner feelings' (Gross, 2002:282) which would otherwise be observed as behaviour. Suppression is used once an emotional state has already been created and although 'suppression decreases behavioral expression', it 'fails to decrease emotion experience' (Gross, 2002:281). In simple terms, suppression does not reduce anxiety, it simply reduces the outward manifestations of it. The second category of emotional regulation involves the reframing or reappraisal of the way an individual construes an upcoming situation (Barrett, 2017a) so as to 'decrease its emotional impact' (Gross, 2002:282).

Such emotive events may be elicited not only by a direct external stimulus (such as confrontation by a predator) but may also be created purely through 'imagination and recollection' (Barrett, 2017a; Paul and Mendl, 2018:203), where the highly developed cognitive processes in humans 'also make possible the elicitation of emotion states through thoughts, or imaginings, about all kinds of situations that one has not in fact experienced' (Anderson and Adolphs,2014:197). If a situation can be anticipated in advance, then that subjective anticipation will be the central feature of the emotional response generated (Barrett, 2017a; Paul and Mendl, 2018). Reframing or reappraising these upcoming events in a way that makes them less likely to cause strong arousal becomes an important strategy in emotional regulation and the management of associated behavioural expression.

The role of relationships in emotional regulation
In his work in the field of interpersonal neurobiology, Daniel Siegal (2001) believes that emotional self-regulation begins with co-regulation where emotions are a form of non-verbal communication that aid regulation in others. He describes an alignment of states of mind which 'permits the child to regulate her own state by direct connection with that of the parent' (Siegal, 2001:81). This form of communication goes beyond that of parent and child and forms the basis of Porges' (1995) work in developing the link between positive social connectedness and the calming of stress responses in

an individual. Porges' polyvagal theory (1995) suggests a three-way hierarchical response to being placed in a threatening situation, see Figure 1.
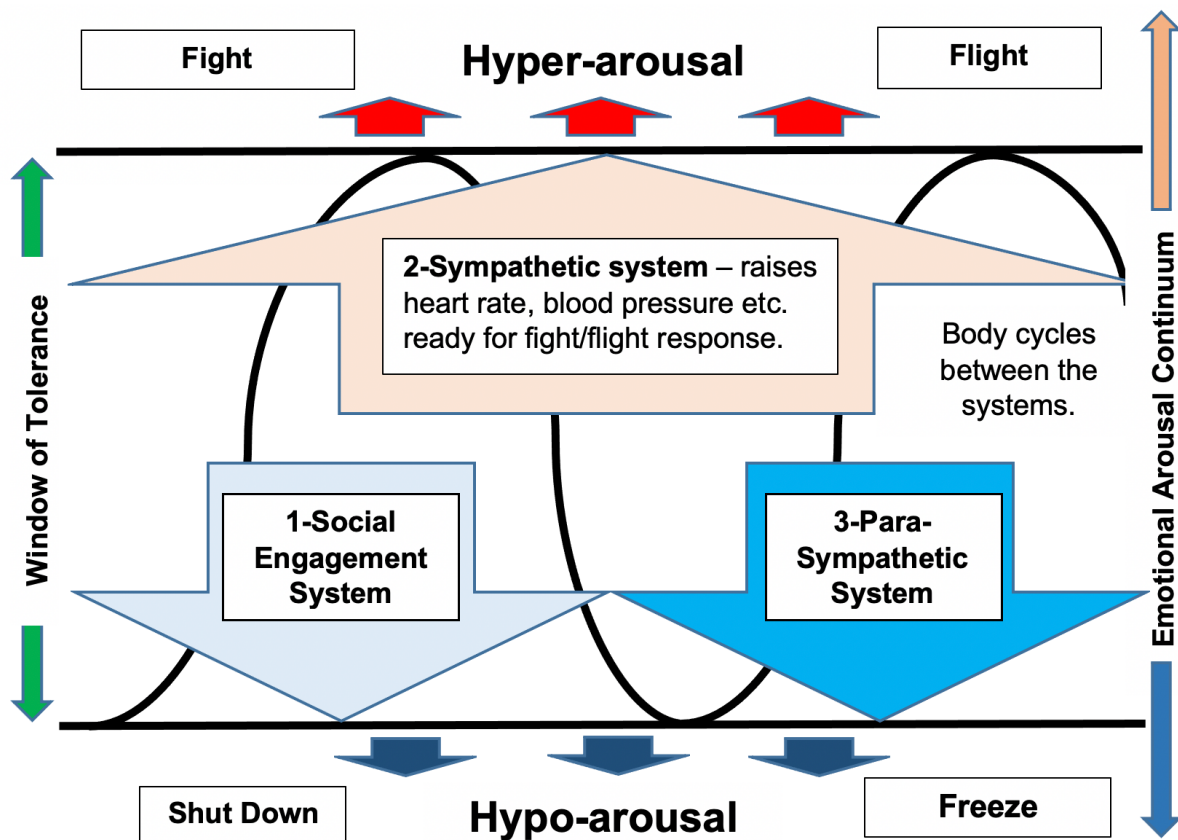
Figure 1 – Porges' polyvagal theory.

The theory includes hyper-arousal which prepares the body for a fight/flight survival situation and hypo-arousal which causes a 'freeze' or 'shut down' (Gill, 2017:Online) response. Porges (1995; 2003), however, also suggested an additional response to a threatening situation which he called the 'social engagement system'. If an individual feels some initial safety, then they will first opt to use their 'social engagement system' in response to raised emotional arousal in order to illicit calm and maintain a state of emotional regulation. This idea was picked up by Ogden et al. (2006:27) who describe the social engagement system as a 'braking' mechanism on heart rate which inhibits defensive reactions and keeps the arousal state stable.

If the ability to socially engage is an important tool in emotional regulation, then it is important that children develop good quality relationships which allow this to happen (Perry, 2009; Bomber and Hughes, 2013; Colley and Cooper, 2017; Riley,

2010). In a potentially threatening situation, a child may initiate positive social interaction in order to engage the social engagement system and reduce arousal. This is a two-way process of giving and receiving social cues. The body becomes primed to give and receive cues, including laughter and tone of voice. Facial expressions and body language are further important social cues, and eye contact and touch are also important. When a child has this system working strongly it allows for an emotional agility and fine tuning to take place in order that they can regulate in a way that is appropriate to the situation (Porges, 1995).

Bunford et al. (2015:188) describe emotional dysregulation as the inability of an individual to emotionally regulate 'to such a degree that the inability results in the individual functioning meaningfully below his or her baseline' (Bunford et al., 2015:188). Within the context of the current study, this may include a child's inability to function in way that conforms to the social norms expected in a mainstream educational setting manifesting in 'low frustration tolerance, impatience, quickness to anger' (Barkley, 2010, cited in Bunford, 2015:189).

The term 'emotion' in this study

In the context of this study, the term 'emotion' is used to describe an internal mental and physiological state which is elicited by an event. This event may be external or produced internally through memory or imagination. The term 'emotion' may also be used to describe the subjective 'feelings' associated with that state. Emotions have both valence and intensity with emotional arousal being used to describe the degree of intensity experienced. In this study, emotional arousal is used to describe a continuum where degrees of intensity may range from calm through to anxiety and on to fear and panic. 'Emotional regulation' is used as a term to describe the ability of an individual to modulate their emotional arousal. Although the suppression of emotional experience is considered, emotional regulation in this study is more concerned with the way an individual may shift their position up and down on the continuum of emotional arousal.

2.4 – Resilience

The term 'resilience' needs further clarification, both as a construct and also in the way it relates to the concepts of behaviour, emotions and relationships within the developing conceptual framework of this study. This review will consider the way

resilience has been defined within prior research and the way that it is framed within social ecological models. It will consider both risk and protective factors associated with resilience and the choices made by researchers to define what successful resilience looks like. It will conclude by defining the way the term is used within this study.

Resilience as a construct

In simple terms, within their 2018 guidance on *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*, the English Department for Education (DfE) describe the necessity for schools to equip 'pupils to be resilient so they can manage the normal stress of life effectively' (DfE, 2018b:6). In doing so, they defined resilience as a key component of mental health and draw on the 2014 work of the World Health Organisation (WHO) who describe mental health as:

> A state of wellbeing in which every individual recognises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution to his or her own community. (WHO, cited in DfE, 2018b:11)

While public health and education policy literature tends to frame resilience as this ability of an individual to manage normal, everyday stresses, academic research in the domain of developmental psychology attempts to understand why some individuals seem able to successfully manage extreme adversity (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 1997; Garmezy, 1991; Luther and Eisenberg, 2017; Masten and Barnes, 2018; Rutter, 2012; Ungar et al. 2019). In this context, there are various definitions of resilience, but 'a common theme in most definitions is that of competence and success despite adversity and disadvantage' (Cafei, 2004:149). Here, resilience may be defined as the 'individual's capacity for adapting successfully and functioning competently despite experiencing chronic stress or adversity, or following exposure to prolonged or severe trauma' (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 1997:797).

Rutter (2012:335) describes resilience as 'an inference based on evidence that some individuals have a better outcome than others who have experienced a comparable level of adversity'. Masten and Barnes (2018) suggest the motivation behind much of the research on resilience may lie in the 'variation among individuals

at similar levels of risk, some of whom are manifesting positive adaptation and…
doing better than might be expected' and the 'ongoing search for answers to the
question of what makes a difference' (Masten and Barnes, 2018:5). This search for
answers became part of the positive psychology movement (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter,
2012) which rather than focus on 'maldevelopment' (Garmezy, 1991:416) caused by
negative factors and heightened risk, 'changed to the identification of protective
factors which promoted resilience in children environments' (Cafei, 2004:149–150).

Resilience as a function of social ecology

In describing 'processes within social systems' Cafei (2004:152) describes a shift in
emphasis from research into factors which may make an individual more resilient
towards resilience in terms of an individual's interaction with their environment as
part of a wider social system. Here, resilience is 'shaped by the ecological interplay
of relational, social, and cultural contexts' (Harney, 2007:73). Rutter (2012:335)
describes the need for research to include consideration of 'positive personality
dispositions, a nurturant family milieu, and external societal support systems'. When
considering this broader construct, Ungar et al. (2013:348) sees resilience as 'the
capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and
physical resources that sustain their well-being'. Individuals do not exist in isolation
and these resources are an intrinsic part of the complex social systems in which they
exist. In the study, when attempting to understand the behaviour of children entering
the centre, further understanding of the way resilience is seated in these systems will
be needed.

There is an important distinction, here, particularly when considering children
who have been excluded from schools for challenging behaviour. The resilience of a
child in managing the normal stresses of everyday school life needs to be seen not
as a character trait of an individual but as a characteristic of a complex system at a
given point in time with the mechanisms affecting it related to the context in which
they occur (Rutter, 1994). This means that the capacity of an individual to adapt to
challenges will depend on their 'connections to other people and systems… through
relationships and other processes' (Masten and Barnes, 2018:2). As these
relationships and processes are constantly shifting, Cicchetti and Rogosch
(1997:797) make the point:

It is important that resilient functioning not be conceived as a static or trait-like condition, but as a state in dynamic transaction with intra- and extra-organismic forces.

Within schools, it is important therefore that resilience is viewed as 'contextual and relational, dependent on processes taking place in school and classroom contexts' (Cafei, 2004:151). Resilience is not a character trait but an indicator of mechanisms operating within a complex social ecology.

Attempting to understand the way in which these complex social systems impact on the developing child formed the basis of Urie Bronfenbrenner's seminal *The ecology of human development* (1979), which 'principally emphasised the pivotal role of the social context surrounding the individual' (Houston, 2017:54–55). This influential work still underpins the English Department of Health's (DH) *Assessing Children in Need and their Families* (DH, 2000) with its three 'interlocking domains, covering child development, parenting capacity and the impact of family and environmental factors' (Houston, 2017:53). Bronfenbrenner developed this work (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Houston, 2017) into a bio-social-ecological model to specifically consider the domains of the person, process, context and time (PPCT). Harney (2007:76), using this work, describes how from an 'ecological perspective, resilience is a contextual variable… depending on the person-process-contexts under examination'. In other words, resilience is a variable that may change depending on the situation being considered. This notion is relevant to this study as resilience may be considered in terms of both the capacity of the systems in the centre to successfully manage a child as well as the more conventional viewpoint of simply considering the child's ability to adapt successfully to a situation.

Ungar et al. (2013) describe the influence of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to the point where 'decades of resilience research can be sorted into bio-, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systemic processes' (Ungar et al., 2013:361). Here, bio systems are concerned with an individual's physiological and psychological systems and micro systems are concerned with the immediate environs inhabited by the individual, such as home or school. Meso systems concern the connections between the different micro systems inhabited by the individual, and exo systems involve wider factors with which an individual does not have direct contact, but which still affects them. Examples of exo-systemic influences which might impact on a

child's resilience include a reduction in neighbourhood policing or factory shut down. These are 'institutional forms that have a knock-on effect for the micro and meso systems' (Houston, 2017:57). Macro systems include wider policy and political processes which have an impact. Ungar et al. (2013) describe macro systems as those aspects of 'social ecology that form the cultural backdrop to a child's bio-psycho-social development' (Ungar et al., 2013:355), such as a national policy on high academic attainment.

When considering the interplay between each aspect of the system, there may be a temptation to see these models of social ecology as a set of Russian dolls with the individual sitting in the centre of an ever-widening field of play. However, Ungar et al. (2013:356) warn against diagrams of 'neatly drawn concentric circles' which 'misrepresent what research shows. In fact, the nature of any single system is to always be in a reciprocal relationship of dependency and influence with all the other systems' (Ungar et al., 2013:356).

There are clear links here to critical realism (see Chapter 3) with its commitment to a laminated social ontology and these links will form the basis of analysis during each research cycle using Layder's (1997) domains of the person, situated activity, social setting and contextual resources.

Bio systems

Ungar et al.'s (2013) description of resilience research describes a category of bio systems concerned with what is going on inside the individual at the centre of their personal social ecology where the 'human body can also be understood as one microsystem with an emotional and a cognitive subsystem' (Ungar et al, 2013:351). It includes the physiological changes governed by the body's autonomic nervous system (Appelhans and Luecken, 2006; Bunford et al., 2015; Hjelland et al., 2007; Porges, 2003) that occur when an individual experiences an emotive event. The mechanisms within Layder's (1997) description of psychobiography and Houston's (2010) domain of the person at play are within this category and affect the ability of an individual to regulate their emotions in a given situation by either reframing the situation or by suppressing their emotional arousal (Gross, 2002; Phillips et al., 2003). When working with children, Domitrovich et al. (2017) and Modecki et al. (cited in Luther and Eisenberg, 2017:352) describe how the 'primary emphasis is often on developing skills to regulate negative emotions (anger in particular)' which

result in the ability to make good cognitive decisions and maintain positive relationships.

Risk and protective factors

In attempting to understand why some children exhibit greater resilience than others, Masten and Barnes (2018:2) describe children being 'often protected by multiple "back-up" systems, particularly embedded in their relationships with other people in their homes and communities'. It is widely accepted across the research (DfE, 2018b; Garmezy, 1991; Luther and Eisenberg, 2017; Masten and Barnes, 2018; Rutter, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013) that maltreated children exposed to high levels of stress generally show lower levels of resilience then non-maltreated children. Across three years of longitudinal assessments, Cicchetti and Rogosch (1997:806) found that maltreated children exhibited 'significantly more externalizing symptoms, less prosocial behavior, and more difficulty in their school adjustment' than their non-maltreated peers. Maltreated children may choose behaviours which are adaptive and serve their needs in the moment but which are detrimental and maladaptive in the longer term. This may include pathways such as 'withdrawal from emotional attachments in contexts of physical abuse' (Wyman, 2003, cited in Ungar et al., 2013:349), which may serve to protect a child from harm but can create patterns of behaviour which will disadvantage them later in life. In the case of young people struggling academically at school, it may mean opting out of education in order to preserve their own self-esteem. 'In the short term this behaviour may be adaptive in a particular sociohistorical context' (Dei et al., cited in Ungar et al., 2013:359) but may be seen as maladaptive in the long-term.

The cumulative effect of multiple risk factors associated with social disadvantage and maltreatment are considered to contribute considerably to the likelihood of low resilience in children (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 1997:800). In the policy document *Behaviour and Mental Health in Schools*, the Department for Education (DfE, 2018b:13) describes the 'complex interplay between the risk factors in children's lives, and the protective factors which can promote their resilience'. It goes on to describe how as 'the number of stressful life events accumulate for children, more protective factors are needed to act as a counterbalance'. From the perspective of social ecology, we will now go on to explore some of the protective

and risk factors which might be influencing the resilience of the children within our centre.

The relationship between home and school environments

Micro systems are systems involving the roles, relationships and activities with which an individual is directly involved, such as family or school class (Ungar et al., 2013), whilst meso systems are comprised of a number of these micro systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and the way the mechanisms operating within them overlap and intertwine to form a more complex system. Bronfenbrenner (1986) describes how from a meso system perspective, the way a family system affected school outcomes was considered much more regularly than how systems within a school affected home life.

Where the impact of school was considered (Luther and Eisenberg, 2017), the benefit of good quality relationships between adults connecting the systems of family and school was noted. Those children at the

> …greatest risk for externalizing problem behaviours do better when their educators (the school micro system) and caregivers (the parent micro system) communicate regularly. (Nix et al., 2005, cited in Ungar et al, 2013:354)

This often resulted in the improved 'well-being of the primary caregiver—typically the mother' (Luther and Eisenberg, 2017:338) and had a positive knock-on effect on the child. In describing the impact of these relationships, Dishion (2016) stated:

> If I had to pick one thing, it would be kindness - [to give] to a group of chronically disenfranchised, highly stressed, low-resource parents. (Dishion, 2016, cited in Luther, 2017:341)

When considering the ways in which schools can positively affect resilience in children, Ungar et al. (2013) conclude that more understanding is needed to identify the protective factors most likely to play a role within school and ask whether the focus should be on changing individual children, their school environments or their home and communities.

Resilience and the system of school

In *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools* the DfE (2018:6) describe schools as being in a unique position to help prevent mental health problems by 'equipping pupils to be resilient so that they can manage the normal stress of life effectively'. The DfE (2018) describe the need for schools to have a thorough understanding of 'the protective factors that can enable pupils to be resilient when they encounter problems and challenges' (DfE, 2018b:13), and Luther and Eisenberg describe the consensus across the literature as a need to 'minimize toxins and maximize nurturance in children's socializing contexts, targeting the most important, malleable processes in their everyday environments' (Luther and Eisenberg, 2017:345).

Both Luther and Eisenberg (2017) and Ungar et al. (2019) describe the way that unconditional acceptance of children within school is repeatedly cited as a protective factor across the academic literature. This was not only acceptance by staff towards children: Malindi and Machenjedze (2012, cited in Ungar et al., 2019:618) describe how resilience is 'enabled by supportive teachers who not only welcomed them into their classrooms but also encouraged peers to be unconditionally accepting'. Toomey and Russell (2013) describe how supporting pupils who may be experiencing isolation or discrimination in this way has been shown to increase a sense of belonging to school. This is of interest in this study when looking at the rapid change in behaviour of children who have been excluded from school and who then arrive in our setting, a setting which adopts the principle of unconditional positive regard as one of its key principles. This supportive 'peer culture further assists in the role of socialisation' (Garmezy, 1991:425), where social norms are clearly modelled with an emphasis on 'norms related to respect, diversity, or positive civic values' (Thapa et al., cited in Domitrovich, 2017:411).

Masten and Barnes (2018) describe the enormously protective role that supportive relationships play in the way resilience is maintained over time. In a study including around 29,000 children, Smith et al. (2009, cited in Ungar et al, 2019:620) found that those children who built meaningful relationships within school 'had a greater capacity to navigate their way through negative life experiences and choose prosocial solutions to problems'. It is within these supportive relationships that children can be gently exposed to the stress and challenges which will help them to develop the adaptive and self-regulatory systems they need to 'optimize for an adaptive and healthy life' (Masten and Barnes, 2018:7).

Providing the environment and time for these supportive relationships to flourish is not a new concept. In the mid-1970s, Bronfenbrenner put forward his idea that societal changes in America were leading to schools becoming segregated from their communities and becoming 'one of the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society' (Bronfenbrenner, 1974:60). His solution was to propose 'nothing more radical than providing a setting in which young and old can simply sit and talk', where the 'evil and the cure lie not in the victim of alienation but in the social institutions that produce alienation, and in their failure to be responsive to the most human needs and values of a democratic society' (Bronfenbrenner, 1974:61).

Resilience and wider society

In Bronfenbrenner's (1974) piece on what he saw as the alienation of America's children, he describes how the antecedents of antisocial behaviour are tied in with family disorganisation, and this disorganisation is forced on the family by external factors and the situation in which the family finds itself (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). He describes the causes being 'such unlikely quarters as business, urban planning and transportation systems' and argues that:

> …the ultimate effects of change are seen most frequently in American schools and, not as often but more disturbingly, in the courts, clinics and mental and penal institutions. (Bronfenbrenner, 1974:53)

The effect of 'long commutes to their places of employment, poor wages and inadequate housing' may act as predictors of the quality of child and parent interactions for immigrant and low-income families (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2010, cited in Ungar et al., 2013:355). Social cohesion within neighbourhoods may be more of protective factor than economic status in enabling a community to provide the 'safety and supports children require to develop future aspirations and engage at school' (Sroufe et al., 2005 cited in Ungar et al., 2013:355). This sense of safety provided by community and safety within society as a whole can be 'shaken or enhanced on a community or societal level' (Harney, 2007:82). Factors here range from threats to life from poverty, war or violence within the community to those 'implicit biases, homophobia, and discrimination' (Masten and Narayan, 2012, cited in Luther and

Eisenberg, 2017:343) which form the backdrop to a child's life. Bourdieu (2003) describes this backdrop as part of the 'habitus' of the child, where habitus is the

> …deep-seated set of durable, internalised dispositions, propensities and predilections to think, feel, judge and act in certain predetermined ways that we gain from societal conditioning and socialisation. (Bourdieu, 2003, cited in Houston, 2017:59)

The systems within and the interactions between the child, the family and the school will all add to the mix of risk and protective factors associated with resilience; however, there needs to be acknowledgement that these systems are operating within 'a social world beset with enabling and constraining social structures, asymmetrical relations of power and unequal access to resources' (Houston, 2017:54). The effect of the wider context may result in something akin to attempting to fly a kite in a hurricane. Even a sturdy, robust kite that is painstakingly put together may ultimately be swept away by forces way beyond their control.

The term 'resilience' in this study

When considering how the term 'resilience' is used in this study, it is worth noting that the study is being conducted in a centre working with children who have been excluded from their mainstream schools due to challenging behaviour. The working definition at the outset of the study is taken from the Department for Education's 2018 *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools* where resilience is the ability to 'manage the normal stress of life effectively' (DfE, 2018b:6).

The key concepts of behaviour, relationships, emotions and resilience outlined in this chapter were used to form an initial a priori hypothesis suggesting why children may cease their prior challenging behaviour quickly on entry to the centre. This represented a starting point. An initial position statement that could be interrogated and replaced as I attempted to capture my developing understanding in updated position statements along the way. Each position statement was 'simply the current version of the researcher's map of territory being investigated' (Miles and Huberman,1994:20). As each cycle was worked through, the aim was to develop the conceptual framework to be more precise as each strand or category within them was identified and studied and the understanding of the relationships between them

refined. Chapter 3 describes how a combination of critical realism and first-person action research was planned to test the boundaries of this 'tentative theory of the phenomenon' (Maxwell, 2005:33–34) in a systematic, cyclical way.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The aim of this study is to improve the lot of children who are excluded (or at risk of exclusion) from mainstream primary schools. To do so I use first-person action research in an attempt to develop my own understanding of the underlying mechanisms behind children arriving in the centre and quickly ceasing to exhibit their prior challenging behaviour. However, a first-person study which simply developed my own understanding would not improve the lot of excluded children. Therefore, the rationale for the methodology was designed to allow my own developing understanding to inform my work with both our own staff and professionals from other settings to bring about a change in practice across three research cycles.

I chose to ally critical realism (CR) with first-person action research (AR) due to its ontological view of the world. Firstly, as will be discussed below, the ontology of CR has a depth which allows the causal mechanisms lying behind an observation to be considered. This works well in this study as I began with an observation of children entering the centre and ceasing challenging behaviour quickly and worked towards developing an understanding of what may be bringing that about. Secondly, this study is situated within a complex open system and as will also be discussed below, CR has a complex, socially stratified ontology which complements the concept of social ecology described earlier (see Chapter 2).

I also chose to ally critical realism (CR) with first-person action research due to CR's epistemological stance. This acknowledges that our ability to perceive and understand the complex entanglement of causal mechanisms lying behind an observation is limited, and therefore the models we create to explain them are flawed. This was my starting position. I began with an initial hypothesis to explain an observation and worked through three research cycles to improve it and change practice. I acknowledge at the outset, however, that each hypothesis simply captures my best understanding at that point in time. I share this epistemological view of the world, where although the work of improvement will never be finished, we need staging posts along the way. Our understanding and modelling of the world can always be better; however, we also need to act and work to the best of our ability in the moment. The epistemology of CR and first-person action research are natural

allies in the sense of 'We will get there, just one step at a time'. This epistemological stance was the driving forward momentum behind the three action research cycles.

This chapter first lays out in more detail my ontological position in terms of depth and social stratification before moving on to describe in more detail the scepticism inherent in my epistemological stance. Finally, it describes how this translated into a practice. In doing so, it also aims to offer a worked example for those looking to use applied critical realism in an education setting.

3.1 – A critical realism ontology

Ontological depth

The CR metaphor of ontological depth lies at the heart of this study. A prominent figure in the development of critical realism (CR), Roy Bhaskar (1978) describes three levels of reality. At the deepest level (the real), things exist independently of our knowledge of them and have an inherent potential and power within, which may or may not be actualised (Brown, 2007; Fletcher, 2017; McAvoy and Butler, 2018). When this power is actualised, there is a level in which events happen (the actual). These actualisations are happening regardless of our ability to observe or experience them. Finally, there is a level (the empirical) in which some of these actualisations are observed. This empirical level is one which we readily perceive and provides evidence for the existence of underlying causal tendencies (Barron, 2013; Hu, 2018). These three layers may be seen as nested (Archer, 1998), where 'the domain of the empirical is part of the domain of the actual, while the domain of the actual is part of the domain of the real' (McAvoy and Butler, 2018:161). Therefore, the power and potential within a thing can exist but not be actualised whereas actualisation cannot exist without the potential and power behind it. This leads to the ontological metaphor of depth where we look for the deep power/potential behind an actualisation or phenomenon experienced (Bhaskar, 1978; Brown, 2007).

This ontological depth allows an observation to be made and then consideration to be made of the underlying conditions which brought it about. The cessation of challenging behaviour is seen as an observation in the empirical layer which must have been brought about by causal mechanisms in the actual. I may be able to perceive some of these mechanisms, however there may be mechanisms

which are beyond my perception. All of these causal mechanisms can only exist due to the deep power/potential of entities within the real. This study is tasked with gaining a better understanding of the complex interplay of causal mechanisms some of which may currently lie beyond my perception.

Causal mechanisms and tendencies

Critical realist (CR) authors believe that the social models which they artificially construct are an attempt to represent a complex entanglement of mechanisms which underlies the empirical and actual layers of the world (Price and Martin, 2018). Retroductive methods (Hu, 2018; Price and Martin 2018) require the researcher to move backwards from the empirical, unexplained phenomenon into the deeper level of 'causal powers and mechanisms' which make the phenomenon possible (Hu, 2018:122). In this case, the hypotheses and models created during the study are an attempt to represent the interplay between mechanisms which lead to the children's cessation of challenging behaviour.

Critical realism (CR) is built on the notion that entities are things within the real which have the power/potential within them to make a difference to the world (Edwards et al., 2014). An entity has the power/potential to act by virtue of the way it is put together. It is more than the sum of its constituent parts. This power/potential may exist without being actualised or it may be actualised and countervailed by another mechanism (Brown, 2007). Within a complex social world, the

> …regular actualization of any one power is much less likely to occur than otherwise because a host of (potentially) countervailing powers must necessarily be in play together. (Brown, 2007:506)

Within critical realism, a power that is exercised but not always actualised due to a countervailing mechanism is termed a 'tendency' (Brown, 2007:502). These causal tendencies in turn lead to demi-regular phenomena (demi-regs) within the empirically observable level which appear regularly but not all the time (Lawson, 2003). For this study, this ontological position on the nature of countervailing mechanisms and demi-regular phenomena has parallels in the 'differential impact' described by Ungar et al. (2013:357) (see Chapter 2). Here there is an acknowledgement that the same mechanism can have a different level of effect on different individuals at different

times. This is particularly relevant when considering the effect of the centre's provision on outcomes for different children or for the same child at different times.

The stratified social ontology of critical realism

In social science, we are operating within complex, open systems (Bhaskar, 1978; Edwards et al., 2014; McAvoy and Butler, 2018). As described above, I chose to ally critical realism with action research due to its ontological position on the stratified nature of the social world which both Archer and Lawson describe as 'quintessentially open' (Archer, 1995; Lawson, 2003, cited in Brown, 2007:506). For this study, this had resonance with the model of social ecology and its association with the concept of resilience described previously (see Section 2.4).

Critical realism ontology sees the social world as made up of distinct, differentiated realms of social reality (Archer, 1988; 1995; Layder, 2006). Whereas the concept of underlying mechanisms invites the vertical metaphor of ontological depth, the stratification of these differentiated realms of the social world suggest the horizontal metaphor of 'breadth' (Brown, 2007:503). A combination of depth and breadth implies that those attempting to understand the social world will need to construct a 'laminated' (Price and Martin, 2018:91) system considering the physical, biological and psychological realms in addition to the normative, socio-economic and cultural levels of reality (Brown, 2007; Edwards et al., 2014). One such construction is Layder's (1997:vii) description of the 'richly textured and multidimensional nature of the social world' made up of a set of interlacing domains within which he identified domains of (1) psychobiography, (2) situated activity, (3) social setting and (4) contextual resources.

In this study, the lens of Layder's (1997) social domains may be applied to the phenomenon of a child quickly ceasing to exhibit challenging behaviour with a view to better understanding the causal mechanisms within each domain and how they may interact.

The domain of psychobiography

The first of Layder's (1997) domains, the domain of psychobiography is important to this study as we consider the life experiences and agency that pupils bring with them as they meet with the provision offered by centre. This domain involves the concepts of behaviour, emotion and resilience (see Chapter 2). These involve psychological

concepts such as belonging and prosocial behaviour. This domain also involves the neurobiological subsystems of emotion and cognition and the physiological entities associated with the body's autonomic nervous system and the mechanisms associated with arousal.

The domain of situated activity

The causal mechanisms within the domain of situated activity are those concerned with face-to-face interactions and those which maintain social order. Within the centre in this study, this will include relationships and the characteristics of the person-centred approach, such as acceptance and unconditional positive regard (see Chapter 2). Characteristically, these interactions within situated activity have a distinct beginning and end and may be a single interaction or a sequence of single interactions.

Layder (2006:7) describes situated activity as:

> …a subtle and complex amalgam of the powers, emotions and mutual influences of multiple individuals that unfolds in the real time of the encounter.

Successful social encounters in situated activity require skill from those involved where misunderstanding and error are never far away. From the perspective of emotional security, Layder (2006:7) describes each participant requiring minimum levels of 'psychological reassurances' from the interaction, such as acceptance, inclusion and approval, and he feels that it is remarkable that more individuals do not opt out of interactions altogether.

Pertinent to this study, is Layder's (2006) view that within situated activity, anxiety and insecurity are ever present and every situation 'must be regarded as a potential threat to the inner security for even the most calm and stable of us' (Layder 2006:5). From the perspective of resilience, he describes the distinction between those who are 'unfazed by ordinary social existence and those who are socially disabled by chronic fear and anxiety' (Layder, 2006:5) where the former are able to manage the anxiety and stress of everyday life. In this sense, resilience may be viewed as 'temporary, personal accomplishments generated within everyday encounters' (Layder, 2006:5).

The domain of social setting

The causal powers and mechanisms within this domain are associated with the specific setting in which the action takes place. This includes 'formal groupings such as social institutions' (Houston, 2010:77) and educational settings such as the centre involved in the study, which is an integral part of the social ecology of the child. This study is concerned with how social settings influence the situated activity that takes place within them.

In the case of this study, it may involve the socialisation (See Chapter 2) of individuals (Archer,1995), involving both the explicit and unnamed social norms and underlying values of the centre. This may include mechanisms such as 'informational social influence' (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004:591–621), which is characterised by the watchful and vigilant nature of pupils arriving in a new and unfamiliar setting, and 'normative social influence' (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004:591–621) as mechanisms operate to reproduce 'social relations, positions and practices' (Houston, 2010:79). It will also include the setting's resilience and flexibility to cope with stressors and adversity (see Chapter 2). In this case the stressor may be seen as a child exhibiting challenging behaviour and the resilience of the wider system of the class or centre (social setting) to cope and return quickly to normal functioning.

The domain of contextual resources

Houston's 2010 critique of Layder's (1997) final domain suggests that contextual resources be further stratified into domains of culture and economy. From the perspective of social ecology, this will include the exo and macro systems which may have an impact on a child, staff members or the centre (the social setting in the study). They add to the complex tangle of enabling and countervailing mechanisms which impact on the activity and outcomes of situated activity.

Culture – Culture looks at much wider groupings than those included within the domain of social settings and relates to the causal mechanisms concerned with societal norms, rituals and practices. For this study, it will include systems such as the community, the local education authority, the English education system and the wider society.

Economy – Layder (1997) discusses three different types of economic resource. In addition to resources such as money and power, it also includes cultural resources, such as academic know-how. In the case of this study, this will include a

child's ability to access a good quality primary education. Houston (2010:82) describes how 'social categories such as gender, race and class act as gatekeepers' to these resources and this may have relevance in a centre with an intake of predominantly low academically attaining special educational need and disability (SEND) children from areas of high social deprivation.

3.2 – A critical realism epistemology

As described above, I chose critical realism as its epistemological position provided me with both an ongoing forward momentum but also the space to pause and act to apply new knowledge and change practice along the way. Brown and England (2005) describe how in practitioner research the aim of each cycle of analysis is to gain a more sophisticated view, get closer to the real whilst never quite getting there. I began the process knowing that my model of understanding at each staging post would be flawed; however, I also acknowledged that it was my best attempt at the time and used it to act and bring about change as I moved forward and began the next cycle.

In aligning with a critical realism epistemology, my belief is that simply because we cannot fully grasp reality does not mean that it does not exist (Bhaskar, 2011), and Layder (2014:135) describes theory and practice working together to solve this conundrum as a form of 'adaptive research', beginning data analysis by choosing 'orienting concepts' which have proven value from the stock of established knowledge and previous research. Such concepts help structure the analysis in its earliest phases and allow exploration of the extent to which they 'fit' and are relevant to the research data (Layder, 2014:135). This pushes the researcher towards 'scrutinising and "testing" the explanatory limits of the orienting concept (or network of concepts)' (Layder, 2014:136). In this study, I began with an a priori hypothesis based on my best understanding at that time which included the concepts of behaviour, emotions, relationships and resilience. I then used each research cycle to scrutinise and test the explanatory limits of my understanding by following Houston (2010) and using the five-step retroductive process described below to gradually manoeuvre towards a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms behind the observed phenomena.

In ensuring rigour to this ongoing scrutiny of understanding, critical realism does not have a prescribed methodology, however Bhaskar (2010) uses the

acronym RREEIC (Resolution, Redescription, Retroduction, Elimination, Identification and Correction) to describe how critical realism uses an analytical structure (Melia, 2020) to cyclically compare theory and data in order to manoeuvre towards a better understanding of reality. Houston (2010) attempts to capture the complete process using what he describes as five 'steps in retroduction' (Houston, 2010:83).

A five-step retroductive process

The depth ontology of critical realism believes that empirical observation must have been brought about by underlying causal mechanisms which in turn are only in existence due to the power/potential of entities in the real world. Houston (2010) proposed a five-step retroductive model to systematically take an observed phenomenon and ask what lies behind it.

Step 1 – The transcendental question

Critical realism is a retroductive process (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013) beginning with an empirical observation and then asking a transcendental question about what is going on in the 'real' world that has caused the observed phenomenon. We observe something and then search for what brought that about (Hanson, 1965).

In relation to an action research process, creating a transcendental question is the beginning of the planning process. It is the distillate of an observation process in the sense that it takes an important empirical observation and asks why it happens. It is a crucial part of the process as it drives the direction of everything that follows. This leads to suggestions as to why the phenomenon happened in the form of an a priori hypothesis. Here, it takes the observation of children quickly ceasing to exhibit prior challenging behaviour on entry to the centre.

Step 2 – The a priori hypothesis

A synthetic, working a priori hypothesis is created (Porter, 1993), which may take the form of an analogy, model or metaphor. In relation to the action research process, creating an a priori hypothesis will mostly be part of the planning process, although the very act of suggesting reasons behind an empirical phenomenon will include some initial analysis, which in this case included some introductory reflection on the role of the person-centred approach in guiding practice in the centre at that time.

Bhaskar (cited in Hu, 2018:123) describes how the researcher's intellectual and perceptive skills are relied on when 'developing hypotheses in retroductive studies'. This study is concerned with taking an initial a priori hypothesis and attempting to understand how it developed over time. In this sense, the a priori hypothesis in each research cycle provides periodic staging posts to help guide the research through multiple cycles (McAvoy and Butler, 2018).

Step 3 – Seeking evidence

Sitting within the observation phase of action research, this step involves looking for evidence which may shed light on the validity of the hypothesis by looking for likely effects in the empirical world. Hu (2018) describes the fallibility of knowledge when considering complex open systems and in this study, evidence is collected in the form of vivid accounts (Mason, 2002) in a professional journal. The priming for recording these accounts was the hypothesis in each cycle and a sense of professional 'disturbance' (Mason, 2002:139) when an experience either resonated with my current understanding or there was an incongruence which grated against it. This rationale is discussed further (Section 4.4 - Seeking evidence) in the description of the collecting of accounts for cycle one.

Step 4 – Data Analysis/Scepticism

There is scepticism inherent in this critical realism retroductive process which aligns with the analysis phase of the action research process. Houston (2010:83) describes the role this takes in 'refining, confirming, falsifying or reworking hypotheses' and in this study the data analysis was broken down into three distinct steps.

Initially, sample accounts were considered through the lens of Layder's (1997) theory of social domains. This took into account the ontological breadth of a complex, social system and tests the boundary of the hypothesis by suggesting possible alternative causal mechanisms which I may not have previously considered. Secondly, there was a retroductive appraisal which challenged whether each aspect of the hypothesis was a true precondition of the phenomenon observed. Finally, there was a hermeneutic analysis of my writing within each cycle. This challenged the conceptual boundary of my hypothesis by considering what the language revealed about both my professional position and where my use of language

indicated a constraint on my ability to view the world. Each of these steps is considered further below:

a. **The analysis of accounts through the lens of social domain theory** – The first part of the analysis considers the validity of the a priori hypothesis by considering data drawn from the practitioner accounts through the lens of social domain theory (Layder, 1997). A single account was selected during the cycle one analysis as I became familiar with the process of considering an account through each of Layder's four domains of psychobiography, situated activity, social setting and contextual resources. As my experience with the process developed, this increased to four accounts in cycle two and ten accounts in cycle three. These accounts were each chosen as I felt that there was an incongruence within them that did not match up to either my current hypothesis or documents being used to inform practice.

   During cycle one, an account was chosen which described a child quickly adopting the social norms of the group. This was not described anywhere in our SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards and felt beyond the limit of my understanding at that time. This analysis led to a reframing of the phenomenon to consider not only the cessation of challenging behaviour but the behaviour that replaced it. During cycle two, four accounts were chosen which described a child's behaviour quickly changing when the situation around them changed. This sat outside both the current hypothesis and the SEMH Principles document that was being used at the time. The analysis led to consideration of 'window of tolerance' (Siegal, 1999) and informed the planning for cycle three. During cycle three, ten accounts were selected in which there was an incongruence between my accounts and the Profile Tool which was being used to capture outcomes. This led to a reappraisal of the accounts to consider the indicators of children operating within their window of tolerance.

b. **The use of retroductive reasoning** – During each cycle, a retroductive appraisal is used to test the validity of the hypothesis by asking, 'could one imagine X without Y?' (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013:3). For example, in cycle one, this asks if one could imagine a rapid cessation of challenging behaviour in the absence of positive social interaction, a person-centred environment or

the children presenting with a heightened need to belong. This retroductive appraisal is an integral part of the overall data analysis process as the hypothesis is challenged with the aim of bringing the researcher closer to understanding the complex combination of mechanisms behind their observations. For example, at the end of cycle two, the terms 'person-centred environment' and 'heightened need to belong' were removed from the hypothesis as I felt that they no longer stood up this retroductive appraisal.

c. **A hermeneutic approach to professional place** – It is vital that there is due consideration to the place of the professional creating both the accounts and the models of conceptual understanding. A hermeneutic approach is taken to both. This is because, unlike in the natural sciences, language provides an 'inside' or 'interior' to social life (Bhaskar, 2014:57). We can only investigate this interior by engaging with the language chosen. When re-reading my writing there were times when I experienced a 'queasiness' at my choice of language which indicated a constraint to my conceptual understanding of the world. An example of this 'queasiness' was in my use of the phrase 'happy, positive, pro-social behaviour' in my cycle two hypothesis without being able to explain what I meant by the term. This hermeneutic approach to my writing gave me the sense that the path towards an alternative way of conceptualising the world was through further exploration of my use of this term. This guided my work going into cycle three.

3.3 – Applied critical realism

Critical realism refrains from prescribing a preferred method of data collection or analysis and has no defined methodological pathway which a researcher can easily follow in order to apply its philosophy (Fletcher, 2017; Bunt, 2018; McAvoy and Butler, 2018). The choice of a critical realism approach requires a commitment to ontological depth and breadth, and the methodology developed must fit the study in hand (Edwards et al., 2014). Bhaskar felt that practicality and application should be the heartbeat of critical realism (Edwards et al., 2014; Melia, 2020); however, he described a paucity of applied critical realist authors and summed up the issue for the practitioner wanting to study their setting with:

> …even when one has begun to grasp some principles of basic critical realism it will not be obvious how exactly one is to do it. (Bhaskar 2014, cited in Melia,

The CR literature 'does not make it easy to learn by example' (Melia, 2020:286); however, what follows is a brief description of the way that the development of my approach relates to three recent works in applied critical realism.

Working with schools providing education to indigenous children in Australia Ian Mackie, Gary MacLennan and Brad Shipway (2017) used critical realism to attempt to understand the causal mechanisms behind behaviour in a setting where staff were subject to violence from pupils on a daily basis. This relates directly the development of my approach in this study where I use the retroductive approach of critical realism to consider the cessation of such violence towards staff and ask what the underlying causal mechanisms may be. Mackie et al. use the ontology of critical realism to reframe the situation. They took the phenomenon of violence towards staff, treated it retroductively and asked whether 'problems of "discipline" might be better constructed as evidence of the students' resistance to an oppressive situation' (Mackie et al., 2017:304). They give the example of a child being punished for poor attendance when the causes were more associated with underlying poverty, such as the need to care for a sick parent or not having bus fare. This was critical realism being used at the sharp end to tackle a situation where staff were frightened and, in some cases, openly hostile to the suggestions of underlying causes. Ian Mackie and his colleagues did not choose the easy path and I found their commitment to emancipatory change through the use of critical realism both brave and inspiring.

Clare Rawdin (2019) used critical realism in an attempt to conceptualise therapeutic school-based initiatives in a nurture group setting. Rawdin offered critical realism as an alternative to the positivist approaches, which she felt characterised much of the work looking at the effectiveness of such intervention programmes, and interpretivist approaches, which tended to focus on wider societal factors such as gender, race and class. Rawdin's work relates to the development of my approach in the study in the way she uses of Layder's (1997) theory of social domains to add ontological breadth and to consider the mechanisms which may lie behind her observations. If found a connection with Rawdin's work as her interpretation of the way Layder's four social domains could be mapped onto a school-based setting aligned with the approach I had been developing. I was then able to take this approach and use it as the starting point for analysis in each of the three cycles of this study.

In a study to consider the impact of the Prevent Strategy in the UK, Rob Faure Walker (2019) combined a critical realism ontology with a critical discourse analysis of the UK's Prevent counter-terrorism strategy in a school in east London. The study was prompted by Faure Walker's feeling that the Prevent strategy had curbed healthy debate on political issues in his class. This relates to the development of my approach in that it similarly uses a critical realism ontology in taking an observed phenomenon and retroductively theorising to better understand the causal mechanisms behind it. The study uses a critical discourse analysis of the Prevent documentation. However, I also found Faure Walker's use of language interesting. I found myself wanting to know more about his reflection on his own professional position and this relates to the development of my approach as I developed a first-person hermeneutic analysis of my own writing as part of each cycle.

3.4 – First-person action research

As described previously, this study is based on the premise that research is 'conducted for a purpose and that action research has reflective thinking as a means to underpin practice' (Costello, 2011:2). It was born of the idea that I needed to develop my own understanding of the provision we were offering within our centre in order to inform change and improve practice. This resonated with Herr and Anderson's (2005:13) description of Donald Schön's (1983) influential book *The Reflective Practitioner*, as encouraging practitioners to 'tap into their store of professional knowledge in order to make it explicit and share it with other practitioners'. I felt that in order to work with others to improve practice, I first needed to improve and make explicit my own understanding. Whereas classic action research had the feel of a field experiment, Schön (1983, cited in Ram et al., 2014:205) placed emphasis on the practitioner 'addressing their self-perceptions and how they process learning'.

In this study, a hermeneutic approach to my own professional writing is used to support reflective thinking (Bolton, 2005; Hedberg, 2009). Reason and Bradbury (2008) would characterise this as a piece of first-person action research involving an individual practitioner reflecting on their personal practice and offering an account of what they are doing and thinking (Herr and Anderson, 2005; Adams, 2014; Brydon-Miller and Coghlan, 2019). At its core, first-person action research means that the practitioner's 'own beliefs, values, assumptions, ways of thinking and behaving are

afforded explicit attention as they experience themselves in inquiry and in action' (Brydon-Miller and Coghlan, 2019:305). It is 'doing research on oneself' (Nyanjom, 2018:629) and 'makes no pretence of universal knowledge' (Adams, 2014:4); rather, it 'subjects our perceptions, assumptions, values, ways of thinking, strategies and behaviour to critical inquiry' (Adams, 2014:4). This approach dovetails with the epistemological position of critical realism in this study where I work through cycles to develop my own understanding with the acknowledgement that the models I create along the way are flawed.

As action research in education is often carried out by teachers who are not specialists in research, it can be viewed sceptically by those steeped in academia (Herr and Anderson, 2005). The practitioner embarking on first-person action research needs to answer questions about rigour at each stage of the process. I had arrived as the headteacher from a mainstream primary school into the world of alternative provision in a pupil referral unit (PRU). I witnessed children excluded from school for challenging behaviour arriving in the centre and ceasing that behaviour quickly. I tried to understand this but struggled to find any underlying philosophy guiding the provision. The staff were finding their own way and doing what they felt worked and in some cases were explaining that in terms of Rogers' (1957) person-centred approach. I used this as a starting point and formalised this approach with our SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (see Appendix 1) in an attempt to improve consistency of practice across the centre. This pragmatic approach followed what worked and attempting to work out why it worked felt like a very natural approach to me. However, I had nagging concerns. Herr and Anderson (2005) describe the limited ability of organisations to learn in this way. Assumptions made about why things work can lead to research simply validating pre-existing theory and organisations ceasing to consider whether there are alternative explanations or a better way of working. I have a deep-rooted pragmatic streak, and I feel that I am always in danger of simply proving the theory I believe. I needed to add a structured approach to providing sceptical rigour to my work (Herr and Anderson, 2005). I was keen to examine what my own speech, actions and writing revealed about my understanding of the social world (Brown and England, 2005). I was not at the stage where I was ready to move on to a more collaborative form of study. I needed a first-person approach to better develop my own understanding of the situation.

As a first-person researcher I planned to create an account of my personal reflexive journey over time. I was aware that my place in the world and the way that I experienced and expressed it would permeate the entire process. In the course of this study, I read many action research doctoral theses involving the researcher's process of reflection to appreciate their underlying professional position. I found detailed, first-person approaches hard to come by. When I did find them, they were compelling reflections on underlying values, traditions and practices. However, I also found a proportion with what amounted to a single page of such reflection buried within hundreds of pages of wider work. The description of reflection had the feel of compulsory inclusion rather than an integral consideration. I did not want my thesis to feel that way. I needed critical reflection to be the core of the process in order to better understand how I was attempting to make sense of the professional situation I was experiencing. The study I have chosen, the theories I have considered, the language I have used, the concepts I have formed and the way I have reported my work are all, in the words of Jacques Derrida, 'saturated by the leakages of mischievous lubricant and debris of autobiographical hauntings' (Derrida, cited in Hirst, 2019:3). First-person researchers need to be well aware of the potential for self-deception where people 'fool themselves with cultural influences that blinker perception' (Adams, 2014:6). This study uses hermeneutic analysis to shake out professional place in an attempt to ensure my reflection is open and transparent to both myself and the reader.

The first-person action research model used in this study

The model used in this study follows the classic action research sequence of Plan–Act–Observe–Reflect, beginning in the Observe phase:

> **Observe** – This study began with the observation of a phenomenon with the aim of developing my understanding over what might be bringing the phenomenon about.
>
> **Reflect** – Initially, this reflection phase was attempting to grasp the philosophy underpinning the work of the centre. In subsequent cycles, this phase was broken into a systematic analysis following Houston (2010) using social domain theory, retroduction and hermeneutic analysis.

Plan – The reflection phase led to the production of an attempt at capturing my understanding in the form of an initial a priori hypothesis and to our SEMH Teaching and Learning document (see Appendix 1). In subsequent cycles, the hypothesis was revised, and these documents were rewritten to capture my developing understanding at points in time and used to act and bring about change.

Act – The Act phase involved the newly developed or rewritten standards being shared with staff with the aim of developing a consistency of practice across the centre. The cycle then began again with a systematic approach to the Observe phase

Although the process of Plan–Act–Observe–Reflect is laid out in a linear form, in practice the procedure is iterative in that it involves a repeated cycle of operations (Costello, 2011) often described as 'cycles or spirals of inquiry' (Adams, 2014:3). This study follows a self-reflective spiral (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Costello, 2011) represented by the diagram (see Figure 2) below.
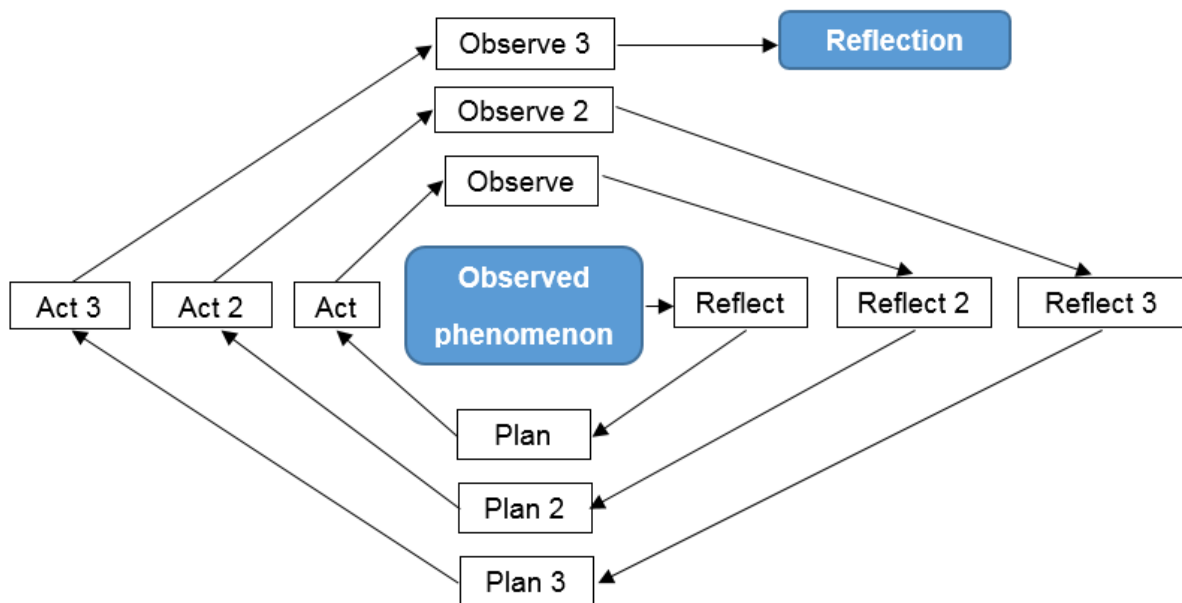
Figure 2 – Spiral action research model.

This cyclical action research process is allied with critical realism to offer both an ontological depth and a stratified view of the complex social world within which this study is situated.

3.5 – Applications of first-person action research

Although first-person action research is a 'systematic and sustained inquiry into personal practice' (Adams, 2014:3), it is not a research methodology in itself. Adams (2014:3) describes it as 'methodologically pluralist' with 'tools of inquiry, assembled to suit the occasion'. What follows is a brief synopsis of the work of three practitioners conducting first-person research which have influenced my work and illustrate this point.

I was first exposed to Janice England's (2003) work during phase A of my doctoral studies. Her thesis opened my eyes to the possibility of using a hermeneutic analysis of data collected in the form of personal practitioner accounts. England kept accounts of her interactions with a boy called Lloyd in the form of a research diary. Her work was first-person, practitioner research offering an account of how race may be understood in school, and in reading her hermeneutic reflections, I was drawn to the level of analysis devoted to single accounts and her overriding questioning of 'why is the researcher asking *these* questions in *this* way?' (England, 2003:3). This informed the development of my study as I used my accounts of interactions as a data source and used a hermeneutic analysis of those accounts as part of each cycle.

Helen Woodley (2017) used a first-person approach to study pupil/teacher interactions in a primary pupil referral unit (PRU) in Newcastle upon Tyne. I found her thesis to be a compelling description of the journey of her understanding of acceptance, love, relationship and hopes in her setting. She included her own writing about herself as data and in doing so 'ensured thoughts and feelings would be made visible and the research process transparent' (Woodley, 2017:74). This study aspired to do the same as my understanding and practice developed and changed. Woodley describes finding her voice and this influenced the development of my study. In seeking to improve the lives of children, I am seeking the confidence and voice that she describes. I could not let my study fall into the realm of a cosy reaffirmation of the status quo for an easy life. I aim to be disruptive. It is about improving the lot of both my staff and the children we work with. Although this study is introspective 'first person inquiry is not just for me, but it is also for us and for them' (Adams, 2014:6).

Julie Nyanjom (2018:629) describes her use of first-person action research as 'doing research on oneself'. Her study acknowledges the emergent nature of a first-

person process where each cycle is informed and shaped by the one before and she catalogues her attempt towards 'structure and orderliness' Nyanjom (2018:626). This relates directly to the development of my approach as I worked through my study and used the outcome of each cycle to inform the next. Nyanjom describes the often-chaotic practicality of action research. She set out to create a structured approach but found that it emerged only out of a messy process which is not often reported. Her view is that those reading a final report often get little of the tortuous process behind the work. I found solace in this view when wrestling with the process and during periods where I was walking in a fog and felt the world was opaque. Nyanjom's description of her work gave me the confidence to keep moving forward and the acceptance that although I did not understand, I could trust the process, keep going and some form of clarity would emerge.

3.6 – A combination of critical realism and action research

As described above, a critical realism ontology provided the ontological depth to allow me to consider my observation of children ceasing their prior challenging behaviour and to retroductively consider the necessary conditions which may be bringing that about. It also provided me with the epistemological forward momentum where I acknowledge that my understanding can always be improved. Allying action research with the cyclical critical realism process ensured that I was not only developing my own understanding, but I was using it to act (see Table 1 below) and bring about change with the aim of improving the lot of children excluded (or at risk of exclusion) from primary schools.

Table 1 – A combination of action research and critical realism

	Initial **observation** – Children with prior challenging behaviour cease that behaviour quickly on entering the centre	
Cycle One	**Action Research**	**Critical Realism**
	Reflect	1. Transcendental question asked
		2. A priori hypothesis suggested
	Plan Develop SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards	
	Act – Implement SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards with centre staff	

	Observe	3. Professional journal of practitioner accounts kept. 57 separate journal entries collected between April and June 2018.

	Reflect 2	4. Scepticism
		  a) Sample account viewed through the lens of social domain theory
		  b) Retroductive reasoning applied to a priori hypothesis
		  c) Hermeneutic analysis of the process, the accounts and the teaching and learning standards to consider professional place

		1. Transcendental question reconsidered and adapted
		2. Adapted a priori hypothesis suggested
Cycle Two	**Plan 2** SEMH Principles document developed	
	Act 2 SEMH Principles document implemented with staff	
	Observe 2	3. Professional journal of practitioner accounts kept. 42 separate journal entries collected between September 2019 and February 2019.

	Reflect 3	4. Scepticism
		  a) Sample accounts viewed through the lens of social domain theory
		  b) Retroductive reasoning applied to a priori hypothesis
		  c) Hermeneutic analysis of the process, the accounts and the SEMH Principles document to consider professional place

		1. Transcendental question reconsidered and adapted
		2. Adapted a priori hypothesis suggested
Cycle Three	**Plan 3** SEMH Profile Tool developed	
	Act 3 SEMH Profile Tool implemented with staff	
	Observe 3	3. Professional journal of practitioner accounts kept. 47 separate journal entries collected between February 2019 and July 2019.
	Final **Reflection**	4. Scepticism a) Cycle 3 accounts viewed through the lens of social domain theory

		b) Retroductive reasoning applied to a priori hypothesis
		c) Hermeneutic analysis of the process, the accounts and the SEMH Profile Tool
		5. Overall critical reflection as part of final analysis.

The cyclical nature of both action research and critical realism invites a natural combination of processes to help understand the mechanisms behind the rapid cessation of challenging behaviour in pupils admitted to the centre. Combining action research and the stratified ontology of critical realism allows a weaving together of theory and practice and as the cycle is repeated, it offers a way of going deeper and developing understanding. (Costello, 2011; Bhaskar, 2011).

Houston believes that action research is the 'qualitative method most appropriate for carrying out research informed by critical realism' (Houston, 2010:86). He contends that the retroductive method he describes can be integrated into cycles of action research to good effect with both action research and critical realism being concerned with emancipatory change and human agency. In this study, it falls within the reflection phase of each cycle as shown in Table 1 (above) and is used to inform the plan and act phases of the next cycle. In doing so, action research provided me with the opportunity to 'ground its [critical realism's] ideals in practice' (Ram et al., 2014:219) and bring about change.

3.7 – Method

The study took place in an alternative provision for primary aged pupils who had been permanently excluded (or were at serious risk of permanent exclusion) from their mainstream school. Data was collected in the form of a professional journal during three cycles of action research which took place between April 2018 and July 2019.

Cycle one (see Chapter 4) of the action research process included 57 separate journal entries collected between April and June 2018. At this time, I developed a written framework (SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards – see Appendix 1). The standards were grouped into four main categories of resilience, anxiety, inner life and relationships which I used as a basis for staff training with a view to improving the consistency of practice across the centre.

Cycle two (see Chapter 5) of the action research process included 42 separate journal entries collected between September 2018 and February 2019. Following the first cycle of the action research process, I revised our SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards as I felt that they were too much of a mixture of provision and outcomes. This led to the creation of our SEMH Principles document (Appendix 2) which focused exclusively on provision. This was again used to provide guidance for staff on the way I wanted them to work with children.

Cycle three (see Chapter 6) of the process included 47 separate journal entries collected between February and July 2019. I used our SEMH Principles documents as the basis for a first draft of an assessment tool which focused on outcomes (SEMH Profile Tool – Appendix 3). This was used to assess individual pupils and inform bespoke provision for each child. Once again, this was used to inform staff training with a view to improving provision by focusing on the outcomes of individual pupils.

During cycle three, I felt a sense of unease that the outcomes being described by our profile tool were not capturing the important outcomes that were being observed in the children. These related to the happy, prosocial behaviours that I was repeatedly noticing and recording in the journal. In order to go beyond my current understanding of the outcomes I had described in the profile tool, what followed was an inductive collecting and categorising of words and phrases from within the accounts which related to pupils' demeanour. This further developed my understanding of the outcomes that I ascribed value to and supported investigation into the mechanisms which may have been involved in creating them.

Following cycle three of the action research process, my developing understanding of what lay behind children entering the centre and ceasing their prior challenging behaviour was explored using the developing a priori hypothesis captured within each cycle of the process (see Chapter 7). In conclusion, a final critical reflection on the emancipatory nature of the study was conducted and is included at the end of the thesis.

Ethical considerations

The requirement of research ethics is to protect those involved from harm, either physical or psychological (Wisker, 2007; Sandy and Durnay, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2017;

Booth, 2018). Approval for the research was granted by the MMU Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, however, ethical considerations are not simply for the purpose of getting through the committee but are integral to the entire research process (Hill, 2005; Beynon, 2008). In this study, this included ethical considerations around the recruitment of participants, the ongoing process of data collection and an awareness of my positionality as a first-person researcher and the validity of any conclusions drawn.

When recruiting pupils and families, there was a need to consider how the sample of pupils was selected and that an ease of access to some children did not lead to an over representation in the sample (Hill, 2006). The centre has provision for 40 pupils, and all were invited to take part. Consent was sought from both children and families and there were separate participant information sheets for staff and parent/carers and a separate sheet for pupils written in child-friendly language. There was an acknowledgement of the power imbalance between the participants and myself as the headteacher/researcher (Patton; 2002; Norton, 2009; McNulty, 2017; O'Sullivan, 2017) and a junior member of staff was therefore assigned to approach all the potential participants and share the participant information sheet and explain the nature of the study.

Of those approached, 29 pupils and their families agreed to take part in the study, and it was made clear that declining participation or withdrawing at any point would not result in any penalty and that there would be no difference in provision for those choosing to accept or decline participation. The data collected consisted only of documents describing the provision offered in the centre and my written practitioner accounts of everyday interactions with staff, pupils and families. It did not include any additional meetings, interviews or observations. It was felt that, in the context of this study, pupils or families being asked to share their views by taking part in any additional meetings or interviews may be regarded as a form of provision (Stanley, 1996; Booth, 2018). This may have resulted in additional causal mechanisms being present for those taking part in the study which would be absent for those declining to take part. Similarly, rather than formal observations, notes were discretely made at the earliest opportunity following everyday interactions. These were used to form more detailed accounts as soon as was practicable. Indeed, there were examples in

the study (e.g., Account 2.3) where a child's behaviour changed when they felt my eyes on them. Even discreet observation has the potential to act as a causal mechanism affecting behavioural outcomes and this needed to be guarded against. A further safeguard was to ensure that all pupils in the centre were assigned a key worker to monitor their well-being and to liaises with families as part of their role. At any point, if a staff member, family member or child thought that being part of the study was detrimental then they could opt out at any time without any penalty to the provision they received.

My positionality as a first-person researcher and the way that I account for my presence within the study also required ethical consideration (Brewer, 2000; Booth, 2018, Newton, 2018). This study systematically used a hermeneutic analysis during each cycle of the study (See section 4.7, 5.7 and 6.7) to prevent assumptions being made and an awareness was needed of the way that I cast both myself, staff, parents and children in the accounts I created and the conclusions that I drew (Wolcott, 1990; Atkinson et al., 2001; England, 2003; Booth, 2018). Both the epistemology of critical realism and the hermeneutic analysis used allow a recognition that any conclusions drawn simply represent my own understanding of the world and that they can always be developed and improved. This reflexive approach characterised the nature of this study as I sought to develop my own conceptual understanding of the phenomenon observed.

All information collected during the study was kept strictly confidential, and all information included in the professional journal and write up of the study had names removed and was anonymised so that children, families and staff could not be recognised. The research was funded entirely by the centre in the study.

Chapter 4 – Analysis and Findings for Cycle One

This chapter describes the first research cycle where I attempted to better understand my observation that children were quickly ceasing to exhibit challenging behaviour on entry to the centre. This chapter follows the combined action research/critical realism method as laid out in Table 1. It begins with my asking a transcendental question about the cessation of behaviour and producing an a priori hypothesis which articulates and captures my best understanding at that point in time. It describes the plan and action phase where I produced and implemented a set of SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards with the staff in the centre with a view to improving our consistency of provision. It considers my collection of data in the form of accounts during this period. It then describes my reflective analysis of these accounts using social domain theory and retroductive and hermeneutic analysis. Finally, this chapter considers how the findings of cycle one informed the planning for my second cycle of research.

4.1 – The initial transcendental question for cycle one

As described previously, the process involved an initial phenomenon being described which led to a transcendental question being asked as to what conditions had led to the phenomenon observed. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1970) describes constructing knowledge about our own cognitive faculty to understand how experiences have come about. A transcendental question has the aim of seeking knowledge about the way understanding is being formed.

The transcendental question driving this study is:

Why do many pupils who have previously exhibited challenging behaviour cease that behaviour quickly on admission to the centre?

The initial answer that I suggested to this question articulated my understanding at that time and formed an initial a priori hypothesis.

4.2 – The initial a priori hypothesis for cycle one

For cycle one, the a priori hypothesis suggested an answer to the above transcendental question and provides an initial framework to be tested. The a priori hypothesis for cycle one was:

Children cease challenging behaviour quickly as we provide an environment run on person-centred principles providing positive social interaction to children with a heightened need to belong.

It names three assumptions that can be seen as preconditions to this cessation of challenging behaviour. In a retroductive sense (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013), this a priori hypothesis assumes that without: (1) provision of an environment run on person-centred principles, (2) provision of positive social interactions and (3) children entering the centre with a heightened need to belong, then children would not cease their challenging behaviour quickly. This provided a focus for the collection of evidence to test these assumptions and data was collected using practitioner accounts in the form of a journal (see Section 4.4).

4.3 – The plan and the action for cycle one: development and implementation of the centre's SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards

On arriving at the centre to take up my post as headteacher, I had found no consistent underlying philosophy guiding practice. Some staff, however, were describing their practice using the language of Carl Rogers' (1956;1957) person-centred approach based around congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard, and this led to my creation of a set of SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (Appendix 1) which leant heavily on the work of both Bomber and Hughes (2013) and 30 hours of whole staff counselling training. The organisation of these standards was a largely inductive process with the emerging themes of resilience, anxiety, inner life and relationships. I worked with staff to embed these standards at the outset and across this cycle. There was an expectation that these standards would underpin our everyday practice. They were used to create a visitors' guide, as the basis for our teaching and learning policy, and to inform lesson observations, and they were written into all staff appraisal targets.

4.4 – Seeking evidence

Evidence to test the cycle one a priori hypothesis was collected in a systematic way during the summer term of 2018. It took the form of a professional journal, and between April and June 2018, 57 separate accounts were recorded.

In keeping accounts, I drew on Janice England's (2003) use of personal practitioner accounts to research race in school. Brown and England (2005) followed up this work to discuss how although the 'real' may never be captured, it has properties which create effects which can be experienced. England (2003) used accounts recorded and revisited over time to consider the development of practitioner identity, and I took a similar approach to consider my developing understanding of our setting.

As the data was primarily drawn from my personal practitioner accounts, my concern was in ensuring that the study retained rigour and did not run away with itself along a pre-ordained railway track. In one of her accounts, Janice England (Brown and England, 2005:10) summed up this concern:

> Lloyd, the pupil, would not fit into the original script set out for him, built, as it was, between the teacher's construction of herself and of the world she saw herself inhabiting. 'He doesn't know he's in my movie. And I have become a little over-committed to my originally proposed script.

I felt that it would be all too easy to slip into a predetermined path and to end up constructing accounts that moved quickly from description to justification. Such accounts are interesting in terms of attempting to interpret why it was written with that emphasis by that person at that time. Mason (2002), however, describes this type of account as having analyses tied up within them, compromising the ability of the professional to notice in an impartial way. I chose to follow Mason's (2002:41) alternative and attempt to keep a series of descriptive 'accounts of' my observations which steered clear of 'interpretation, explanation, value judgment, justification, or criticism' (Mason, 2002:41).

When writing on the keeping of accounts, Layder (2014) advises that because observations can only reliably be committed to short-term memory whilst in situ you 'jot down your thoughts and observations as soon as possible' (Layder, 2014:80). His advice is then to make full field notes at the end of a day's observation. These should include a chronological account of 'what happened in the setting' as well as

being reflexive about how your presence has 'impinged on the behaviour of others, and the assumptions you are making about what people are doing and saying' (Layder, 2014:81).

This translated into practice with me jotting notes on a piece of paper as I went about my daily work and then producing more detailed accounts at the earliest opportunity. The attempt was to produce 'brief but vivid' (Mason, 2002:62) descriptive accounts of my observations. Any time I felt myself slipping into interpretation, I added this as notes alongside my descriptive account.

On a practical basis, I needed a pragmatic, systematic plan of action for creating accounts. In addition to the need for a plan of when the accounts would be created, I also needed to plan for the subject of the accounts. Would they have focus or would they simply be whatever I felt was important at the time? Layder (2014:73) refers to a form of 'directed observation' where

> …observations are led, informed and thus 'directed' by your problem – and topic focus – and the research questions to which they give rise. This is what gives structure and organisation… and makes the whole process systematic. (Layder, 2014:75)

In this case, my accounts were therefore initially directed by considering the a priori hypothesis that I had constructed to answer: why children ceased challenging behaviour quickly on entry to the centre. This included the necessary preconditions of a person-centred approach, positive social interactions and children entering the centre with a heightened need to belong. My concern, however, was that I would only notice what I was 'primed and sensitised to notice' (Mason, 2002:66) and the ability to probe and test the limits of my understanding would be impeded. In practice, the subject of my accounts also included times when I felt a deep sense of professional disturbance.

Mason (2002:139) describes two main types of 'disturbance': firstly, when an experience resonates in accordance with the researcher's beliefs; and secondly, when the researcher finds that an experience grates or irritates, leading to 'not a tidal wave, but a ripple sufficiently great to be distinguishable on the choppy surface which is my experience' (Mason, 2002:68).

During this study, one consistent indicator of resonance was when I found myself repeatedly discussing a phenomenon with different members of staff, such as the impact of the situated activity of a child being shown around the centre (16th April 18), or the length of child's planned transition back into a mainstream school (17th April 18). At other times, it was an almost physical sense of unease at an observable event or aspect of practice observed. For example, when a child had been refused permission to place her stuffed toy close by when she was transitioning into her new school (18th April 18), or when a child was refusing to get out of the car in the morning as it was their birthday and they said that they did not want there to be any fuss made. Mason (2002:63) discusses the seeking of 'threads', where once you have a collection of accounts, 'you can work at locating some common threads, some features of sameness, some issues that you want to explore' (Mason, 2002:69), which in turn lends further focus to noticing and exploration.

For example, it was noticeable that some accounts did not relate easily to our SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards. There was an incongruence here which I felt may indicate that there was something in these accounts that sat beyond my current framework. A common theme amongst these accounts were children who were arriving and noticeably quickly adopting the social norms of the centre and becoming integrated into the group. This is not described anywhere within the standards and represented a limitation in my understanding at that point. This, in turn, supported the abductive process of looking outside the framework of the investigation for alternate solutions and illustrated my need to re-engage with the theory as I moved into cycle two.

4.5 – Analysis through the lens of social domain theory

At this stage, social domain theory was used to consider an example of a disruptive account, as described above, where a child arrived at the centre and quickly adopted the social norms of the group. It considers the account through the lens of each of the social domains (Layder, 1997; Houston, 2010). This was a journal entry written after observing a child on their second day on the centre.

> *Child arrived and was overtly racist. He stood up in class, dancing and singing and making racist comments. The children didn't react and he*

carried on for a while and then sat down. He tried again but got the same reaction. He looked confused. Then he stopped.

I had also found myself discussing this incident with a number of staff members and, as discussed earlier, I found this to be a consistent indicator of professional 'disturbance' (Mason, 2002:68) which informed my keeping of accounts. The child had looked confused and sat back down. I found myself wondering what had led to him sitting back down and how this incident related to my hypothesis. It felt graphic yet typical of the broader pattern.

In this process, social domain theory was used as an abductive tool (Danermark et al., 1997; Meyer and Lunnay, 2013) to consider mechanisms which may lie beyond the framework of the original investigation. The account was considered through the lens of each of the social domains in turn.

Considering the account through the domain of psychobiography

The first step was to consider the mechanisms which may be acting in the scenario described within the domain of psychobiography. This is where there is a consideration of the things that may have happened in a lifetime that shape an identity (Layder, 1997; Houston, 2010). These may be related to trauma, the need to fit in, the interaction a child may have had with primary caregivers (Booth and Jernberg, 2009) and how all these may shape a child's emotionally unique response to social expectations. The phenomena observed are often coping mechanisms that a child uses to manage these emotionally unique responses (Ogden et al., 2006; Corrigan et al., 2010). A person-centred approach can disrupt a child's negative self-image through our unconditional acceptance (Wilkins, 2001; Mearns and Thorne, 1988; Prever, 2010) and create the conditions where their actualising tendency helps them heal and make positive changes, which, in turn, feed into their psychobiography.

In this case, the child involved in the scenario had no obvious trauma in his background; however, he had recently been excluded from primary school and was now required to attend the centre, which is in another part of the town. One possibility may be that he was being overtly racist as he thought that this was what he needed to do to fit in (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Nash (2016), amongst others, described the heightened need to belong in those displaced from their peers.

The child in this case had previously been engaged in this type of behaviour with a group of young people near home and may well have thought that this was what he needed to do to fit in at the centre. The fact that he looked confused that his actions had not received a positive response from the other children would support that, as would the fact that he eventually sat down and did the same thing as everyone else. This resonates with the area of 'informational social influence' and 'normative social influence' (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). When interpreted from this perspective, the child may have been looking to others to see what to do in an unfamiliar setting or acting in a certain way to gain the approval of the group.

In the psychobiography domain, Layder (2006:257) describes how we are not only considering the things that have happened that shape a child's identity but also the way they then manage the ups and downs of daily life:

> It also traces the impact of critical experiences (like illnesses or psychological traumas) on the manner in which they psychologically manage their personal and social lives.

Although there may be many similarities in the way children manage their lives, in the context of this study, this management could broadly be regarded as the use of coping mechanisms (Ogden et al., 2006; Corrigan et al. 2010). Some of these mechanisms appear self-defeating (for example, sitting under a table or tearing up a piece of work); however, they serve an immediate need. The situated activity which may be triggering these coping mechanisms in each individual child is important to understand as it may result in what is then regarded as extreme behaviour.

Considering the account through the domain of situated activity

The next step was to consider the domain of situated activity. The causal mechanisms here are those related to face-to-face interactions (Layder,1997; Houston, 2010) and those which maintain social order. The original hypothesis suggested the role of positive social interaction in bringing about a cessation in challenging behaviour. Here, the social interaction is both the way the provision meets the children's emotional coping mechanisms and the way that situations are planned to mitigate their need to cope in the first place. A large proportion of the centre's Teaching and Learning Standards describe provision falling into this

domain. They describe calm, emotionally regulated interactions, avoiding encounters which will cause awkwardness or embarrassment, meeting an emotional need, giving and receiving kindness, ensuring that meaning is created through being unambiguous and demonstrating acceptance, welcome and warmth, and fostering belonging so a child develops a sense of social place and structure.

In the account cited, the child had just arrived at the centre and therefore was in a new and unfamiliar environment. This may have triggered an emotional response and his behaviour may be seen as a coping mechanism (Siegel, 1999) and a way of ingratiating himself with the other children (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). He may have had a predetermined view of what a class of excluded children would be like. Both staff and pupils met his actions with a calm, emotionally regulated response rather than a large reaction. There was no condemnation of his actions and he was not reprimanded in front of the class, something which may have led to further emotional response as he dealt with an awkward, embarrassing situation (Tagney, et al., 1996). He was met with acceptance and his behaviour viewed as a form of communication. One explanation is that he sat down after working out that his behaviour was not going to ingratiate him with the group. However, he was also not isolated from the group and did not feel a sense of rejection, and there was an acceptance from all concerned without condoning his actions. There was a sense of social structure within the group and a shared value system which offered a sense of place and safety (Anderman and Freeman, 2004; Buckley et al., 2004). This is shown by the fact that he simply looked confused and sat down rather than having a large emotional reaction caused by a sense of rejection or embarrassment. This level of acceptance is one of the prerequisites of the 'unconditional positive regard' described by Rogers (1957:98) as part of the therapeutic person-centred approach which forms part of the hypothesis.

So far, the way the positive social interaction and unconditional positive regard have been provided through the face-to-face interactions of situated activity have been considered. However, these interactions are planned and conducted within the wider context of the centre which will now be considered under Layder's (1997) domain of social setting.

Considering the data through the domain of social setting

The domain of social setting considers hierarchy and structure as well as factors such as adherence to socially acceptable behaviour, and it is often a local version of wider society (Layder, 2006; Houston 2010). Very few of the statements within the centre's Teaching and Learning Standards used during cycle one fall into this category; however, the way the centre uses this therapeutic person-centred approach also impacts on the shared value systems of the centre which need consideration within the domain of social setting.

In the account described above, it is possible that the other children in the class demonstrated the depth to which the person-centred value systems of the centre are embedded. They were genuine, accepting and demonstrated an empathetic understanding of a child's first few days in the centre. They were calm, emotionally regulated and by meeting his actions with a gentle non-response demonstrated that there is an expectation of socially acceptable behaviour in their class and that his actions were not going to provoke reactions in them or ingratiate him with the group. It is possible that their calmness lent him a calmness, and their clear acceptance of the adult/child hierarchy within the class also lent a feeling of structure, safety and security (Anderman and Freeman, 2004; Buckley et al., 2004) leading to the child quietly sitting down.

The way in which shared values are created and the way in which an individual is drawn into them feels like a previously unconsidered mechanism worthy of further exploration as the process moves into its next cycle. Finally, within this cycle, the data will need to be considered through the domain of contextual resources.

Considering the data through the domain of contextual resources

The final domain to consider is that of Layder's (1997) contextual resources which, as discussed earlier, Houston (2010) divides further into the domains of culture and economy. While the domain of culture is concerned with societal norms, rituals and practices, economy is concerned with access to resources such as money, power and know-how. As previously discussed (Chapter 3.1), Houston (2010:82) describes how 'social categories such as gender, race and class' act as gatekeepers to these resources, and this has relevance in a centre with an intake of predominantly low academically attaining children from areas of high social deprivation. Almost all the children are performing well below the academic norm for their age groups and many

are not neurotypical, leading to some aspects of academic and social know-how being limited. The provision offered by the centre attempts to give children the academic and social skills that they will need to navigate their communities and British society successfully. In this case, the child in question comes from an area of significant social deprivation and has missed a significant amount of education leading to low academic attainment.

4.6 – A retroductive appraisal of the a priori hypothesis for cycle one

As discussed previously (Section 3.2), critical realism uses retroductive appraisal to ask whether each aspect of a hypothesis is a true precondition of the phenomenon observed. Here, it asks whether one could imagine a rapid cessation of challenging behaviour in the absence of positive social interaction, a person-centred environment or the children presenting with a heightened need to belong. Ethical constraints do not allow for the removal of any factors which I believe to be in the best interests; however, it is possible to perform thought experiments (Jones, 2011) to consider whether in a hypothetical world the children would cease their prior challenging behaviour without the conditions laid out in the hypothesis. This would allow a consideration of mechanisms such as violence or corporal punishment. It would allow mechanisms to be considered that would be seen in modern English society as criminal, manipulative and degrading. As abhorrent as these may be to consider, it is possible that they also might bring about the rapid cessation in challenging behaviour described by the hypothesis without any need for positive social interaction, a person-centred approach and regardless of a heightened need to belong in the children. This acknowledges that a pupil ceasing their prior challenging behaviour may not always be in their best interests and the focus should not simply be about whether the cessation in behaviour is being brought about effectively but whether it improves the life chances of the pupil involved.

The outcome of the retroductive process used during cycle one was a reconsideration of the phenomenon being observed. It became less about what did not happen and more about what did. It became less about the cessation of challenging behaviour and more about the features of the behaviour that replaced it. Therefore, the observed phenomenon taken into cycle two became about the replacement of challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour.

4.7 – Using a hermeneutic approach to shake out professional place

In discussing general trends in recent research, Price and Martin (2018) describe the characteristic use of hermeneutic processes in studies using applied critical realism (Hu, 2018; McAvoy and Butler, 2018; Patel and Pilgrim, 2018). This recognises that language provides an 'inside' or 'interior' to social life (Bhaskar, 2016, cited in Price and Martin, 2018:92).

At the end of each research cycle, therefore, I will use a hermeneutic analysis to investigate my use of language and what it might reveal about my positionality throughout the process (Bolton, 2005; Hedberg, 2009). The interpretation of a written text is 'frequently offered as a model of the way that we come to attain understanding' (Gallagher, 1992:5), and it is important to consider both what is being said and also what is being achieved by the language used (Habermas, 1970, cited in Cohen et al., 2011:450). It is not just about the deciphering of specific words and text but about understanding the perspective of the writer.

In this study, my main concern is being a practitioner within a professional community with its own language and discourse. The way we construct experiences is shaped by the context and discourse in which we are situated (Gadamer, 1962). In this context, 'categories implicit in the use of language itself reveal much about the community which generated it' (Brown, 1996:261), and language can be seen as a restraint or a limiting factor in the way the world is viewed and interpreted. Although liberating to create accounts, Brown (1996:263) suggests that:

> …any accounts offered by individuals speak the society from which they come and have, built within the language itself, layers of assumptions endemic in that society's view of the world.

Mason (2002:250) states that 'all observation involves using yourself as an instrument' and as such, my accounts and written documents will speak to the professional community to which I belong.

Although we will never be free of our prejudices, the use of hermeneutics (McNiff, 2013) attempts to understand them as much as possible. What follows below is an attempt to better understand my professional place in the midst of this study.

Firstly, the structure and language of both the initial transcendental question and a priori hypothesis in relation to social domain theory will reveal aspects of my positionality (see Figure 3).
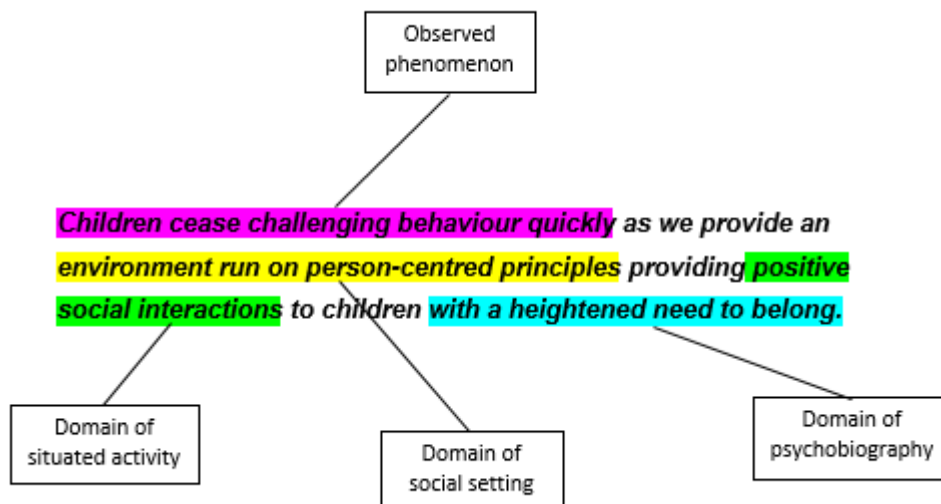
Figure 3 – Initial a priori hypothesis in terms of social domain theory.

I notice that I chose to explore the fact that children cease challenging behaviour quickly when they enter the centre without having a clear understanding of why that happens. I chose this as an area for investigation soon after arriving in the centre. The language used in the observed phenomenon is also illuminating. I chose to use the term '***cease challenging behaviour quickly***' to describe the fact that many of the children who arrive at the centre having previously exhibited extreme behaviour behave appropriately from day one. The term did not come easily as it feels negative in the sense that it describes something stopping rather than something beginning to happen. This felt alien to me at the time, but I chose to stick with it. An alternative may have been something along the lines of, 'began to conform to the behavioural expectation of the centre quickly'. Looking back, I think that I may well have been intimating at the challenging behaviour being a coping mechanism that they were using to manage what life was dealing them. I may not have known it at the time, but I think that it betrays an underlying belief that it was not compliance with expectations because of something we were doing, it was more that the children were no longer having to cope with being put in challenging situations. It was as much to do with what we were not doing as what we were. I think the authorial intent

was to, once again, remove the focus from the children and shine a light on the provision they had received in their prior settings. It is saying, '…if only the prior setting could have got it right then the children would not have needed these extreme coping mechanisms and that as soon as they were out of there, the extreme behaviour stopped.' It shouts out, '…look, the children are fine… it must be down to you.' It is clear evidence, again, that I have cast myself into the role champion and protector of these children.

My choice to separate out the term '***positive social interaction***' is interesting. I had written and rewritten the hypothesis many times and there was not a spare word allowed. It shows where my consciousness was at that time. If I was rewriting it now, I may well leave the term out as I believe it is implicitly included in the term 'person-centred principles'. I must have felt the need to emphasise the point. Indeed, almost all of the provision described in our key principles are in the domain of situated activity which deals with social interactions. It is illuminating to see where my thoughts lay and how that may have guided my work. I had spent time after I arrived working with the staff on ways of supporting the children's coping mechanisms with distraction techniques to positively affect their mood. It again shows that my thinking was deeply rooted in the domain of situated activity. I had also begun to work on ensuring that the children received academic work that was pitched at the correct level. It had seemed to me that asking children to tackle things that were not pitched or taught effectively was a major contributing factor in triggering challenging behaviour.

The term '***environment run on person-centred principles***' demonstrates that although the vast majority of the things described in our provision best fit into the domain of situated activity, I had a sense that just being in the environment was contributing causal mechanisms to the process. I had not found a way of articulating it at the time, but it felt important enough for it to be included in the hypothesis. I was describing a sense that the 'centre' got into the soul through the pores and had a profound effect, but I could not see how. My search for that answer may well have lent weight to how much value I gave to the domain of social setting as I found a possible solution and became attached to it.

The term '***heightened need to belong***' betrays my instinct that much of what is going on can be described by evolutionary mechanisms. I have a fascination with the way human beings have evolved into social beings (Forman-Barzilai, 2005) and

how modern life affects well-being in relation to that (Elder-Woodward, 2009; Loewenstein and Small, 2007). I have a tendency to look for evolutionary explanations to phenomena as it piques my interest, and I may have a tendency to be too reductionist when considering how evolution plays a role in classroom behaviour.

My choice of data extract drawn from the journal of accounts for cycle one again shows a casting of myself as a protector and champion of children. The child in question had arrived with a significant history of challenging behaviour, had started as described but then had gone on to be a valued and well-liked member of the centre and had maintained all our high expectations of him. Despite the racist nature of the incident, he had gone on to show kindness and friendship to children from all ethnic groups in the centre. He moved on to a new setting and quickly reverted to extreme behaviour which seriously escalated. I heard exasperated staff from his new setting and felt the need to stand up for him as I felt that when his needs were being met, he exhibited no challenging behaviour at all. It seemed to distil my belief at the time which was 'Meet their needs and they will not exhibit challenging behaviour. Don't meet their needs and they have emotional responses which they deal with using coping mechanisms which are viewed as challenging behaviour.' I found myself discussing and saying as much to a number of people, and the choice of the data extract served that authorial purpose well.

My use of language within the extract does not throw up much on rereading except a sense of unease at my description of his actions as '***overtly racist***'. It does not describe the act and is a judgement rather than a description. He had stood up and danced in a mock 'Bollywood' style with a comment, 'This is how they dance' in a mock Indian/Pakistani accent. I also omitted that this was in front of his class teacher (Pakistani heritage) and Learning Mentor (African heritage). His actions were directed towards the other children in the class (all white, British boys) and were an attempt to incite a kind of group disrespect of the adults in the room. My unease seems to stem from my own concern over describing his actions and not being accurate in terms of the type of dance he was doing. I had felt that it needed description and had settled on the term '**overtly racist**' as it showed that I viewed the act as intentionally offensive and of a racist nature.

Rereading the way I chose to create the SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (Appendix 1) is enlightening of my professional position at the time. The

language used leans heavily on the work of Louise Bomber and Daniel Hughes (2013) in their book *Settling to Learn*. I had invested a large amount of time in developing the standards and rereading, I sense an emotional attachment to some of the phrases used. I find that some standards illicit a strong emotional response in me, and I was not ready to let them go at the time. I had also made an investment of both time and money into training the whole of our staff in counselling skills. The person-centred approach is clear to see in the language chosen. From the perspective of noticing, I am more likely to notice those things that I am primed to notice.

To summarise how the hermeneutic approach has shed light on my place as a professional within the process, it is clear that I have an ideological stance that excluded children have a raw deal and that they are the victims of the piece. This translates into the almost angry, emotional language that I sometimes use. I feel like many professionals have missed the point and are getting things the wrong way round. I seem to be imploring schools to make changes and attempt to meet the needs of the children.

I have angry responses when people criticise children and have cast myself into the role of their defender. During the write up phase, I have found myself waking up in the night and noticed a passion in my writing which belies an anger that I was not expecting. This seems linked to an awakening to the mechanisms involved in the domain of contextual resources and may be amplified by the fact that as a member of the same local community, I have a vicarious sympathy with the plight of children and their families. I have assumed that the disenfranchisement of families leads to alienation compounded by the effects of a child being excluded, which in turn leads to coping mechanisms interpreted as challenging behaviour. I also have a reputational investment in a person-centred approach having a positive effect on that challenging behaviour. My instinct has been to shift away from belonging to the mechanisms which a person-centred approach may bring. This includes a feeling that it is the centre as a calm, person-centred space that has as much impact as individual social interactions.

Getting hold of the whole of the first research cycle and shaking it down in this hermeneutic way, was a cathartic exercise. The concerns I had had about the bias inherent in practitioner led research subsided somewhat as I made a concerted effort to be as transparent about the process as possible. I do not think that I managed to

remove myself from the process but simply became more aware of myself within it (Bolton 2005, Hedberg, 2009). I feel that moving into cycle two, I shall be more balanced in my approach and more open to and aware of mechanisms that had previously been beyond my understanding.

4.8 – A summary of cycle one findings

As described above, cycle one has been useful in the shaking out of my place as a professional and has also guided the next stage of the process. The development of the SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards (Appendix 1) was useful; however, a number of accounts sat outside the framework that it offered. These accounts largely involved children quickly adopting the social norms of the centre and becoming integrated into the group. The standards focused largely on the domain of situated activity, and I felt that more consideration was needed of the centre as a social setting. This meant there would be a need to re-engage with theory within cycle two to include those mechanisms within the domain of social setting that affect how a child may be drawn into a shared culture, how that culture has come about and how a child's prior experiences might affect the likelihood of that happening.

During cycle one, I had also struggled with the bi-directional nature of provision and agency. As I went into cycle two, I felt that I needed to attempt to separate out the provision of the centre from the agency of the children to better understand the system.

Working through the initial cycle of the process helped to clarify the way in which deductive reasoning and abductive inference combine to test a hypothesis and present alternative solutions, and to clarify the way that social domain theory supports that process (Houston, 2010). In this case, it supported the identification of the way in which the underlying value system of the centre operating at the level of the domain of social setting might well be a previously unconsidered mechanism affecting the cessation of challenging behaviour. Finally, the use of retroductive reasoning was key during analysis where it became clear that the cessation of behaviour described would be possible without either positive social interaction or the use of a person-centred approach as it may be possible to bring it about through the use of violence or coercion. From a critical, emancipatory perspective, there is a need for any change in behaviour to be in the best interests of the children, with a view to improving their life chances. This led to a reframing of the phenomenon from

children simply being compliant and conformist to children replacing challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour, which was felt to be a more accurate description of the pattern of behaviour observed. As described in Section 3.2, this in turn would include a reworking of both the transcendental question and the a priori hypothesis (Houston, 2010) at the beginning of cycle two.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and Findings for Cycle Two

This chapter describes the second research cycle. It describes a change in both the research question and hypothesis as my understanding developed. This resulted in a change in practice as I implemented a new SEMH Principles document with staff in a further attempt to improve our provision. This also involved the beginning of our work with professionals from other settings as we looked to develop their approaches to working with children presenting with challenging behvaviour. The chapter once again describes my working through of Houston's (2010) retroductive process and follows the combined action research/critical realism method as laid out in Table 1. It considers my collection of data in the form of my personal accounts during this period. It then describes my reflective analysis of these accounts using social domain theory and retroductive and hermeneutic analysis. Finally, this chapter consider how the findings of cycle two informed the planning for my final cycle of research.

5.1 – The revised transcendental question for cycle two

An important strength of the action research process is the way its cyclical nature (McTaggart, 1996; Costello, 2011) allows a more in-depth study over a period of time. If cycle one of the action research process was about shaking out professional bias and positioning, cycle two was about taking into account a broader range of factors which were originally outside the original scope of the investigation.

Cycle one suggested that a reframing of the original observed phenomenon would be beneficial. Rather than simply observing the absence of undesirable, challenging and extreme behaviour, it became about noticing the behaviour that replaced it. In this case, the children were replacing challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour and adopting the social norms of the centre. This broadened the range of causal mechanisms and placed greater emphasis on the domain of social setting which had largely been ignored during cycle one.

The transcendental question was therefore adapted for cycle two of the study and became:

Why do many pupils who have previously exhibited challenging behaviour replace that behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour quickly on admission to the centre?

5.2 – The revised a priori hypothesis for cycle two

This led to a reworking of the a priori hypothesis to include the term 'replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour'. At the time of rewriting the hypothesis, I was aware that I would need to re-engage with theory around the term 'happy, positive prosocial' to further develop my understanding, and I pick up this choice of language in more detail in the hermeneutic analysis of this cycle in Section 5.7 towards the end of this chapter. The other aspects of the hypothesis remained the same.

> *Children quickly replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour as we provide an environment run on person-centred principles providing positive social interactions to children with a heightened need to belong.*

5.3 – The plan and the action: development and implementation of the centre's SEMH Principles document

At the end of cycle one, I felt that I needed to improve my understanding of the mix of concepts relating to provision and those relating to agency, and I felt that separating out the provision offered by the centre from the agency of the children would support my developing understanding. With that in mind, I reworked the centre's Teaching and Learning Standards into an SEMH Principles document (Appendix 2), and the statements now each began with the term 'We will…' in order to direct focus towards the provision offered. This new SEMH Principles document was arranged around four main principles:

- We will help you understand the things that make you anxious.
- We will help you accept that learning new things means trying hard and making lots of mistakes.
- We will help you build relationships and make friends.

- We will help you explore the choices you can make.

This rewrite and the language used is discussed in more detail in the hermeneutic analysis towards the end of this chapter.

During this period, we began to offer morning sessions for groups of visitors into the centre. Delegates would spend the first hour being taken through the SEMH Principles document and then would spend the remainder of the morning in classes observing practice. Every staff member was involved and would discuss different aspects of the Principles document with visitors as they moved around the classes. The new SEMH Principles document was also used to inform lesson observations and formed part of the appraisal targets for every member of staff. Throughout this period, I continued to keep a record of accounts in the form of a professional journal.

5.4 – Seeking evidence

Evidence to test the cycle two a priori hypothesis was collected in a systematic way during the autumn term of 2018 and the first part of the spring term 2019. During cycle two, I was primed to notice those incidents in which a child was demonstrating prosocial rather than challenging behaviour, particularly where a child was acting in a way that enabled them to gradually move from being an outsider to a position of happiness and belonging within the social order of a group within the centre. As in cycle one, journaling also occurred following incidents that held a professional resonance or produced a feeling of unease (Mason, 2002; Brown and England, 2005). Between September 2018 and February 2019, 42 separate accounts were recorded.

Of these accounts, four were chosen to be analysed further using social domain theory as I felt that they pushed at the boundaries of both the hypothesis and the SEMH Principles document that was being used at the time. There was an incongruence about them that I could not articulate but which felt significant and needed to be explored in a different way.

Account 2.1 – A new child stopped to chat in the corridor on the way to class. He said that he had been worried before coming to us that children would laugh at him because he liked teddy bears. He then went

on to say that they didn't laugh at him and his demeanour is happy and settled.

Account 2.2 – I watched a dance session this morning. Around 15 children were following the lead of a dance teacher and were completely engaged and in the moment. They didn't exactly all move as one, but they seemed lost in the lesson and had no self-consciousness about it. They felt like a group of children, comfortable in their own skins and comfortable in each other's presence. We also had a child, and it was only his second week. He was on the edge of the group and giving it a good go. When looking at the whole group, he stood out. He took part but there was something guarded about his whole demeanour. In the middle of the session, he asked a member of staff if he could return to class as he had had enough. When I spoke to his mum later, she expressed her gratitude to the centre and says that he is getting up and looking forward to coming each morning. This is very different to his life before.

Account 2.3 – A child that has been with us for a long time received his hoodie in assembly this morning. It had been hung in the class with his name on for a few days and the staff said he really cared about getting it. He achieved it but it was a couple of days until assembly. He had the option of taking it and receiving it again in assembly or waiting for it. He chose to wait. This feels significant.

Account 2.4 – A new child walked cheerfully up the corridor at the end of the day. His mood seemed to be happy and breezy. A member of staff that doesn't interact with him often asked him if he had had a good day. His demeanour changed instantly, and he became very dour. He replied, 'No. Not sort of.'

Each of these accounts was considered further through the lens of social domain theory.

5.5 – Analysis through the lens of social domain theory

What will follow is a consideration of each of the four accounts above against Layder's (1997) social domains of psychobiography, situated activity, social setting and contextual resources as part of the abductive process in suggesting previously unconsidered mechanisms which may currently be lying outside the framework of the investigation to date (Danermark et al., 1997; Meyer and Lunnay, 2013). However, going into cycle two, I had also felt that I would need to re-engage with theory to include how a child may be drawn into a shared culture, how that culture has come about and how a child's prior experiences might affect the likelihood of that happening. I had also struggled with the bi-directional nature of provision and agency resulting in my attempt to separate out the provision of the centre from the agency of the children. Before considering the above accounts through each of the social domains, I will therefore first consider the critical realism view of structure and agency through Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic theory and Roy Bhaskar's (2014) transformational model of social activity (TMSA)

Archer's morphogenetic theory and Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity (TMSA)

In their overview of the use of applied critical realism in the social sciences (for the *Journal of Critical Realism*), Price and Martin highlight the general trend of researchers to use either the 'Bhaskarian form of the Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA) or the Archerian form of Morphogenesis/Morphostasis' (Price and Martin, 2018:89) to approach the way human agency interacts with social structures and either leads to their reproduction or to their transformation over time.

Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic theory aims to identify how through endless cyclical chains of interaction (Simmonds and Gazley, 2018), the agency of individuals impacts on the reproduction (morphostasis) or reshaping (morphogenesis) of social structures (Archer, 1988; 1995). She describes the morphogenetic sequence as temporal (1988; 1995; 2010) with four distinct time markers (T1, T2, T3 and T4) in each cycle with the outcome at each time marker affected by the antecedents which came before. In this study, these time markers can be applied in a straightforward way to the social setting of the centre.

T1 – T2   In this time period, the conditioning/socialisation of those individuals existing within the centre occurs due to the enabling and constraining mechanisms associated with the centre's norms and values.

T2 – T3   T2 sees the start of a situated interaction (Layder's (1997) domain of situated activity) which manifests in an outcome at T3 (such as the cessation of prior challenging behaviour).

T3 – T4   In the time period between T3 and T4, the outcome of the interaction impacts on the social structure to either reproduce it (morphostasis) or change it (morphogenesis). Layder (1985:132) describes a social structure as having 'reproduced social relations which have an ongoing, organized and relatively enduring quality to them'. The outcome of the interaction may also feedback and shape the individual, resulting in a mutual influence on both the individual and the social structure known as double morphogenesis (Layder, 2006; Archer, 1988; 1995; 2010).

Bhaskar's 1979 publication *The Possibility of Naturalism* included a very similar approach to that of morphogenetics. In his discussion of Bhaskar's TMSA, Collier (1994) describes an initial phase of socialisation, which parallels the conditioning of actors' phase between T1 and T2 in morphogenetics. Similarly, there is then an interaction phase resulting in an outcome which acts upwards to reproduce or transform the structure in question. Again, this offers a parallel to the T2 to T3 (interaction) and T3 to T4 (morphogenesis or morphostasis) phases within morphogenetics.

　　Both morphogenetic theory and TMSA are mostly concerned with gaining an understanding of the production or reproduction of social systems (Archer 1995; Simmonds and Gazley, 2018). In this this study, however, they will be primarily used to consider the outcome of an interaction at T3 (the cessation of challenging behaviour) and its antecedents. This may include the way that the enabling and constraining mechanisms associated with the setting have both conditioned the children and adults (between T1 and T2) and influenced the activity (between T2 and T3) that goes on within it (Layder, 2006; Archer and Morgan, 2020).

Considering the sample accounts through the domain of psychobiography

In Account 2.1, the child expressed concern about being laughed at by other children because he liked teddy bears, and in Account 2.4 the child at first appeared happy and then reverted to appearing very dour and monosyllabic when required to interact with a staff member who he did not know well. As described previously (Section 4.4), Mason (2002) describes the seeking of common threads within a collection of accounts which indicate an area for further exploration. Within these accounts I felt there may have been a thread of similarity regarding the way that prior life experience shapes the way we react to being put in certain situations. Over time, we develop patterns of response (Lazarus, 1991; Sroufe, 1996) which allow us to cope with the ups and downs of daily life. These play an important part in our attempts to understand the way that a child appraises and labels a stimulus and the resulting emotional and behavioural response created (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981).

Child 2.1 may well have been referring indirectly to his prior experience of being laughed at by his peers, but he felt comfortable enough in the centre to spontaneously initiate a conversation about how his liking of teddy bears was accepted by both centre staff and children. This unconditional acceptance felt like an important protective factor in his happy presentation (Luther and Eisenberg, 2017; Ungar et al., 2019) and an important mechanism in his own journey towards positive change (Handy, 2004; Lloyd, 2001; Makri-Botsari, 2015; Moran and Diamond, 2008). This may be an example of a child finding it a relief to drop their pretences and fronts and know that they will still be accepted (Stewart, 1997; Myers, 2007).

Child 2.4 had arrived in the centre presenting with an extremely dour demeanour at all times. In unguarded moments, this changed and he appeared happy, but whenever he thought someone was watching, he adopted a dour, serious persona. This appeared to be a consistent time-tested response (Lazarus, 1991) and may well have been shaped over time by his past experience in educational settings (Sroufe, 1996). Over time, this pretence had dropped with children and staff that he was familiar with to the point that when he reacted by returning to his dour persona when interacting with a staff member he did not know well, it was a marked and sudden change. He was on the way to feeling unconditionally accepted and valued in the centre but not as far along as Child 2.1 who was at the point where he felt comfortable enough to discuss it openly.

Considering the sample accounts through the domain of situated activity

The domain of situated activity is concerned with the face-to-face interactions and in the case of this study involves the situations in which children find themselves needing to deal with on an everyday basis (Layder, 1997; Houston, 2010). The nature of a child's emotional response to a situation will depend on the nature of the event (Paul and Mendl, 2018), and the child's past experience of similar events (Kleinginna and Kleinginna, 1981; Anderson and Adolphs, 2014).

In Account 2.2, the recently arrived child was taking part in a dance lesson and, similar to the accounts of the children above, his demeanour was much more guarded than other children who:

> *seemed lost in the lesson and had no self-consciousness about it. They felt like a group of children, comfortable in their own skins and comfortable in each other's presence.*

When considering the situations in which children find themselves, it is worth noting that this session was not compulsory and that he had chosen to take part. He was on the fringes but giving it a good go. The difference came when he felt my eyes on him. That changed the nature of the situated activity. He was no longer just a class member anonymously joining in with a lesson but a new child being observed and judged by the headteacher.

Bomber and Hughes (2013) describe how a child feeling that they are being judged and evaluated can shut down and become defensive. Layder's (2006:5) view is that that within situated activity, anxiety and insecurity are ever present and every situation 'must be regarded as a potential threat to the inner security for even the most calm and stable of us'. His demeanour changed and he spoke to his keyworker and asked to return to class. Layder (2006:5) describes resilience as being viewed as 'temporary, personal accomplishments generated within everyday encounters' and from this perspective, the child coped well with the anxiety of the situation without an unhelpful escalation of behaviour. The centre had also proved itself resilient enough to cope with the situation (Ungar et al., 2013) through the skill of the keyworker in handling that social interaction in a way that did not escalate the situation. The resilience of the system to cope with this situated activity can be seen as just as much dependent on the adequacy of the setting as the personal

characteristics of the child (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Luther and Eisenberg, 2017; Modecki et al., 2017).

Initially attributed to Siegel (1999), the term 'window of tolerance' is used to describe a state in which an individual's arousal levels are manageable and do not tip them into a survival response such as fight/flight or cause them to freeze/shut down (Siegel, 1999; Ogden et al., 2006; Dezelic and Ghanoum, 2016; Gill, 2017). Corrigan et al. (2010:2) adapted the earlier work of Siegel (1999) and Ogden et al., (2006) to create a representation of the window of tolerance model which described the window as an 'optimal arousal zone, encompassing both intense emotion and states of calm or relaxation, in which emotions can be tolerated and regulated'. There is an important distinction between simply providing situations which produce no response and those which produce responses that are encompassed with an individual's window of tolerance. The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (no date:online) describes the window as a place where 'you feel like you can deal with whatever's happening in your life'. The model therefore involves an everyday range of situations and an individual's unique ability to cope with them without a fight/flight or freeze/shut down response. Gill (2017:Online) describes an

> …optimum arousal level when we are within the window of tolerance that allows for the ebb and flow (ups and downs of emotions) experienced by human beings.

In each of the above accounts, the child could be said to be operating within their window of tolerance. Child 2.1 was able to bring up his prior concern about being made fun of for liking teddy bears. Child 2.2 felt my eyes on him and was able to ask a member of staff if he could return to class when he felt anxious. He successfully changed the situated activity in order to stay within his window of tolerance without an escalation into challenging behaviour. Child 2.3 was successfully operating within his window of tolerance whilst waiting for the award of his hoodie, and Child 2.4 was operating well within his window of tolerance until the nature of his situated activity changed and a member of staff he did not know well initiated interaction with him. At that point, he used a time served method of coping which was to become monosyllabic and adopt a dour demeanour. This did not result in an escalation into

challenging behaviour as the staff member ended the interaction and the situated activity changed again. In this respect, Child 2.4's monosyllabic, dour presentation had resulting in a change in situated activity and allowed him to remain within his window of tolerance.

Considering the sample accounts through the domain of social setting

The norms of the social setting where the situated activity takes place (such as the centre in the study) are important for a number of reasons. Both Bhaskar (2014) and Archer (1998; 1995) describe the top-down conditioning effect of these norms on an individual existing within a social setting. In turn, Layder (2006) then discusses the way in which the norms, practices and rituals of a social setting influence the situated activity that happens within it.

In Account 2.1 the child expressed surprise that the other children in the centre did not make fun of him for liking teddy bears. Biesta (2009:40) describes the socialisation of children to maintain social norms as one of the core purposes of education by inserting 'individuals into existing ways of doing and being'. The centre SEMH Principles document has a statement which says, 'We will accept and welcome you without judgment', and the staff are expected to work to that standard and encourage children to do the same. On initiating the discussion, Child 2.1 did not mention that staff did not make fun of him, it was the fact that the other children did not laugh at him that he chose to talk about. This feeling of acceptance by his peers may support his socialisation (Garmezy, 1991) and be a contributing protective factor in his resilience and ability to manage his day-to-day life in the centre (Toomey and Russell, 2013; Luther and Eisenberg, 2017; Ungar et al., 2019).

In Account 2.2 the children in the dance lesson were lost in the moment and comfortable enough in the centre to let themselves go without fear of ridicule. The child was new and could not do that yet. The written SEMH Principles of the centre (Appendix 2) encourage and give permission for staff to work in a certain way. In this case '*We will challenge you to learn new things and recognize when enough is enough*' and '*We will spot if you need a break from learning to help stay on track*' were relevant and relate to the choice of the keyworker to allow the child to leave the dance lesson and return to class. It is easy to forget that social norms are constructed (Jensen et al., 2014) and the premise of both Bhaskar's (2014) transformational model of social activity (TMSA) and Archer's (1988, 1995)

morphogenetics is that the norms of the setting are either reproduced or transformed through from the outcomes of social interactions. These norms are not rewritten after every encounter but from 'reproduced social relations which have an ongoing, organized and relatively enduring quality to them' (Layder, 1985:132). The interaction between the child and his keyworker reinforced that recognising when enough is enough and giving children a break to help them stay on track are part of the established social norms of the centre.

On observing Child 2.2 giving it a go on the fringes of the dance lesson, I got the sense of a child on the journey from being an outsider to one that belongs within the group. The other children:

> *…didn't exactly all move as one, but they seemed lost in the lesson and had no self-consciousness about it. They felt like a group of children, comfortable in their own skins and comfortable in each other's presence.*

I could feel his need to fit in and belong, but it was early days, and he could not quite let himself go and let down his guard. His mum had commented on how much he was looking forward to coming to the centre each day in contrast to his last school. Both Ladd (1999) and Murray and Greenberg (2000) describe the way in which a child exhibiting challenging behaviour in school may become more and more isolated from their peers as time goes on, leading to feelings of anxiety and distress. I had the sense that he was attempting to integrate as best he could, as quickly as he could in order to seek the safety that comes with being part of the group (Maslow, 1954; Baumeister et al., 2005; MacDonald and Leary, 2005; DeWall et al., 2011).

In Account 2.3, the child has been in the centre for over a year and is about to earn his hoodie (hooded sweatshirt with centre logo) for 60 consecutive successful days in the centre. The centre hoodie is part of school uniform but can only be worn by those having earned it. The term 'successful' is a subjective one and was chosen carefully. We are at pains to point out that it does not mean 60 consecutive 'perfect' days and I have come to realise over time that for me the term 'successful' means observing the social norms of the centre which falls in the Department of Education (2014) view that positive behaviour is that which conforms to social norms. On observing the interaction, I could sense that he cared very deeply about earning and receiving it. It felt like a rite of passage and a public affirmation of his acceptance into

the group. Children arriving in the centre begin this journey on day one where they aim to have a single successful day. Five consecutive days leads to a bronze star that they can wear on their sweatshirts, fifteen days leads to silver and thirty days to their gold. Finally, 60 days leads to a centre hoodie. Each of these milestones is celebrated in class and in assembly and that process starts as soon as the child arrives. It is worth considering that this provides a simple to understand, visible pathway from being an outsider to being an accepted member of the group and that the sense of belonging that this offers may be a protective factor in a child's resilience in situations they may find challenging (Anderman and Freeman, 2004; Buckley et. al., 2004; Baumeister et al., 2005; MacDonald and Leary, 2005; Newman et al., 2007; DeWall et al., 2011).

Considering the sample accounts through the domain of contextual resources
The domain of contextual resources is concerned with the wider social systems in which the child, their family and their educational setting are situated. This will include exo and macro systems (Ungar et al., 2013) which a child may have no direct contact with, but which still affect them. Houston (2017:57) describes exo systems as 'institutional forms which have a knock-on effect' on micro and meso systems, and Ungar et al. (2013:355) describes macro systems as forming the 'cultural backdrop to a child's bio-psycho-social development'. When considering the above accounts through the domain of contextual resources, I find that I am looking at accounts of situated activity and then considering possible wider systems that may be having a knock-on effect. This abductive process is about developing my own understanding and considering things which are beyond the boundary of my current conceptual framework.

When considering each of the above accounts, what I notice is the change in demeanour of children as they settle into the centre and I am speculating that this may be due to the increased sense of belonging and acceptance they find within the centre. Each of the children had not conformed to the expected social norms in their prior schools and their behaviour had been viewed as challenging. Their schools (and the centre in the study) sit within the wider English education system which has an established system for managing a child with challenging behaviour (DfE, 2018b), and all were excluded from their mainstream primary schools and placed in alternative provision (AP). The centre in the study is an example of an AP provider

sitting within the English educational system. The system funds AP provision differently from mainstream primary schools with the knock-on effect of smaller class sizes and higher staff:pupil ratios.

The way the English education system views accountability for academic progress is different for AP provision than for mainstream schools with no requirement for children to take part in statutory assessment such as end of key-stage standard assessment tests (SATs). This may have the knock-on effect of shaping the norms and established practices of the social setting and the situated activity that goes on within it. Each of the children in the above accounts were operating at a much lower academic level than the majority of their mainstream peers, and it is worth noting that in the SEMH Principles document (Appendix 2) a proportion of our written approaches to mitigating a child's anxiety during situated activity are related to academic expectation. The principles state that:

- We will give you individual targets that match carefully what you need to learn next.
- We will provide the structure and support that suits where your learning is up to.
- We will challenge you to learn new things and recognise when enough is enough.
- We will allow you to progress at your own speed without pressure to keep up with others.

Both the funding and academic accountability framework for alternative provision within the wider structure of the English education system may result in our centre being able to focus attention on mitigating children's anxiety resulting from academic expectation which in turn may lead to a reduction in their challenging behaviour.

In Account 2.1, the child had been concerned that the other children in the centre would laugh at him because he liked teddy bears. This sits in a wider cultural backdrop where it is seen as unusual for a boy of his age to like teddy bears and that had then made him a target for ridicule within his mainstream school. He is not a neurotypical child and this may be one example of his neurodiversity leaving him open to bullying and becoming isolated and distressed. Three out of the four children

in the above accounts were also not neurotypical and had also been excluded from their mainstream schools. What I notice from the accounts is their positive demeanour which may indicate that they feel safe, comfortable and accepted within the centre. Sitting within the wider structure of the English education system, it may be that alternative provision (AP) groups similar children together and gives them a place to feel safe and accepted unconditionally.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that the children in the above accounts are typical of the pupils in the centre, the majority of whom struggle academically and are working at levels which are below that expected for their age. A significant proportion are neurodiverse, and a significant proportion have other risk factors (DfE, 2018b) such as abuse, family breakdown or bereavement which increases their likelihood of presenting with SEMH needs.

5.6 – A retroductive appraisal of the a priori hypothesis for cycle two

Retroductive appraisal asks whether each aspect of a hypothesis is a true precondition of an observed phenomenon. When considering the a priori hypothesis for cycle two this asks whether children could possibly quickly replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour if they did not have a heightened need to belong or we did not provide either an environment run on person-centred principles or positive social interactions.

Firstly, there was an acknowledgement at this point that the term 'happy, positive prosocial behaviour' needs more exploration as I go into the next cycle. It did, however, still feel a relevant and necessary part of the hypothesis. The term 'heightened need to belong' no longer felt like a necessary precondition as I could imagine children ceasing challenging behaviour without this heightened need. The term 'environment run on person-centred principles' also no longer felt like a necessary precondition. Our centre uses person-centred principles to inform practice, but I could imagine a positive change in children's behaviour without provision being described in those terms. The term 'positive social interaction' still felt appropriate and it is difficult to imagine a rapid, positive change in a child's behaviour without them experiencing positive social interaction.

5.7 – Using a hermeneutic approach to shake out professional place

During cycle one, a hermeneutic approach helped to shake out examples of professional presuppositions and potential bias, and the same method was completed for cycle two of the process. This initially considered the changes to the phenomenon being identified, the transcendental question and the resultant changes to the a priori hypothesis before moving on to consider the extracts chosen and the development of our SEMH Principles document.

Cycle two involved a reframing of the phenomenon being observed. During the rationale for that change, I wrote that we had no interest in making children simply '*compliant* and *conformist*'. Looking back at this use of language it seems rooted in a change in the philosophy I have been attempting to implement in the centre. This has been about pro-actively recognising pupil behaviour as a symptom of unmet needs which need to be met rather than responding with behaviour management techniques after the event. It demonstrates my professional leaning towards the avoidance of escalation rather than de-escalation techniques and betrays a professional need to ensure that the changes we make are in the best interests of the children and are not masking poor practice through corrective behaviour techniques. I described some methods of achieving a cessation of challenging behaviour as *violent, degrading, criminal, manipulative, abhorrent* and *coercive*. Although it is unremarkable that a professional would regard such behaviour management methods as unacceptable, feeling a need to list them is noteworthy. As in cycle one, it demonstrates my own professional positioning as a protector of excluded children and exposes my own underlying opinion that many of these children have been treated poorly in the past.

The revised a priori hypothesis states that children '*quickly replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour*'. There was a careful choice of language here and it underwent a number of rewrites. It began with simply referring to *'prosocial behaviour'.* This term felt appropriate but gives away a professional unease and ambiguity around how to describe the range of new behaviour being observed. As a catch-all term, it served its purpose and felt suitably academic and was chosen as it would give space to explore it further; however, I then went back and added two more terms as there was a feeling that the term 'prosocial' did not capture the flavour of what was being observed. The word '*happy*' was deliberately added, and it seemed to be there as a very specific term to evoke emotion in those reading and to help them understand that the centre is not clinical

but is an emotional environment where it is not simply about correcting behaviour but about enjoyment and happiness. Again, this seems rooted in my role as protector of the children and my underlying feeling that their educational lives to date have not been happy and that is something that needs to be addressed. The term '**positive**' was then added in one rewrite and left out in another. It was then put back as it seemed to serve the purpose of giving the term a forward momentum as a child moves from challenging behaviour to non-challenging behaviour. From a professional perspective, reputation is something I clearly value, and I need those reading to feel like there is substance behind our work and adding 'positive' to the term seems to be there to give an impression of balance and drive.

When considering the accounts chosen for further analysis, it is worth looking at the overall effect that the choices make as a whole. They give the impression of a heart-warming environment which cares about the way children feel; it betrays again a professional position which feels strongly that excluded children have been victims who in the right environment can make progress and flourish. They seem to shout out, 'These children are fine if their needs are met'.

The last line of the final extract breaks this narrative. Here, the child's demeanour changes and he becomes very dour. If I had been deliberately attempting to create an impression of an overwhelmingly heart-warming environment, this account would have not been chosen, so although the pattern is there, it appears to have happened subconsciously, shedding light on some deep-seated professional positioning that may otherwise have remained hidden.

When taking each extract in turn, the language used is important. I used the term '***demeanour***' to describe the presentation of a child in Accounts 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4. Although attempting to notice prosocial behaviour, I have chosen to notice and describe how a child presents through their state of mind and body language. I also used the terms '***settled***' and '***comfortable in their own skins***' in Accounts 2.1 and 2.2 to describe the children's demeanour. When added to the description of the child in the remaining Account (2.3), the impression created is of children who are content and comfortable in the centre and are happy in themselves and their place. The mixed use of language terms here seems to indicate a lack of professional clarity in exactly what is being noticed, and rereading it gives me a sense of unease as it feels like the range of terms and the use of a catch-all term such as '***prosocial***' was used to accept that I was unsure and leave further exploration to a later date.

Account 2.3 discusses a child willing to wait to receive a hoodie in assembly and ended with the term '***rite of passage***'. This account has a coming of age feel about it and almost feels like a graduation ceremony on rereading, and the effect achieved by the words is celebratory. Both the choice of this account and the language and flow of it demonstrate a professional positioning which gets great pleasure in seeing the change in pupils over time. Although it does not name it as such, the account is about presentation and demeanour, and about memories of the child smiling and being relaxed about his decision to wait for the hoodie. On rereading, it adds weight to the current inability I seem to have to describe what I mean when I see happy, positive prosocial behaviour. In Account 2.4, I use the word 'breezy', but in each account I use a different term and fumble around trying to capture the essence of the positive change that I am attempting to describe. Capturing the nature of the way the children are presenting feels like smoke escaping through my fingers, but my repeated attempts uncover how important understanding a child's demeanour is to me in this process.

The choices made when writing the SEMH Principles document used in this cycle may also provide some insight into my professional positioning. The document was being used at the time to describe our provision to visitors and also to use as a training tool with staff. It was designed to shine a light on the hidden, informal curriculum and was very new and fresh in my mind. In developing the structure, I separated out our provision from the '***agency***' of the pupils. It shows that I was dividing the mass of causal mechanisms into two main categories and uncovers a potentially problematic reductionism as I simplified the world into the mechanisms caused by the pupils and those caused by the provision. The choice of the term '***agency***' as the catch-all label for those mechanisms caused by the pupils feels problematic upon rereading, as the mechanisms felt more related to the pyschobiographical backgrounds of the pupils rather than their conscious choices. I knew that some of those mechanisms experienced through being in the centre were not provided directly by staff, but my description of the rationale at the time shows a struggle to manage the distinction as all the statements in the SEMH Principles document were around our overt actions and all began with '***We will…***'.

The structure was attempting to make sense of part of the gamut of causal mechanisms but was purposely limited in its scope. It reveals my professional tendency to get on and attempt to make sense through a gradual approach over time

and to work my way through confusion. Reading back, I have a sense of not being clear, but it reveals a determination to not take the easy path and settle on something that can easily be explained. I had a sense that I was playing with models and was comfortable with the elusive nature of the truth I was working towards. I knew that it was flawed but that I needed to be pragmatic and that sense would be made of it, even though I was walking in a fog at the time. I get a sense of trust in the process, of being willing to wait for clarity to come and of treating the opaqueness I found with good humour. As a professional in the middle of this study, this trust combined with a continual forward momentum is important to note. I think that it demonstrates a genuine journey of discovery and an openness to wherever I end up rather than attempting to simply get to a predetermined point and tick off markers along the way.

My choice in implementing the newly revised SEMH principles with staff was telling. I had invested many hours in their creation and they formed the cornerstone of my beliefs about the way we should work with the children entering our centre. I had a great deal invested in them and from a reputational perspective, I was completely tied up and intertwined with them. I had a vested interest in proving that they were effective, and there is no doubt that I was primed to notice the things I had been working on with staff. My choice to then further consider accounts which I believed fell outside the limit of our SEMH Principles document does demonstrate an awareness of my positioning as a researcher and my attempt to mitigate for that by actively looking for a lack of balance in order to better understand causal mechanisms that may have currently been beyond the boundary of my current understanding.

The changes made in developing the SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards into the SEMH Principles document and the language choices made are worth considering when attempting to uncover a sense of professional positioning at the time. The new categories chosen sum up the different kinds of provision offered by the centre in an attempt to compare our provision with that laid out by social domain theory.

The first key principle is '**We will help you understand the things that make you anxious**'. Reading back, I felt the uncertainty in this statement and the internal wrangling that went into it. I felt it had the effect of putting the responsibility for the anxiety at the feet of the children, and it felt inaccurate in that our provision is more

about ensuring pupils are not put in positions where they will feel anxious or distressed. I also felt a sense of uncertainty about the word '**anxious**'. I seemed to be trying to say that the emotional world of the children is entirely rooted in anxiety and that all other emotions stem from initial anxiety responses. On rereading, it felt simplistic and reductive and linked to my ambiguity around the terms 'prosocial' and 'demeanour'. In order to alleviate the sense of unease at the term 'we will help you understand the things that make you anxious', I seemed to be wanting to say '*We will help you be happy, positive and prosocial*' if only I could work out what these terms meant. This is illustrative of the ongoing hermeneutic, cyclical process of making sense and was a staging post between confusion and understanding. On rereading, I had a sense of unease at the language I had used and the meaning it elicited. I was attempting to unearth the cause of that unease and move on to a place where I felt more comfortable whilst acknowledging that more needs to be done within the next cycle to deepen understanding further.

During the development of the SEMH Principles document, I had rewritten the statement '**Emotional states being contagious and the mood of one person affecting the mood of another**' and changed it to '**We will do our best to be calm at all times**'. This change seemed to demonstrate a shift away from explanation of causal effects to a simple straightforward description of provision. The effect elicited on the reread is one of loss and worry at the resultant lack of explanation and this uncovers an important sense of professional place as I characterise myself as a trainer and educator both of our staff and of those educational professionals who may end up using our SEMH principles more widely. The old term and the new feel like two parts of the same sentence which would read 'Emotional states are contagious and the mood of one person affects the other so we will do our best to be calm at all times'. I shifted from theory to action with the purpose of giving staff a non-negotiable statement to follow, but my anxiety showed that I felt that this was not enough for me and that I needed people to understand why we do the things we do. I had created a document called '*SEMH Principles*' but on rereading see that this would be more accurately titled '*SEMH Strategies*'. As a professional in the centre of the process, this shows my tendency to be principle led rather than strategy led. When delivering training to both our staff and outside agencies, my focus has repeatedly been on the 'why' of what we do rather than the 'what', and I spend the majority of training time explaining what lies behind our strategies and only briefly

talk about the strategies themselves at the end. I feel protective of our approach and this reread has helped uncover that. Not in the sense that I think that it is perfect and fully formed, rather, that it is fragile whilst understanding is developing.

On rereading, a number of the SEMH principles used within this cycle drew unexpected responses as I passed over them. '***We will make sure that you never feel isolated or alone***' again feels like a strategy where the purpose may be lost. The purpose behind the choice of language was to couch terminology in the positive and shows my professional place as someone who attempts to shape behaviour rather than punish children. This professional position is so ingrained that I could not bring myself to say what I actually meant which was that I believe that the enforced isolation of children is distressing and therefore leads to escalations in challenging behaviour. On one side, I had my professional training and practice which had led to a positive reframing of statements for over 25 years, and on the other I had a need to use our SEMH Principles document as a training tool to shed light on what I believe is the raw deal some SEMH children have in some primary schools. I sensed that continuing struggle on rereading the whole SEMH Principles document and although I could reconcile myself to this on the whole, I could not let it pass when it came down to the use of isolation. Hence, I found myself wanting to write something more like, '***We will never use enforced isolation as a form of punishment as we understand that is distressing and barbaric***'. Anger resurfacing during the hermeneutic process and my professional position on this was exposed once again. This unease of both the writing of principle statements and rereading them hermeneutically had shaken that professional position out.

Other examples of changes to language that caused a response on rereading included the change from '***honouring***' children's efforts to '***valuing***' them and also the change from supporting children in '***developing strengths***' to supporting them in '***learning new things***'. In this hermeneutic process, it is not enough just to discuss what is meant by the phrases. It is the effect of the choice of language and what that reveals about my professional positioning that is needed. In that respect, my emotional response to rereading these minor tweaks feel significant in that I get a sense of letting the children down.

The language choice in both the initial phrases gave me a sense that we care about the individual child and that we are fighting for them and 'prizing' (Rogers, 1956,1957) their efforts in a truly person-centred way and that we would actively

seek out potential areas of strength in a child and support them to develop those areas with all the resultant benefits that this may bring. The new phrases had a generic feel that gave me a sense of a child being treated as one of a mass and of lip service being paid to these principles rather than a genuine effort being made to ensure that this happens. This once again revealed an anger, a sense of injustice and a professional position which showed my belief that SEMH children do not receive the differentiated provision that they are entitled to, are treated as one of the mass and that the responsibility for their behaviour and exclusion is put at their door rather than the professionals working with them.

On rereading, the category that involved the most internal disturbance was that of, '***We will help you understand the choices that you make***'. Taken at face value, there was nothing controversial in here; however, the language used was very carefully selected, although having used it, it did not reflect the intended purpose. I knew that at the outset but lacked the professional courage to say what I meant which was about '***change***' rather than '***choice***'. At the time of the initial writing, I felt that I needed to capture the way that our provision brings about '***change***' but shied away from it and could not bring myself to use the word and replaced it with '***choice***'. The effect of the language revolved around respect for each child's autonomy and it revealed my professional concern that we would greet a child by making a very explicit assumption that we thought they needed to change. Maslow (1943; 1954) discusses self-actualisation which is around making positive changes. The goal of a truly person-centred approach is to create the conditions where positive change can happen (Rogers, 1957) based on the premise that an actualising tendency is present in us all. The use of the word '***choices***' reveals a professional uncertainty that was present at the time and an embarrassment of admitting that we were attempting to change children. Once it is couched in the language of creating conditions for children to bring about their own change, the embarrassment goes. This demonstrates that it was less about acknowledging the need for change and more about us imposing it upon them and goes back to our core belief in not creating children who are merely compliant and conform to our expectations but children who are happy, positive and prosocial.

5.8 – A summary of cycle two findings

Cycle two has helped develop my conceptual understanding of the multidirectional nature of the mechanisms operating within each of Layder's (1997) social domains. Bhaskar's (2014) transformational model of social activity (TMSA) and Archer's (1988; 1995) morphogenetics both describe the conditioning effect of a social setting on the individuals operating within it. However, they also both describe how the agency of the individuals shapes the nature of social interactions and how this in turn may either reproduce or transform the social setting in which these interactions take place. The analysis against the theory of social domains also demonstrated that I had not previously considered the knock-on effects (Ungar et al., 2013; Houston, 2017) that factors such as funding and academic accountability within wider systems such as English education have on both settings and the individuals existing within them.

The a priori hypothesis for cycle two described children being happy, positive and prosocial. When considering the sample accounts through the domain of situated activity, I introduced the concept of children operating within their window of tolerance (Siegel, 1999; Ogden et al., 2006; Corrigan et al., 2010; Gill, 2017) to describe the presentation of children socially interacting without tipping into a survival response such as fight/flight or causing them to freeze or shut down (Dezelic and Ghanoum, 2016).

The model below (Figure 4) draws together my current understanding of the relationship between the provision offered by the centre and the theory of social domains (Layder, 2006) and provides areas of further investigation for cycle three. It attempts to capture a growing understanding of the multidirectional nature of the mechanisms operating across the domains and the outcome for a child operating within their window of tolerance during situated activity. It is acknowledged that this model is a snapshot capturing thinking at the end of cycle two and reduces the complex, swirling set of causal mechanisms to a simplistic structure. The social domains are represented in bold italics.
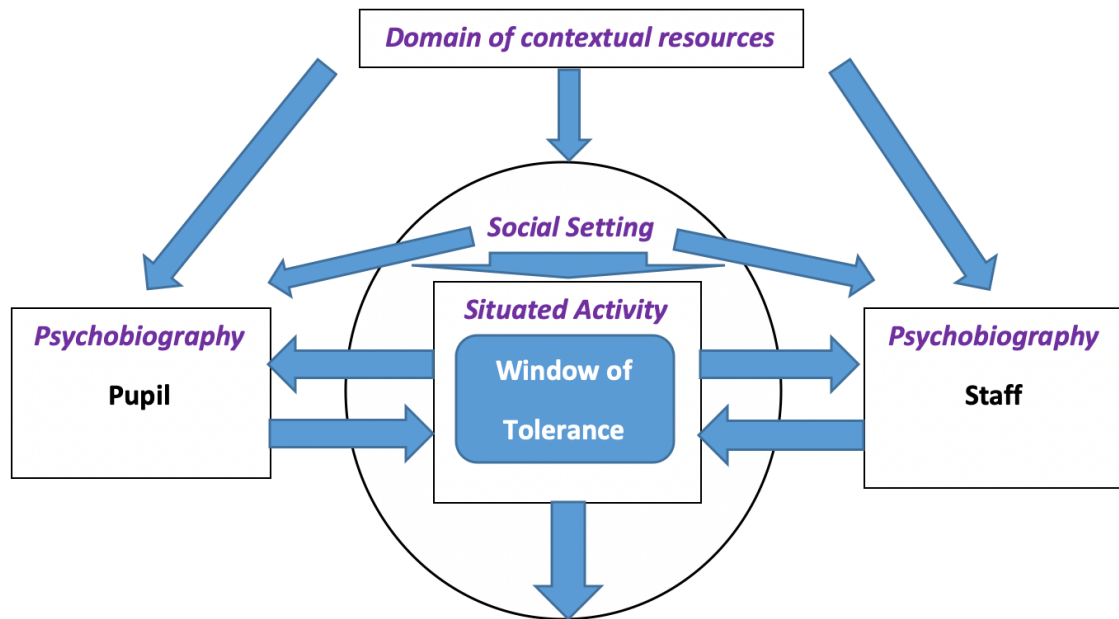
Figure 4 – Model of social domain theory relating to provision within the centre.

At the centre of the process is a child who has been put into a social situation (situated activity). At the centre of this is a window of tolerance within which the child can function without evoking an unhelpful emotional response. This situated activity takes place within the wider context of a social setting, such as the centre in the study. The conditioning effect of existing within such a social setting acts on the psychobiography of both the children and the staff which in turn influences the situated activity that takes place. The norms and practices of the social setting also influence the nature of the situated activity which takes place within it. The outcome of the situated activity affects both the psychobiography of those involved and also acts to reproduce or transform the social setting over time.

This whole process sits within the wider domain of contextual resources which includes wider exo and macro systems, such as the English education system and the cultural norms and expectations of English society as whole. These impact on both the psychobiography of all concerned and the norms and practices of the social settings in which they exist.

Following cycle two, I felt that it was important to further explore the indicators of a child operating within their 'window of tolerance' and how this related to the term 'happy, positive prosocial behaviour' used in the a priori hypothesis.

Chapter 6 – Analysis and Findings for Cycle Three

This chapter describes the final research cycle and once again begins with a revision to the research question and a priori hypothesis. This cycle resulted in a change in practice as I developed and implemented an assessment tool based on our SEMH Principles in order to support a more bespoke level of provision for each child. This was also with a view of sharing this tool with professionals from other settings as part of our developing work to improve the lot of children at risk of exclusion from primary schools. It once again describes my working through of Houston's (2010) retroductive process and follows the combined action research/critical realism method as laid out in Table 1. It considers my collection of data in the form of my personal accounts during this period. It then describes my reflective analysis of these accounts using social domain theory and retroductive and hermeneutic analysis.

6.1 – The revised transcendental question for cycle three

The model created within cycle two (Figure 4) shows children operating within a window of tolerance at the centre of situated activity domain. The transcendental question going into cycle three was reframed once again to reflect this developing understanding and became:

> ***Why do many pupils who have previously exhibited challenging behaviour replace that behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour within their window of tolerance quickly on admission to the centre?***

The led to the a priori hypothesis also being modified going into cycle three.

6.2 – The revised a priori hypothesis for cycle three

The model created in cycle two used much of the language associated with social domain theory and the new a priori hypothesis also took this into account. It became:

Children rapidly replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour as we provide a social setting designed to create positive situated activity which leads to children operating within their window of tolerance.

The established norms of the centre support social interactions which allow children to operate within their window of tolerance. This leads to children replacing their challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour. The hypothesis still includes the terms 'challenging behaviour' and 'happy, positive prosocial behaviour' to describe the change in the way children present in the centre and also introduces the concept of a child appearing to be 'operating within their window of tolerance'. All are related to outcomes, and at the end of cycle two, I felt that I needed to develop my understanding of the way the concepts were related. Therefore, during cycle three there will be an emphasis on noticing situated activity where outcomes may indicate a child operating within their window of tolerance.

6.3 – The plan and the action: development and implementation of the centre's SEMH Profile Tool document

The statements within the SEMH Principles document (Appendix 2) developed and used during cycle two of the study each described an aspect of our provision. In order to emphasise outcomes, these statements were rewritten in an attempt to capture observable outcomes related to our provision. This became our SEMH Profile Tool. It was shared with staff and they began to use it as class teams as an aid to developing bespoke provision aimed at best meeting the needs of each child. It was acknowledged at that time that the outcome statements were a first attempt to understand how our SEMH Principles statements were linked to outcomes in this way. It was also used as part of our ongoing work with professionals from other settings who wished to improve their own practice in working with children presenting with challenging behaviour. As in the previous two cycles, expectation for the use of this tool formed part of staff appraisals, and this rewrite and the language used is discussed in more detail in the hermeneutic analysis towards the end of this chapter.

6.4 – Seeking evidence

Evidence to test the cycle three a priori hypothesis was collected in a systematic way during the second half of the 2018/19 academic year. As in the first two cycles, journaling occurred following incidents that held a professional resonance or produced a feeling of unease (Mason, 2002; Brown and England, 2005). During cycle three, I was primed to notice those incidents in which a child's demeanour indicated whether they were operating within their window of tolerance and between February and July 2019, 47 separate journal accounts were collected.

In writing the accounts, I felt there was a disconnect between the outcomes described by the profile tool and those which I had felt important enough to note. These included times when I thought that the language I had used regarding a child's demeanour may have indicated that a child's demeanour was operating within their window of tolerance.

One of the last cycle three accounts (3rd July 2019) showed that I was feeling this disconnect:

> ***Account 3.1 – A long conversation with one of the teaching staff today about the nature of a happy demeanour. It is hard to quantify and has lots of nuance and subtlety. Happy, relaxed, comfy, able to be absorbed in tasks, settled, comfy in our skin, content, calm.***

This exposed a disparity between the outcomes I had been expecting to observe (described in the profile tool) and those actually observed, and I was wrestling with that. This illuminated my professional place at that point in time and was a useful part of the ongoing process of making sense.

What followed was an exercise where I drew out single words and phrases from the cycle three accounts where I felt that a child's demeanour may indicate that a child was operating within their window of tolerance. The results are shown in Table 2 below. The column headings relate to the categories within our newly developed SEMH Profile Tool.

Table 2 – Demeanour words and phrases noted in cycle three accounts

Anxiety	Resilience	Relationships	Readiness for change
Calm	Positive	Trust	Could not let himself go

OK	Bang on	Polite	Accepting
Fine	Proud	Humorous	Expose himself a little
Smiley	Engaged	Slowly becoming a member of the centre	Reflective
Happy	Confident	Involved	Actualising tendency
Enjoy	Successful	Joining in	They belong
Comfortable	Deeply involved	Kind	OK in his own skin
Content	Determined	Open	Appreciative
Relaxed	Patient	Compliant	Honest
Settled	Manage emotional responses	Fitting in	Personal responsibility
		Conforming to norms	Sticking up for beliefs
		Helpful	
		Chatty	
		Less guarded	
		Giving	
		Supportive	
		Friendly	
		Playful	

6.5 – Analysis through the lens of social domain theory

As in the previous two cycles, in order to support the abductive process in suggesting previously unconsidered mechanisms which may lie beyond the current

framework of understanding, the accounts were considered through each of Layder's (1997) social domains. At the end of cycle two, a model (Figure 4) was suggested which showed the relationship between the social domains in a setting such as the centre in the study. At the centre of the model was the concept of a child operating within their window of tolerance. The a priori hypothesis for cycle three suggested that children replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour because they are operating within this window of tolerance. Therefore, how mechanisms within each of the domains are related to the concept of window of tolerance are considered.

Considering the accounts through the domain of psychobiography

Bronfenbrenner (1986), Ungar et al. (2013) and Houston (2017) all describe bio systems being at the centre of an individual's personal social ecology, and during cycle two, an individual operating within their window of tolerance was described as them being able to maintain a level of optimal emotional arousal (Gill, 2017). Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016:43) describe the 'window of tolerance model' as 'our unique zone of autonomic nervous system and limbic brain responses (emotional arousal) that is optimal for our own comfort and well-being' where the autonomic nervous system is governing the physiological changes that occur in the body when an individual experiences an emotive event (Porges, 2003; Appelhans and Luecken, 2006; Hjelland et al., 2007; Bunford et al., 2015)

The autonomic nervous system described is the mainly unconscious mechanism that controls bodily functions such as heart rate, digestion and breathing which are triggered during a fight/flight/freeze response. It is made up of the sympathetic and parasympathetic strands (Siegel, 1999; Ogden et al., 2006; Corrigan et al., 2010; Dezelic and Ghanoum, 2016; Gill, 2017). These work in tandem to cycle between a state of arousal and a state of calm, and within the window of tolerance, the cycle of arousal and calm falls within normal, manageable boundaries. Gill (2017:Online) describes this as a state of 'calm arousal' which is

> …another way of describing how we are in the window unless we become 'over stimulated' which may cause 'hyperarousal' which may be characterized as fight/flight. Too much hyperarousal pushes us into overwhelm beyond that

which we can cope with and we go into 'hypoarousal' which freezes or shuts us down.

Within the accounts, I had seen many examples of children of children appearing to be within a window of tolerance and then tipping into what may have been hyper or hypo-arousal when the nature of the situated activity changed.

Account 3.2 – I showed a new child around the centre today. His demeanour was calm and OK until we got to the playground. There were quite a lot of children outside and it felt busy. His feet stopped and he couldn't make them go any further. We came back inside, and he was fine.
Account 3.3 – A new child has been with us for a few days and attendance has been sporadic. They spent the first few days with hood up. They set off to assembly this morning but when they got to the hall door, their feet stopped moving and they couldn't go any further.

In both these examples, I was linking my empirical observation with the concepts of both window of tolerance and being able to maintain a level of emotional arousal. Figure 5, below, represents a model which captured my understanding of this process at this point in time. In creating the model, I was comparing practice with theory, drawing on the work of Siegel (1999); Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016); the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (no date); Ogden et al. (2006); Corrigan et al. (2010); and Porges (2003).
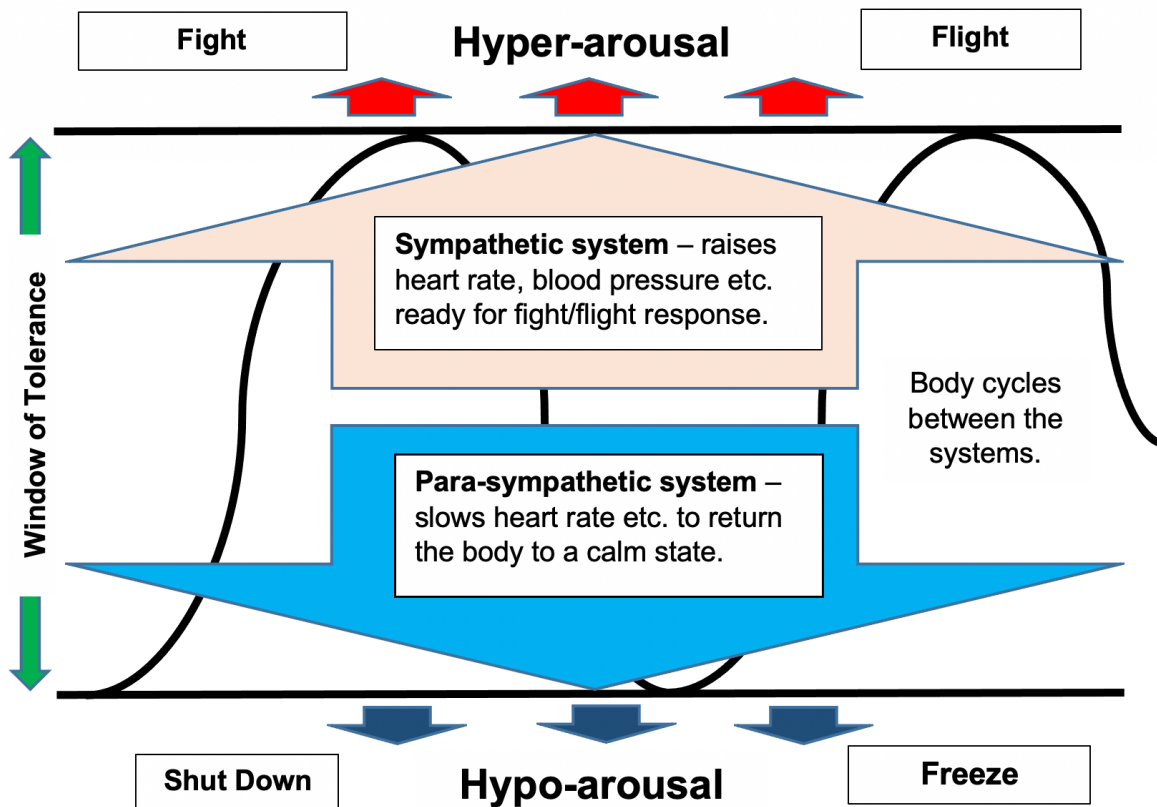
Figure 5 – A model of the autonomic system related to the window of tolerance.

In this model (Figure 5), the sympathetic and parasympathetic components of the autonomic nervous system work against each other to support the optimal level of arousal for the situation. Within the window of tolerance, they work together to ensure that the body does not trip into the hyper- or hypo-arousal state; however, when put in a situation which is beyond the individual's window of tolerance, hyper-arousal is likely to follow with the body preparing itself for fight or flight. It may also include the freeze response which is characterised by a high level of arousal and is accompanied by immobility (Corrigan et al., 2010). This appeared to be what I had observed in both accounts as each child had not been able to move their feet any further. When we are outside of the window, the body shuts down those parts of the body that are not needed for imminent survival. Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016:43) describe this process:

When we are out of the window on either the upper (hyper-aroused) or lower (hypo-aroused) sides of the window, the prefrontal cortex essentially 'goes offline,' with only subcortical brain regions (limbic system-emotional brain, and brain stem) staying active. This process removes our ability to 'think through' our actions and possible consequences.

As illustrative accounts, I chose the two above (Accounts 3.2 and 3.3) as they did not involve a sudden obvious event that may have caused a large emotional reaction. The situated activity was changing, and the child did not escalate into extreme challenging behaviour but very quietly appeared to freeze and seemed powerless to do anything about it at that point.

Walking onto a playground or into assembly could be described as one of the normal, everyday parts of school life that ordinarily a child would manage within their window of tolerance, leading to the speculation that there is some aspect of each child's psychobiography that is feeding into this unique emotional response which tipped them beyond their limit and led to an impact on the width of the personal window of tolerance. 'Width' is an interesting term that is consistently used. Ogden et al. (2006:28) describe how 'the width of a window of tolerance is directly related to how much stimulation is required to elicit the "threshold" response'. For some children the window is wide and for some it is very narrow. Ogden et al. (2006:28) go on to describe how 'traumatized individuals typically experience unusually low or unusually high thresholds, or both', and Gill (2017:Online) describes how 'adverse experiences also shrink our window of tolerance, meaning we have less capacity to ebb and flow and a greater tendency to become overwhelmed more quickly'. These risk factors and adverse experiences are wide ranging and cumulative in the sense that the more adverse experiences and risk factors experienced, the more likely it is that a child will have a very narrow window and low threshold (Dezelic and Ghanoum, 2016; Department for Education, 2018b).

The implication is that a child's psychobiography may mean that their window of tolerance is smaller than their peers, and they may well trip into a hyper-arousal state when put in situations within which their peers can maintain their state of calm. This may include many situations in an everyday mainstream school environment where a child may perceive a level of threat which may not exist. The goal of the autonomic system is to be flexible as it evolved to help human beings survive in

adverse and dangerous situations and to ensure the body is prepared physiologically by shutting down all unnecessary systems and bringing emergency systems online quickly (Porges, 2003). However, as Ogden et al. (2006:26) explain, 'whereas these extremes of arousal may be adaptive in certain traumatic situations, they become maladaptive when they persist in nonthreatening contexts'. Citing Siegel (1999) and Ogden et al. (2006), Corrigan et al. (2010:2) develop this theme and describe the 'emotional dysregulation driving maladaptive efforts to diminish distress'. This may result in behaviour which the child is using to bring themselves back into a state of regulation. In Accounts 3.2 and 3.3 this may describe the outcome where both children froze when presented with a situation which would not ordinarily be seen as threatening.

Considering the accounts through the domain of situated activity

As described in Accounts 3.2 and 3.3 above, the nature of the situated activity that a child is placed in will impact on the outcome. When considering the concept of window of tolerance through the domain of situated activity, I first considered the way the nature of the social interaction may influence a child's movement along their sympathetic/parasympathetic continuum, and then I further considered the language I used in the accounts to describe whether I believed the demeanour of a child indicated that they were operating within their window of tolerance during that interaction.

When considering how social interaction (such as that within situated activity) influences emotional arousal, Porges (1995) introduced his 'polyvagal' theory which suggested a three-way hierarchical response to being placed in a threatening situation. As previously discussed, hyper-arousal prepares the body for a fight/flight survival situation. When this state is maintained beyond the level that can be tolerated, the body is pushed into hypo-arousal which causes a 'freeze' or 'shut down' (Gill, 2017:Online) response. Porges (1995; 2003), however, suggested an additional response to a threatening situation which he called the 'social engagement system'.

Porges (1995; 2003) describes the twin strands of the Vagus nerve acting as a balance to the sympathetic system in order to give the autonomic nervous system the flexibility to move along a continuum. Porges' (1995; 2003) polyvagal theory suggests that if an individual feels some initial safety then their body will first opt to

use their 'social engagement system' in response to raised emotional arousal in order to illicit calm and allow them to stay in their window of tolerance. This idea was picked up by Ogden et al. (2006:27) who describe the social engagement system as a '"braking" mechanism on heart rate which inhibits defensive reactions and keeps the arousal state within the window of tolerance'.

> *Account 3.4 – A new child has arrived in one of the classes. I popped into the class and saw 2 children playing well together who usually don't. I commented on it to the class teacher and she said that since the new child arrived, one of the two children [Child 3.4] has suddenly approached the other and they are now spending time together. The class teacher said that on the trip last week, the same child suddenly began to engage with the other children in a way he would not normally do.*

In this account, Child 3.4 (who had been in the centre some time) had spontaneously initiated social interaction with a child in his class who he would not ordinarily engage with. It was unusual enough for me to notice when I visited the class and unusual enough for the class teacher to mention that it had also happened on a class trip. In both cases, the situated activity had changed. Firstly, a new child had started in Child 3.4's class and initially their presentation had been loud and a little unpredictable. This changed the nature of the situated activity for Child 3.4 as there was suddenly a new, loud, unpredictable child in the class.

In the second instance, Child 3.4 was initiating social interaction on a class trip to a completely new place. In his previous school, he had not been allowed to access trips and this was a new and possibly daunting experience for him. His level of social engagement with the other children he knew well was much higher in this situation than in the normal day-to-day class situation. It may be that these were both examples of the child using the 'braking' mechanism of social engagement described by Ogden et al. (2006:27) above. This 'braking' mechanism allows the experience of a full range of emotions within a tolerable range without relying on the big physiological responses of hyper- or hypo-arousal. It allows a flexibility that the extremes of emotional arousal do not and allows a child to function socially in situations they otherwise might find challenging.

After observing practice and re-engaging with theory, I adapted my previous model (Figure 5) to capture my developing understanding of the way social engagement, the autonomic system and the window of tolerance are related. This adapted model captures my developing understanding at that time and is shown below in Figure 6:
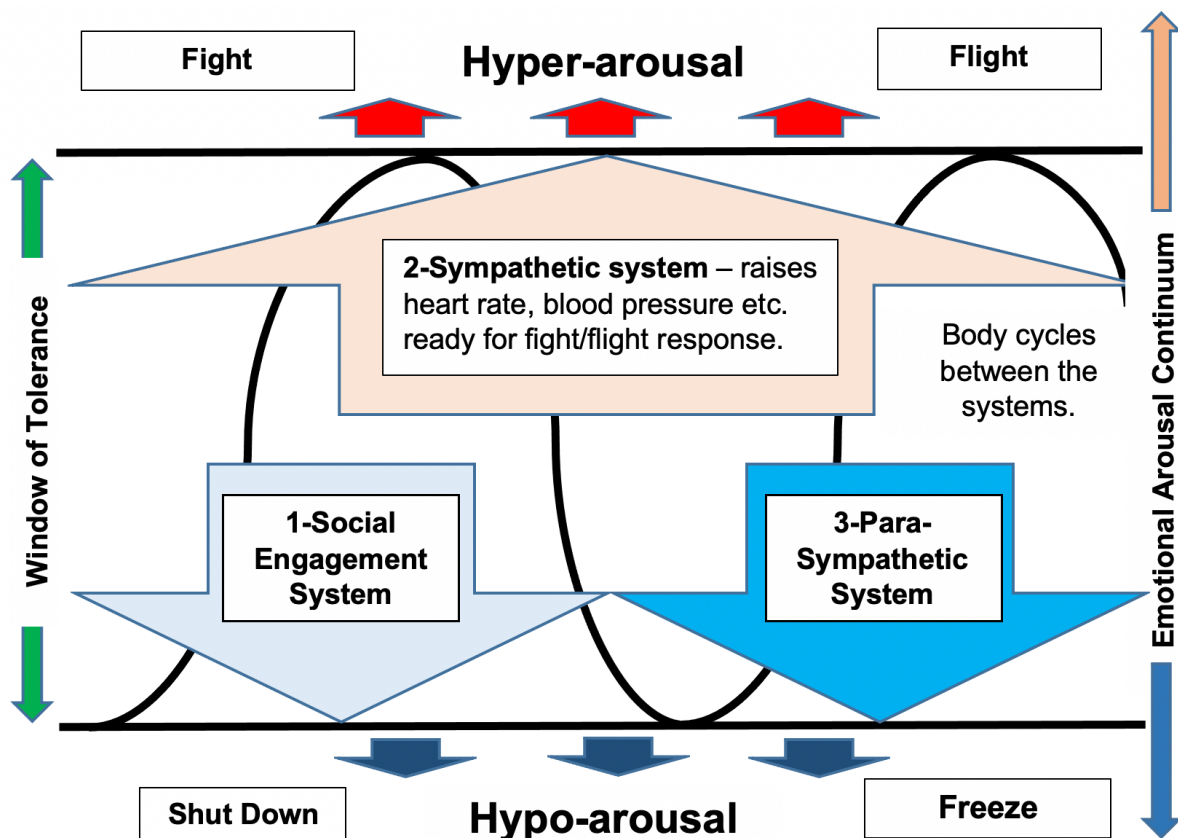
Figure 6 – Social engagement system relating to the window of tolerance.

Porges (1995, 2003) describes the social engagement system as a two-way process of giving and receiving social cues. The body becomes primed to give and receive cues relating to social connection. These may include laughter and tone of voice. Facial expressions and body language are important social cues, and eye contact and touch are also important. In a potentially threatening situation, a child may initiate social interaction in order to engage the social engagement system and reduce arousal.

Once activated, 'social engagement regulated the sympathetic nervous system, facilitates engagement with the environment and helps us form positive

attachment and social bonds' (Ogden et al., 2006:27). This is overridden when the social engagement system does not reduce the perceived threat. At that point, the sympathetic system becomes dominant and the body shifts into hyper-arousal. The way that we interact with children within situated activity is therefore impactful on a key mechanism operating within the window of tolerance. If we can better understand how this mechanism operates then we may discover how it feeds into the overall picture of behavioural presentation when a child arrives at the centre.

Porges' (1995) polyvagal theory has implications for our interaction with pupils. It is important for us to consider the role that social engagement might play in the emotional regulation of our pupils and our potential role in fostering such engagement within the domain of situated activity to allow for their social engagement systems to support their emotional regulation. Porges gives an example of a child being hit in the mouth during play. If the social engagement system is operating strongly, the shock and sense of threat can be dampened down; however, if the social engagement system is operating weakly, the child can tip into hyper-arousal with all that it entails. Creating situated activity that not only feels safe enough for social engagement but also promotes it may allow this driver to operate successfully as a regulating mechanism.

> ***Account 3.5 – The new child who refuses to take hood down and engage with other children was working with a member of staff and some younger children. She was escorting them to and from class and helping administer some spelling tests. She was open and engaged with the children and the member of staff***

> ***Account 3.6 – As I walked past the hall this morning, I saw a child playing the cello with the music teacher. He was a child who had arrived in the centre and did not smile at all. He was very reluctant to give eye contact. This morning, he was deeply involved with what he was doing and engaging well with the teacher. He was content and relaxed and, in the moment, completely absorbed in what he was doing.***

In both these accounts, children who had initially been very withdrawn, began to socially engage and appeared to cope well with the situated activity in which they

found themselves. The language that I used to describe their presentation (open, engaged, deeply, involved, engaging, content, relaxed, completely absorbed) was illustrative of that which I was using within the accounts. Siegal (1999), Porges (2003), Ogden et al. (2006), Corrigan et al. (2010), Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016), and the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Medicine (no date) all use similar language to indicate a child operating at various points on the emotional arousal continuum, including within the window of tolerance. In order to better relate the theory that each of these authors presents with the language that I was using to describe practice, I developed a framework that pulled together the language used as indicators of arousal from across the literature. This supported my developing understanding at that point in time and is represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Indicators of states of arousal

Demeanour indicators		Arousal state	Behavioural indicators

Obsessive
    Aggressive
Rigid
Impulsive
Reactive
    Defensive
Hypervigilant
Distressed
    Frightened
Overwhelmed
    Emotional
	Angry
	Tense
	
	Anxious
		Hyper-arousal	Physical fight/flight/freeze responses
			Disorganised/obsessive/cyclical cognitive processes
			Maladaptive behaviour

Aware
Regulated
    collected
Open
Empathetic
    insightful
Connected
Cognitively able
Calm
    coherent
	cool
	
	intuitive
	
	curious
	relaxed
		Window of Tolerance (Optimal arousal)	Able to feel and think simultaneously
			Able to experience full range of emotions
			Awareness of boundaries
			Reactions adapt to situations

Absent
     helpless
Unavailable
Lethargic
Depressed
Ashamed
Submissive
Zoned-out
     Compliant
Emotionless
     Autopilot
Disconnected
     Shut down
Numb
     Collapsed
	Passive
	Tired
	Spacy
	Zoned
	flat
		**Hypo-
		arousal**
			Maladaptive behaviour
			Memory loss
			Disabled cognitive processing
			Please take care of me
			Can't say no
			Can't ask for help
			Not safe to assert myself
			Disabled defence mechanism
			Absence of sensation
			Feelings of hopelessness

Source: Drawn from Siegal (1999), Porges (2003), Ogden et al. (2006), Corrigan et al. (2010), Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016), and the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (no date).

The indicators of a child operating within their window of tolerance are consistent across the literature and also consistent with the language that I was using to describe the demeanour of children in the cycle three data, such as that in Accounts 3.5 and 3.6 above. This suggested that the outcomes of the situated activity that I was recording in the accounts may well indicate whether a child was operating successfully within their window of tolerance.

Considering the accounts through the domain of social setting

When considering the language used in the accounts, the most troubling terms to place were 'conforming to norms', 'OK in own skin', 'belonging', 'slowly becoming a member of the centre' and 'fitting in' as they seemed to go beyond a transient emotional state and suggest something much deeper, such as a child being at one with the norms and taking these on, and ultimately taking on the value system of the wider group. The polyvagal theory (Porges, 1995) suggests that when a child is comfortable enough with the norms of the centre to feel a sense of belonging, this adds to their sense of safety. This in turn allows them to use social engagement as their first strategy when faced with a situation which they may feel poses a threat. One might argue that the way the policies and practice of the centre (social setting) are structured will influence how quickly a child can adopt the social norms of the setting and how quickly a child can begin to use social engagement. The accounts

below are all related to the very explicit norm in the centre of walking on the right-hand side of the corridor. Our corridors are wide, and we do not have a large number of children. Rather than being about preventing children bumping into each other, these norms are made explicit in order to give a child a simple way of quickly beginning to fit in and feel comfortable.

>*Account 3.7 – A child's second day. He walked along the corridor this morning. Yesterday he was oppositional but this morning (his first on transport) he did as he was asked, moved over and tucked in behind the child in front.*

>*Account 3.8 – Another new child was also walking down the corridor. He jumped in behind another child so that he was fitting in with our rule of walking on the right.*

In both the above cases, the new children appeared to be picking up and conforming to the social norms quickly. Child 3.9 below, had been in the centre a little while and was not only conforming to the norm but modelling it.

>*Account 3.9 – I watched a new child arrive in the centre this morning and then a little later him lining up in a group after lunch. He felt like one of the group in a way that he had not a couple of weeks ago. He looked like he felt at ease amongst them and if anything was modelling calm, positive behaviour. When he had arrived in the morning, he was cheerful and polite.*

Child 3.9 seemed to be lining up in such a way so that I would notice and recognise his efforts. It may be argued that in this case, the simple and explicit nature of the social norms of the centre allowed him to be confident that he was doing the right thing and felt safe. The account below may indicate that the social norms become very well established with the children over time. In this account, Child 3.10 does not know an adult is observing but is supporting a younger child with the norms of the centre. He first ensures that the younger child has washed their hands (another simple, explicit norm) and then ensures that he is walking on the right.

Account 3.10 – I walked down the corridor to see a child knocking on the toilet door and speaking through the crack to a child inside. He was asking if the child had washed their hands. A younger child emerged, the older child checked them and then made sure that he was walking on the right-hand side of the corridor as they went out. The demeanour of both was happy and comfortable. They did not know I was there.

Both children in this account had previously been excluded from their primary schools for repeated challenging behaviour over a long period; however, in this account they were not only conforming to social norms when no adult was present, they were also happy and comfortable in doing so.

Within the model I describe (Figure 4), the window of tolerance sits at the centre of situated activity which in turn sits within the domain of social setting. The policies and norms within the social setting affect the situated activity which takes place. As discussed above, the drivers being considered here are those related to the autonomic nervous system which affect the child's state of emotional arousal along the sympathetic/parasympathetic continuum. These are linked to the perception of threat and fear on one side and safety and social engagement on the other. The way in which a social setting makes it easy or difficult to understand and adopt social norms and feel a sense of belonging will impact on these perceptions of threat or safety. In turn, this will affect a child's emotional arousal and their ability to operate within their window of tolerance.

Considering the accounts through the domain of contextual resources

Houston (2010) further classified this domain into the domains of culture (non-material resources) and economy (material resources). He gives weight to these domains and emphasises the importance of considering the mechanisms associated with them. However in this study, the a priori hypothesis in each cycle has been more concerned with the aspects of psychobiography, situated activity and social setting. As I worked through the cycles, I developed a growing awareness of this and developed the model (Figure 4) to suggest how the domains (including contextual resources) impacted on each other within the centre. Within the model, the knock-on effects (Houston, 2017) of the underlying causal tendencies (Barron, 2013; Hu,

2018) within the domain of contextual resources affect the mechanisms within the domains of both psychobiography and social setting, and these in turn shape the nature of the situated activity (Archer, 1995) and the likelihood of a child operating within their window of tolerance. The original phenomenon observed in this study compares behaviour in one setting to the behaviour in another, and these settings exist within different wider contextual systems. As I attempted to develop my conceptual understanding of this original phenomenon, I began to feel that the influence of these different, wider contextual systems on the settings and individuals within them had been underplayed.

6.6 – A retroductive appraisal of the a priori hypothesis for cycle three

The a priori hypothesis for cycle three was:

> *Children rapidly replace challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour as we provide a social setting designed to create positive situated activity which leads to children operating within their window of tolerance*.

The retroductive process asks whether the phenomenon observed could possibly exist without the factors specified within the a priori hypothesis. In this case, it asks whether a child could ever replace their challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour in the absence of a social setting designed to provide positive situated activity. This in turn leads to them operating within their window of tolerance.

Taking each aspect in turn, I am comfortable with the statement that children replace their challenging behaviour with happy, positive prosocial behaviour as they are operating within their window of tolerance. If they were not, then children would be very likely to exhibit observable behaviour which characterises states of hyper- or hypo-arousal.

I am also comfortable with the term positive situated activity as a necessary condition to the phenomenon. It is possible to imagine a child managing to operate within their window of tolerance even when situated activity is challenging; however, this hypothesis is looking at a general phenomenon of children arriving at the centre and their behaviour changing quickly. It is difficult to imagine this being replicated across many children without the situated activity that they each find themselves in

being positive. Similarly, it is possible to imagine staff working with children and ensuring that they only experience positive situated activity despite the way the social setting is designed and not because of it. Again, however, we are considering a repeated phenomenon and it difficult to imagine this happening with regularity if the norms of the setting do not promote positive situated activity.

6.7 – Using a hermeneutic approach to shake out professional place

Throughout each cycle, there has been a recognition that in practitioner action research there is a professional at the heart of the process (Costello, 2011; Goodson, 2012). The decisions made and the language used have been acknowledged and considered, and a hermeneutic approach (Bolton, 2005; Hedberg, 2009) to analysing authorial intent has been used throughout.

Within the cycle three a priori hypothesis, the term '***happy, positive prosocial behaviour***' remained even though it was acknowledged in the previous cycle that it needed further exploration. I believe this indicates a professional position where I am happy to place a phrase such as this as a holding term whilst further exploration into what I mean goes on. It suggests a growing confidence in the way the process of developing understanding through repeated cycles works and can be used to investigate a complex issue (Costello, 2011; Adams, 2014; Nyanjom, 2018). It is indicative of acceptance that although I do not understand, I will trust the process, keep going and some form of clarity will emerge.

Also within the hypothesis, the phrase '***we provide an environment run on person-centred principles providing positive social interactions to children with a heightened need to belong***' was replaced by '***we provide a social setting designed to create positive situated activity which leads to children operating within their window of tolerance***'. This inclusion of the terminology used in social domain theory seems an attempt to explain the model (Figure 4) devised at the end of cycle two. It is an effort to show that all aspects of social domain theory are being considered and is a first real attempt to explain how the provision of the centre matches up to the theory. In doing so, the term '***environment***' becomes '***social setting***' and '***positive social interaction***' becomes '***positive situated activity***'. Both reflect an adoption of the social domain terminology, which on reflection seems to show a need to demonstrate a level of understanding and explain the connection. A professional awareness of my need to understand the principles behind practice

and share them is important in an effort to guard against reductionism and the search for connections which may not be there.

The term '***person-centred principles***' and '***heightened need to belong***' are removed from the hypothesis. This evoked a feeling of discomfort when I reread it and recollections of an internal battle that I had had as I balanced my attachment to the terms against my need to stay true to the retroductive process. The person-centred approach formed an integral part in designing the provision in the centre and it was hard to let it go. It demonstrates a professional attachment to a process of which I need to be wary and, despite this attachment, I could see the phenomenon happening without a person-centred approach as a necessary condition and so the phrase was removed.

'***Heightened need to belong***' also caused discomfort as my premise has been that exclusion in primary school children can lead to them having a heightened need to belong and that this is a positive mechanism that can be harnessed as a tool in managing their behaviour. In this hypothesis, it could be interpreted that I believe that all children who enter the centre have a heightened need to belong. My removal of the term demonstrates a professional position where I am uncomfortable with that. I can see that there may be instances where this is not a precondition of the phenomenon and therefore my commitment to the retroductive process means that it had to come out. I felt bereft at the time and as though I was stepping into a void, but the omission speaks loudly of a professional position where I trust in the ongoing nature of the process.

The term '***leads to children operating within their window of tolerance***' was added. It comes at the end of the hypothesis with everything else leading to it as preconditions. It therefore implies that children change their behaviour because they are operating within their 'window of tolerance'. This again shows a professional stance where I am willing to sum up my thinking at a point in time and insert an intellectual place holder with a catch-all term that I do not fully understand. The use of the word '***operating***' suggests an acceptance of the agency and autonomy of each child and a belief that children are getting on and managing the best they can despite outside factors which have an impact on their ability to do that. It is saying that I believe that although the children regulate their behaviour, it is the world around them that affects their ability to do so. Even though I am acknowledging the individual, I am also attributing some responsibility for challenging behaviour onto

those putting them in situations that will push them beyond their window and those who interact with them poorly. A simple sentence, again betraying my need to be a protector and defender of the children.

The decision to use cycle three to attempt to isolate outcomes from provision was a conscious choice that developed over time. Partly because the separating out of provision from the actions of the children in cycle two had proved useful in understanding how mechanisms interacted, but mostly it reveals a sense that I could not grasp what the term 'happy, positive prosocial behaviour' meant. I had a deep sense of it and could see it in the children but could not get hold of it. It was ethereal and kept eluding description, and this process reveals a predisposition to notice these behaviours when I saw them.

When looking back at the language used in the cycle three SEMH Profile Tool, the section on anxiety gives the impression of an attempt to describe a child operating within their window of tolerance. As these were simply rewritten versions of the provision offered, it suggests that the initial provision was set up to support the prevention of children tipping into a reaction that was beyond their window of tolerance. It suggests that when the original provision was described, the concept of keeping children emotionally level by being careful with what was expected of them was key. Although overlooked and not in the original hypothesis, this aspect of provision was already being described, suggesting a deep-seated professional valuing of its underlying importance from the beginning and uncovering a presupposition to be wary of. The Profile Tool statements describing relationships do not directly relate to the mechanism of the social engagement system, suggesting that this was not a presupposition; rather, these statements imply an understanding of the need for good relationships and engagement without any suggestions as to the impact on the mechanisms involved. The language used in the Profile Tool feels forced in places and again demonstrate a willingness to trust in the cyclical process and accept that this was the imperfect thinking at a point in time.

6.8 – A summary of cycle three findings

Cycle three developed my understanding in three significant ways. Firstly, it helped me clarify what I understood by the terms '*positive, happy prosocial behaviour*' and '*window of tolerance*' and how they related. Secondly, it developed my depth of understanding of the role of social engagement as a countervailing mechanism

during situated activity. Finally, in my awakening to the mechanisms with the domain of contextual resources and my light coverage of them so far, it increased my awareness of the way I had systematically attempted to develop my understanding across the cycles and offers tantalising suggestions as to where to go next.

Firstly, cycle three was about shifting the focus to pupil outcomes in order to further investigation what I understood by the terms '***happy, positive prosocial***' and '***window of tolerance***'. When rereading the accounts using the outcome criteria that I had created, I found a disconnect between that which I was expecting to observe and that which I felt necessary to record. Following this cycle, I believe that what I was attempting to articulate with the term '***happy, positive prosocial behaviour***' was my observation of children operating within their '***window of tolerance***'. Rather than just the three words 'happy', 'positive' and 'prosocial' my accounts during cycle three contained 45 different words and phrases, such as 'content', 'patient' and 'humorous'. All were indicating the phenomenon that I was attempting to capture in my accounts. These words and phrases were consistent with those described in the literature by Siegel, (1999), Ogden et al. (2006), Corrigan et al. (2010), Dezelic and Ghanoum (2016), and Gill (2017) to describe children operating within their window of tolerance (see Table 3).

Indicators of a child operating within their window of tolerance (both from within the accounts and in the literature) included terms such as 'engaged', 'involved', 'joining in', 'playful' and 'chatty'. I used 18 different words and phrases to capture my observation of a child socially engaging with staff but mostly very naturally with their peers. Porges' (1995) polyvagal theory suggests a possible countervailing mechanism with the use of a child's social engagement system as a vagal brake to dampen down the sympathetic nervous system's response to a situation which may otherwise either lead them into hyper- or hypo-arousal or result in some form of maladaptive behaviour with the goal of returning to their window of tolerance. Porges (1995, 2003) uses the terms 'prosocial' and 'social engagement' interchangeably. The suggestion is that when a child has a strong social engagement system, they gain an emotional agility allowing them to move up and down the arousal continuum in a way that is appropriate to the situation in which they find themselves. The hypothesis then becomes:

As a social setting, the centre aims to provide only situated activity where children feel safe enough to socially engage, remain within their window of tolerance and lessen their need for maladaptive behaviour.

Finally, cycle three helped me to clarify my own learning process and become comfortable with it. Throughout the process, I have been well aware that there are things that I do not understand, and I have purposely used placeholder terms at times and then moved through the cycles to explore them further. I did this with the term 'happy, positive prosocial behaviour' and I am now much more comfortable with what I was actually attempting to articulate with this term. Cycle three has shown me that I was also doing something very similar with the domain of contextual resources. It is the last of Layder's (1997) social domains, and Houston (2010) further splits it into the domains of culture and economy. I had grappled with it during the analysis within each cycle; however, the mechanisms it was suggesting felt vague and lacked definition and clarity. I now understand that this was a very natural part of the process of making sense.

From the perspective of ontological depth, these mechanisms are hugely powerful but deep. In order to attempt to understand their knock-on effects, I first needed to develop my understanding of the domains that they were affecting. As I come to the end of the final cycle of this study, I feel much more in a position to do that. This study is a piece of first-person action research with the modest aim of attempting to understand how my own conceptual framework developed over time. Similarly, it was also rooted in attempting to understand the interplay of mechanisms within my own setting. Having been through this process, I now feel much more in a position to work collaboratively and to extend beyond my own setting. When looking at the way the wider systems with contextual resources condition the settings and impact on the individuals within them, I feel that I would need to study multiple settings and collaborate with the professionals within them. I am in a position where I feel that I need to explore the domain of contextual resources within a new study. I am at peace with that and accept that my current conceptual understanding is simply a flawed position statement at a point in time.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

The aim of this study was to improve the lot of children excluded (or at risk of being excluded) from mainstream English primary schools. There was a recognition that simply developing my own understanding would not bring about change. I needed to theorise the ontological base for my practice, my way of knowing and way of acting in the world. I aligned my position with CR theory and used first-person action research as a tool for personal reflection and to systematically work with staff to change practice. As David Adams writes, 'first person inquiry is not just for me, but it is also for us and for them' (Adams, 2014:6).

7.1 – Main Findings

The research question asked why children quickly ceased to exhibit their prior challenging behaviour on entry to the centre. In answer to that question, the main finding of the study is summed up in the following statement.

> ***The centre has the resilience to continually make the adaptations needed to ensure that each child only experiences situated activity where they feel safe enough to socially engage, remain within their window of tolerance and reduce their need for maladaptive behaviour.***

This moves the emphasis away from the resilience of individual children and onto the resilience of their schools and the wider systems of which they form a part. This leads to a number of suggestions for our work with schools, educational professionals and for those developing policy at a local and national level.

The resilience of schools

Tom Bennett (for the DfE) (2017:23) states that it is necessary for schools to help students 'cope with adversity' by creating 'self-regulation' within them and the Department for Education (2018:12) recognises that some children may have difficulty in 'managing strong feelings'. Resilience is being seen by the DfE as a character trait in the child. My suggestion for those developing policy is to move on from the definition of resilience as the ability of the child to 'manage the normal stress of life effectively' (DfE, 2018b:6) to the social ecological view of resilience from

Ungar et al. (2019) in their paper 'How schools enhance the development of young people's resilience'. They see resilience as:

> …the capacity of an individual, family, community or environmental system to return to normative functioning after exposure to an atypical stressor. (Ungar et al., 2019:616)

When the emphasis changes from the individual characteristics of the child, to encompass the capacity of a class or school or to make adaptations, the child (and all the systems operating within them) becomes a component part of the wider complex system. When viewed from this perspective, Ungar et al. (2013:357) believe that where a child exhibits challenging behaviour this may be 'because of interaction with a failing environment, not because of any flaw in the child's temperament or character alone'.

In our local authority, we are asked to complete a 'school readiness' questionnaire which is intended to sum up the resilience of the child in certain situations. I am suggesting that the SEMH Principles document (Appendix 2) developed as part of this study could be used as the basis for a 'child readiness' questionnaire that should also be completed to determine the resilience of the school to cope with the adversity of receiving a child with SEMH needs.

The implication here is that rather than exclude pupils with SEMH needs when they exhibit challenging behaviour, those developing policy should first consider whether the child's behaviour is a symptom of a failing environment. In which case, the school should receive the challenge and support needed to become more resilient to the needs of SEMH pupils. This work may take time and it may be in the best interests of the child to move on to a more resilient mainstream school without the need for their exclusion. There may be cases where a very resilient mainstream school has exhausted their capacity to meet the needs of the child and more specialist provision is required. In this case, the child could move into a setting more able to meet their needs, again, without being excluded. Where a child is exhibiting challenging behaviour, school leaders need to ask whether their staff are putting the child in situations which are moving them out of their window of tolerance and towards hyper-arousal. If so, why are they doing that and what can be done about it? Those developing policy need to have an awareness of the ways in which their policy

will impact on the social settings of schools and how this then knocks-on into the situated activity that children find themselves. They need to raise the question of whether their education policy is contributing to the failure of the environment.

Working with schools and educational providers

As a centre working almost exclusively with excluded children, we are continually requested to provide support and training for staff in mainstream schools, student teachers and a diverse range of professionals. This study has impacted greatly on our ability as a setting to do that by tapping into a 'store of professional knowledge in order to make it explicit and share it with other practitioners' (Herr and Anderson, 2005:13). Our SEMH Principles document, developed as part of this study, forms the basis of the training we provide. During our training mornings, groups of delegates visit the centre and spend the first hour being introduced to our principles and spend the rest of the visit in classes looking for evidence of them in action. Every member of our staff is responsible for discussing at least one of our principle statements with delegates during the visit. We also visit schools and colleges to present and discuss the way the SEMH Principles were developed and how they inform our practice. To date, we have worked with groups of headteachers, SENCOs, governors, behaviour support service professionals, whole school staff in both primary and secondary mainstream schools, and groups of student teachers.

A significant proportion of our pupils return to mainstream education following a period in the centre. Some return to their previous school and some to new schools. As the study progressed, we developed the use of our SEMH Principles and Profile Tool to write transition reports on how the receiving school may best meet the needs of each child. This helps the receiving school ensure that they do not put the transitioning child in a situation which may lead to challenging, maladaptive behaviour.

7.2 – This study as an example of applied critical realism

This study also had the aim of providing a worked example of applied critical realism for practitioners in the education sector. At around the time that I began this study, the *Journal of Critical Realism* had requested submissions to provide what was described as 'much called for guidance for researchers who want to put critical realism to work to improve the world' (Price and Martin, 2018:95). Price and Martin used these submissions to draw out the trends in recent applied CR research. These

included a commitment to CR ontology, the use of retroduction, hermeneutic methodology, a CR approach to structure and agency, interdisciplinarity and a critical element with suggestions for action. What follows is a consideration of how this study shares the characteristics described above and as such adds to the body of applied critical realism work.

7.2.1 – A commitment to CR ontology

The ontological depth of critical realism lay at the heart of this study. This depth allowed a consideration to be made of the underlying conditions lying behind the observation that the behaviour of many children rapidly ceased to be challenging after a very short time in the centre. It did this by using the concept of regular and demi-regular actualisations along with that of causal mechanisms and tendencies. Within critical realism, a power that is not always actualised due to countervailing mechanisms may result in inconsistent, observable demi-regular phenomena (demi-regs). This resonates with Ungar et al.'s (2013:357) description of 'differential impact' as one of the three main principles of social ecology (along with the principles of 'equifinality' and 'cultural moderation', both discussed later in this chapter). Differential impact is an acknowledgement that the same mechanism can have a different level of effect on different individuals at different times. An example here may be a child being put in a situation where they are asked to complete an academically challenging task. This may elicit an emotional response which moves them into hyper-arousal where the empirically observable behaviour is that the child sits under their table. It may be that in a different circumstance, the child has a friend or trusted adult nearby and social engagement acts as a countervailing mechanism and rather than sit under the table, the child is able to engage with the academic work despite its level of challenge. In this circumstance, the movement into hyper-arousal is not actualised and there is no resultant behaviour that staff might find challenging. This ontological position of demi-regularities and differential impact adds to a view of resilience where some individuals have better outcomes than others despite 'a comparable level of adversity' (Rutter, 2012:335).

In considering the mechanisms which may be at play, this study also shares critical realism's commitment to a socially stratified world and uses Layder's (1997) theory of social domains to analyse the professional accounts created. It does so with a mixed level of success. Across the study, I found limited evidence for Layder's

domain of contextual resources. This suggests that although I have a growing awareness of the knock-on effects of this domain, it sits outside the way that I have so far articulated my understanding through both the centre's SEMH Principles documentation and my a priori hypotheses to date. During cycle one, I attributed social domains to aspects of the cycle one a priori hypothesis (Figure 3) and the domain of contextual resources was absent. I adapted the hypothesis in both cycle two and cycle three and the domain of contextual resources was similarly absent. This was unintentional and reading back, feels like part of my ongoing process of making sense. Across the cycles, my understanding has gone from looking at the observation of situated activity through to looking at how psychobiography affects situated activity. I then moved on to look at how the situated activity also affects subsequent psychobiography. I then began to develop a growing awareness of how the norms of a social setting affect situated activity and then how the outcomes of the situated activity also gradually reproduce or transform the setting concerned. I realised that in grappling with and attempting to develop an understanding of the way the mechanisms and concepts within this study related to each other, I needed to first develop my understanding of the domains of psychobiography, situated activity and social setting before I could begin to comprehend the knock-on effects that contextual resources may have on them. This shows both the strength and weakness of the cyclical approach used here. On the one hand, it gave me the space to allow specific aspects of the system to be explored in the knowledge that I could pick up other aspects during subsequent cycles. However, at some point the study must end and the cycles stop. I am now at that point and that is frustrating. I need to be open in saying that this is a snapshot of my developing understanding at a point in time and that I feel that if I were to move into another cycle, I would be further considering the knock-on effects that contextual resources have on all parts of the system. This idea will be developed later in the chapter as I discuss possibilities for future work.

7.2.2 – A commitment to CR epistemology

I believe that a commitment to a critical realist epistemology characterises both this study and my own professional practice. The starting position was that my ability to first perceive and then to understand the complex entanglement of causal mechanisms inherent in a CR ontological view of the world was flawed. I began with

an initial a priori hypothesis and worked through three cycles of research to improve it and systematically change practice. I acknowledged at the outset that each hypothesis simply captured my best understanding at that point in time. I knew that my understanding could always be better, and my commitment to this epistemological view provided an ongoing forward momentum to the study. My hermeneutic analysis of the language I was using to structure my understanding during cycle two illustrates this point:

> ***The structure was attempting to make sense of part of the gamut of causal mechanisms but was purposely limited in its scope. It reveals my professional tendency to get on and attempt to make sense through a gradual approach over time and to work my way through confusion. Reading back, I have a sense of not being clear, but it reveals a determination to not take the easy path and settle on something that can easily be explained. I had a sense that I was playing with models and was comfortable with the elusive nature of the truth I was working towards. I knew that it was flawed but that I needed to be pragmatic and that sense would be made of it, even though I was walking in a fog at the time. I get a sense of trust in the process, of being willing to wait for clarity to come and of treating the opaqueness I found with good humour. As a professional in the middle of this study, this trust combined with a continual forward momentum is important to note. I think that it demonstrates a genuine journey of discovery and an openness to wherever I end up rather than attempting to simply get to a predetermined point and tick off markers along the way.***

This sense of peace with not knowing was behind my willingness to stop and use the space to create staging posts along the way which indicated it was time to act and bring about change. I believe in a systematic approach where I get there one step at a time as my knowledge and understanding develops.

7.2.3 – A commitment to retroduction

Price and Martin (2018) describe the use of retroduction as a characteristic of applied critical realism. This study used Houston's (2010) five-step retroductive

process to take an observation and then work systematically backwards to ask what underlying conditions may have brought it about. As I moved through the three research cycles, my initial hypothesis changed as I asked whether each factor included was a precondition. Could I conceive that children would cease their challenging behaviour without it being included? As such, the terms 'environment run on person-centred principles' and 'heightened need to belong' were removed during the retroductive analysis during cycle two as I felt that they were not necessary preconditions.

As I have worked through three complete research cycles, I have developed a tendency to judge every suggestion retroductively. However, there is a tension here between a critical realism ontology and Ungar et al.'s (2013:357) principles of social ecology. Retroduction asks, 'could one imagine X without Y?' (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013:3). However, Ungar et al.'s 'equifinality' describes how the same outcome may be brought about by different causes. For example, it is possible to conceive of instances where the cessation of challenging behaviour in one child is brought about by the interplay of different causal mechanisms than for another child. Jones (2011:20), however, describes patterns being sought that are 'relatively enduring over time and space', and my hypotheses moved from the instance of a single child in a specific situation to encompass a more general hypothesis regarding many children across many situations in our centre. In such circumstances, I found myself needing to make a subjective judgement as to whether a precondition needed to be removed. In the final hypothesis, the inclusion or removal of social engagement as a precondition was one such judgement. I asked myself if social engagement was a truly essential precondition. It caused me a nagging sense of unease. When I removed the term from the final hypothesis that feeling of unease intensified. I wanted to find out more. As I wrote and rewrote my thesis, my commitment to retroduction meant that it was incredibly tempting to tinker with this final position. The cycling had to stop somewhere, however, and I acknowledged that my thesis was just a resting place on a long and winding road.

7.2.4 – A commitment to a hermeneutic methodology

This study is a piece of first-person action research and a hermeneutic approach to my own professional writing was used to consider not only what was being said but also what this revealed about my own positionality and perspective. As I read and

reread my writing, I noted my internal wrangles and created a record of them in order that they could be embraced as a tool for throwing light on the ongoing process of making sense. I had moments of resonance combined with feelings of complete unease and all became part of the ongoing, unfolding hermeneutic process. Examples of unease occurred when I felt I had used words and phrases in place of concepts that I could not articulate. One such example was in my use of 'happy, positive, prosocial' to describe pupil behaviour when I did not understand what I meant by the term. It revealed where the edges of my understanding of the world lay and opened up areas for further exploration. Further analysis revealed that I had used 45 different terms relating to the demeanour of the children and that I judge resilience as successful when their demeanour indicates that they are operating within their window of tolerance. This relates directly back to 'cultural moderation', the final of Ungar et al.'s (2013:357) three principles of social ecology, where the measure of successful resilience is subjectively and culturally defined by those doing the measuring.

7.2.5 – A critical realism approach to structure and agency

Critical realism (CR) considers the intersection of social structures and human agency. At the end of the first cycle of research, I was struggling to comprehend the complex interplay of causal mechanisms associated with the provision that the centre was offering and those associated with the arrival of a child. Whereas CR proposes (Layder, 1985) that structure and agency have specific characteristics (a dualism) and may be considered separately, Giddens' (1979) thesis of structuration suggests that the two are so completely intertwined (a duality) that they cannot be seen as separate. Giddens (1979) wants to transcend any form of dualism through the notion of structuration 'whereby the two elements in the dichotomy are viewed as an organically integrated, indissoluble unit' (Layder 1985:131).

At the end of cycle one, I was at that point. I could not separate them out. Critical realism's view (Layder, 2006), however, is that although the entities within the structure/agency dualism are intertwined, each have their own characteristics which can be thought of separately. Layder (2006) describes agency as the ability of individuals to make a difference to the world; however, they are also constrained by social structures (Melia, 2020). In re-engaging with CR theory, I considered the morphogenetic theory of Margaret Archer (1995) and the transformational model of

social interaction (TMSA) of Roy Bhaskar. Both describe the way that social structures are shaped over time by the agency of those existing within them. Both also describe the socialising effect of existing within a social structure on an individual agent. Both argue that rather than conflate structure and agency into a single entity, to understand the social world, 'we must comprehend the interplay between these two, central spheres' (Houston 2010:75). In this study, moving my understanding forward involved consideration of how the norms and values of the centre may be transformed or reproduced by the children and adults within it and also how those norms and values may then socialise those children and adults over time. A commitment to this CR view of structure and agency led to my attempt to separate out the social structure of the centre by developing our SEMH Principles (Appendix 2) to focus only on provision. I acknowledged at the time that my attempt would be flawed but I felt that it was an important staging post in my attempt to systematically develop my understanding.

7.3 – Future research opportunities

In aligning myself with the epistemology of critical realism, I acknowledge that although the process aims to manoeuvre towards understanding, my models and hypotheses can always be improved. This leads to a number of suggestions for further exploration.

- In shifting the emphasis onto the resilience of schools, the question becomes 'Why are some educational settings more resilient than others when exposed to the stressor of a child with SEMH needs?'. A collaborative study could investigate the underlying risk and protective mechanisms impacting on the resilience of a number of settings. This would include the knock-on effects of mechanisms within the wider domain of contextual resources. The model of social domain theory relating to our centre (Figure 4) could be used as the basis for how these compare across different sectors such as mainstream schools, special schools and alternative provision.
- The main finding above states that children use social engagement to remain their window of tolerance. A retroductive appraisal of this statement leads to this being questioned as a true precondition. Is social engagement necessary in every case or are there incidents where a child is able to remain within their

window of tolerance without using their social engagement system? An additional cycle could be conducted to consider this further.

- This study revealed that I value the demeanour of children as an indicator of our resilience in meeting the needs of SEMH pupils. My accounts revealed 45 words and phrases used to describe children in their optimal zone of arousal, and this study has given me the confidence to use them as indicators of successful provision. I am interested to understand more about how our SEMH Profile Tool could be revised to incorporate these words and phrases and how it may them be used to inform provision and track a pupil's progress over time.

7.4 – Concluding remarks: in the best interests of the children

As an integration of action research and critical realism, this study has emancipatory aims at its heart (Costello, 2011; Goodson, 2012). At the outset of this study I shied away from the term 'socialisation'. It caused me a deep sense of unease rooted in a concern that I was imposing my own value system on the impressionable children in my care. However, this study has brought me closer to accepting and owning the term. Biesta (2009) uses 'socialisation' to describe one of the key functions of education (along with qualification and subjectification) and challenges those involved in social science (particularly action research) to look beyond whether children are being effectively socialised to ask whether this socialisation is in their best interests. Early in the study, I found the term emotionally charged and during my hermeneutic analysis, I felt I had included it as a check on myself to ensure that as well as looking at the effectiveness of socialisation, I was also looking at whether it was in the best interests of the children. The aim during this study, therefore, was to ensure that simply seeking a cessation of challenging behaviour did not become a goal in itself. There was an ethical requirement to see beyond the effectiveness of socialisation into the more emancipatory aims of the study with pupil well-being at its core.

Over the course of the study, I have come to embrace the terms 'socialisation' and 'conformity' as the act of changing one's actions and behaviours to match the norms of others. I find that I can reconcile myself to it being in the best interests of the children where they absorb the sound social norms and values of the group,

develop a sense of belonging and develop a strong social engagement system. This in turn allows them to operate within their window of tolerance and reduces their need for maladaptive behaviour. In order to learn new things, develop and move on, children must be in their 'optimal arousal zone' (Ogden et al., 2006:27). Without this, they cannot learn new things (qualification) or explore their inner life and autonomy (subjectification). Socialisation is therefore a necessity before any other development can happen.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Centre SEMH Teaching and Learning Standards

Resilience				
1	**The celebration and honouring of children's efforts**			
1.11	Celebratory marking of work, valuing effort			
1.12	Celebratory contact with parents, valuing effort			
1.13	Celebratory learning environment which values effort of every child			
1.14	Celebratory assembly valuing effort			
1.2	**Staff guiding pupils through process of developing strengths**			
1.21	Pupil's strengths and capabilities being honoured and championed			
1.22	Staff skilled in providing balance of support and allowing mistakes to be made and approaching resistance with creativity.			
1.23	Boundaries ensuring structure and safety in place for educational growth			
1.24	Discipline defined as ability to do things that you don't want to do			
1.25	Key worker lives life with, for and alongside child			

1.3	**Children demonstrating resilience and engagement**			
1.31	Children showing resilience in ability to make mistakes			
1.32	Children showing healthy signs of guilt which acknowledges feelings of others			
1.33	Children experiencing joy in their success at their own pace			
1.34	Children showing enjoyment, curiosity and engagement with learning			
	Anxiety			
2.1	**Emotional states being contagious and the mood of one person affecting the mood of another**			
2.11	Adults being emotionally regulated in their behaviour			
2.12	Adults lending their emotional regulation to the child			
2.13	A calm, purposeful atmosphere in the room and centre			
2.14	Adults being composed and unambiguous in the communication			
2.15	Anxiety of feelings of isolation			
2.2	**Anxiety relating to academic expectations**			
2.21	Learning closely matched to current academic profile and needs			
2.22	Developmentally appropriate expectation, structure and support			
2.23	Staff recognising when to challenge and when enough is enough			
2.24	Children being allowed to progress at own speed without the need to keep up.			
2.3	**Staff recognising cues and giving the child opportunity to re-centre and regain balance and regulation**			
2.31	Fun, playful interactions and reciprocal laughter			
2.32	Children doing a calming activity before learning			

2.33	Break/downtime in learning to counteract overload.			
Inner Life				
3.1	**Relating to acceptance**			
3.11	Accepting child's feelings and perceptions as real and valid			
3.12	Non-judgmental regard of behaviour as a form of communication			
3.13	Staff showing that they are rooting for the child no matter what			
3.14	Staff explicitly repairing relationship after displaying anger or discussing behaviour.			
3.2	**Exploration of inner life**			
3.21	Staff getting to know children as real individuals and showing curiosity about their lives.			
3.22	Staff giving a non-judgmental commentary on what they can see and curiosity and wondering out loud of thoughts, feelings and emotions.			
3.23	Staff supporting children to be self-aware and non-judgmental about things that they sometimes keep hidden			
3.24	Staff gently challenging child's perspective on the motives and actions of other children and staff			
3.25	Children taking part in reparation after an incident			
Relationships				

4.1	Explicit times for relationship building			
4.11	Protected time during the day for relationship building			
4.12	Staff being physically and emotionally close to pupils, in the same head space			
4.13	Opportunities for play that involve staff			
4.2	**Developing trust**			
4.21	Adults, anticipating and responding to children's needs			
4.22	Staff explicitly saying that they will do something for a child, then following up and doing it.			
4.23	Staff explicitly commenting when a child is showing them or another adult trust			
4.3	**Following and Leading**			
4.31	Children being referred to their small team of adults for support			
4.32	Staff taking time to play with a child and follow their lead			
4.33	Children following and giving instructions			
4.34	Children helping other children			
4.35	Children being dependent on key adult			

Appendix 2 – Centre SEMH Principles

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Managing anxiety</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="13">We will help you understand the things that make you anxious</td><td rowspan="5">We will do our best to be calm at all times. (Not always quiet though)</td><td>We will be aware of our emotions and stay calm even when things are difficult</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will be close and calm if we notice you are struggling.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will do our best to make sure that all parts of the centre have a calm atmosphere.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will be clear about how we feel through our words, faces and body language.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will make sure that you never feel isolated or alone.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">We will only give you the things to learn next that are just right for you.</td><td>We will give you individual targets that match carefully what you need to learn next.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will provide the structure and support that suits where your learning is up to.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will challenge you to learn new things and recognize when enough is enough</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will allow you to progress at your own speed without pressure to keep up with others.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">We will help you get back on track if you begin to struggle.</td><td>We will have some fun and make sure that we laugh together sometimes.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will give you something calming to do before learning new things if you need it.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will spot if you need a break from learning to help stay on track</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Developing resilience</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="12">We will help you accept that learning new things means trying hard and making lots of mistakes.</td><td rowspan="5">We will value your efforts and recognize when you try your hardest</td><td>We will make doing the right thing simple, consistent and easy to understand</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will recognise when you try your hardest.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will let those at home know when you are trying your hardest.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will make sure that when you try your hardest, we will display some of your work.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will make sure that your efforts are recognized in assembly.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">We will be alongside you through the ups and downs of learning new things</td><td>We will look for chances for you to develop strengths and learn something you enjoy.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will provide a balance of giving you help and allowing you to learn from your mistakes.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will help you be disciplined enough to sometimes do things that you don't want to do</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will make sure that a trusted adult is alongside you every step of the way.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">We will let you learn at your own pace</td><td>We will recognise when you learn new things by making mistakes and keeping going.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will recognise when you are curious and engaged with something you are learning.</td></tr>
<tr><td>We will recognise when you experience the joy of learning new things at your own pace.</td></tr>
</table>

Building positive relationships		
We will help you build relationships and make friends.	We will provide time in the day for relationship building.	We will make sure that there is time in the day for you to build relationships.
		We will stay close and give you our time and our attention.
		We will make sure that there is time in the day for play and we will often join in.
	We will understand that trust takes time and patience.	We will spot when you might need help with something and make sure you get it.
		We will make sure that we follow up and do the things we have said we will. Every time.
		We will notice when you show trust towards the adults in the centre.
	We will help you learn to sometimes take the lead and sometimes follow others.	We will only give you a small number of adults and children to get to know well at first.
		We will take the time to follow your lead and join in with things you are enjoying.
		We will plan chances for you to practice following and giving instructions.
		We will plan chances for you to do kind things for other children
		We will help you learn by experience that relying on a key, trusted adult can be rewarding.
Exploring choices		
We will help you explore the choices you can make.	We will accept you for who you are, no matter what.	We will take time to get to know you as a real individual and be curious about your life.
		We will accept and welcome you without judgment
		We will always accept that your feelings are real and important.
		We will recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication
		We will make sure that you are OK after we have shown anger or discussed an issue.
		We will always do our best for you, no matter what
	We will help you to think carefully about the way you are feeling and the choices that you can make	We will give a commentary and wonder out loud about thoughts, feelings and emotions.
		We will help you consider the motives and actions of other children and staff
		We will help you be non-judgmental about things that you may sometimes keep hidden
		We will help you feel healthy remorse which acknowledges feelings of others
		We will help you to make amends if you think you need to.

Appendix 3 – Centre SEMH Profile Tool

Managing anxiety	
I am aware of my emotions and stay calm even when things are difficult	We will be aware of our emotions and stay calm even when things are difficult
When struggling, I can regain emotional regulation in the presence of a close, calm adult	We will be close and calm if we notice you are struggling.
I can maintain emotional regulation in a calm environment such as the Forwards Centre.	We will do our best to make sure that all parts of the centre have a calm atmosphere.
I can understand how people feel through their words, faces and body language.	We will be clear about how we feel through our words, faces and body language.
I am comfortable in my own presence and can spend time alone.	We will make sure that you never feel isolated or alone.
I respond well to carefully pitched individual learning targets	We will give you individual targets that match carefully what you need to learn next.
I respond well to academic work with structure and support.	We will provide the structure and support that suits where your learning is up to.
I respond well to challenges in my academic work	We will challenge you to learn new things and recognize when enough is enough
I learn successfully at my own speed without pressure to keep up with others.	We will allow you to progress at your own speed without pressure to keep up with others.
I respond positively to fun and reciprocal laughter	We will have some fun and make sure that we laugh together sometimes.
I respond well to calming activities before learning new things if I need them	We will give you something calming to do before learning new things if you need it.
I respond well to planned breaks from learning to help stay on track	We will spot if you need a break from learning to help stay on track
Developing resilience	
I understand the right thing to do and make positive choices	We will make doing the right thing simple, consistent and easy to understand
I respond positively when my efforts are recognised when I try my hardest	We will recognise when you try your hardest.
I respond well when my efforts are recognized by those at home.	We will let those at home know when you are trying your hardest.
I am proud of my efforts and respond well to them being celebrated and displayed.	We will make sure that when you try your hardest, we will display some of your work.
I am proud of my efforts and can positively receive recognition from others in assembly.	We will make sure that your efforts are recognized in assembly.
I am able to develop a personal strength and learn something I enjoy.	We will look for chances for you to develop strengths and learn something you enjoy.
I am able to balance accepting help and learning from my own mistakes.	We will provide a balance of giving you help and allowing you to learn from your mistakes.
I am disciplined enough to sometimes do things that I don't want to do	We will help you be disciplined enough to sometimes do things that you don't want to do
I respond well to a trusted adult being alongside me every step of the way.	We will make sure that a trusted adult is alongside you every step of the way.
I can learn new things by making mistakes and keeping going.	We will recognise when you learn new things by making mistakes and keeping going.
I can often be curious and engaged with something I am learning.	We will recognise when you are curious and engaged with something you are learning.
I am able to experience the joy of learning new things.	We will recognise when you experience the joy of learning new things at your own pace.

Building positive relationships	
I can form positive new relationships with peers	We will make sure that there is time in the day for you to build relationships.
I can form positive relationships with key adults	We will stay close and give you our time and our attention.
I can play positively with peers and adults	We will make sure that there is time in the day for play and we will often join in.
If I am struggling, I can accept help when it is offered.	We will spot when you might need help with something and make sure you get it.
I can be patient and trust an adult to do what they say they will.	We will make sure that we follow up and do the things we have said we will. Every time.
I can be dependent on a key adult.	We will notice when you show trust towards the adults in the centre.
I can form selective rather than indiscriminate attachments	We will only give you a small number of adults and children to get to know well at first.
I can follow the lead of others and sometimes be the leader.	We will take the time to follow your lead and join in with things you are enjoying.
I can follow and give instructions	We will plan chances for you to practice following and giving instructions.
I can experience enjoyment through doing kind things for other children	We will plan chances for you to do kind things for other children
I feel that relying on a key, trusted adult can be rewarding.	We will help you learn by experience that relying on a key, trusted adult can be rewarding.
Exploring choices	
I feel valued as a real individual and are open an honest about my life and interests.	We will take time to get to know you as a real individual and be curious about your life.
I feel accepted without judgment	We will accept and welcome you without judgment
I think that that my feelings are accepted by others as real and important.	We will always accept that your feelings are real and important.
I can recognise that my behaviour is a form of communication	We will recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication
I can still be OK after an adult has shown anger or discussed an issue.	We will make sure that you are OK after we have shown anger or discussed an issue.
I understand that key adults will always do their best for me, no matter what	We will always do our best for you, no matter what
I can wonder out loud about my thoughts, feelings and emotions.	We will give a commentary and wonder out loud about thoughts, feelings and emotions.
I can consider the motives and actions of other children and staff	We will help you consider the motives and actions of other children and staff
I can be non-judgmental about things that I may sometimes keep hidden	We will help you be non-judgmental about things that you may sometimes keep hidden
I can feel healthy remorse which acknowledges feelings of others	We will help you feel healthy remorse which acknowledges feelings of others
I can make amends if I need to.	We will help you to make amends if you think you need to.