



Project Based Learning (PBL) for students in Alternative Provision and Student Referral Units (AP/ PRUs) within the landscape of Violence Reduction

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Photograph credits belong to Northumbria VRU and the AP settings involved and may not be used without permission.

Links to useful resources and publications:

[Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit](mailto:VRU@northumbria-pcc.gov.uk) can be contacted at VRU@northumbria-pcc.gov.uk

[Samantha's Legacy](#), a voluntary organisation based in the North East of England who provide support and education on the consequences of knife crime.

Leat, D., Thomas, U. & Whelan, A. (2021). *Planning curriculum-embedded Project Based Learning with real world connections*. Newcastle University. Available online [here](#).

Whelan, A., Thomas, U. and Leat, D. (2022). *Project Based Learning: Developing Curiosity, Creativity and Skills for Life*. Newcastle University. Available online [here](#).

For information on the work Newcastle University does on Project Based Learning, contact alison.whelan2@newcastle.ac.uk, David.leat@newcastle.ac.uk or u.thomas@newcastle.ac.uk.

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Project Based Learning (PBL) for pupils in Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units (AP/ PRUs) within the landscape of Violence Reduction

1. Context

The Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) was formed in 2019 and is situated within the Northumbria Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The VRU adopts a public health approach to violence reduction comprising primary prevention, to address violence before it occurs, and secondary and tertiary interventions to support those impacted by violence (Home Office, 2018, 2022; Fraser & Irwin-Rogers, 2021). Our approach to primary prevention involves engagement with education in safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments to ensure other mainstream educational outcomes are not compromised (Bowles, Reyes & Pradiptyo, 2005; UNESCO, 2017).

Exposure to violence, such as bullying or sexual violence, during childhood significantly impacts educational outcomes (Fry et al., 2018). Violence, whether it is encountered within or without an educational setting, is of concern for public health approaches to violence reduction, and safeguarding and child protection (Department for Education, 2022a). Children exposed to violence and other adverse experiences in out-of-school settings will carry those experiences into school where, for some of these children, it is a place of safety to escape but for others it may be the setting in which they avoid or develop strategies to help them cope, for example, self-excluding or presenting with disruptive behaviour.

Education is 'a strong protective factor against children and young people's risk of involvement in serious violence' (Home Office, 2022, p.78). After all, school is where we 'define our identity, shape our values, provides a sense of belonging and build our skills and confidence to succeed throughout life' (Commission on Young Lives, 2022, p.29).

Children who may already have complex *lived experiences*, much of which is often 'hidden and difficult for us to know (or even imagine) and their need for secrecy is powerful and all-consuming' (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020, p.28) are often coerced into committing crime and criminally exploited leading to them presenting with disruptive behaviour in school. Persistent

disruptive behaviour is the most common cause of exclusion from school (ONS, 2022), which may unintentionally victimised these children further (Just for Kids Law, 2020; Arnez & Condry, 2021).

Exclusion from school (see Department for Education, 2022b) risks ‘making already vulnerable young people more vulnerable’ (APPG, 2019, p.14). Thus, ‘further [damaging] their self-esteem and identity, while simultaneously closing off avenues for them to pursue healthy and prosocial lives’ (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2020, p.10; see also Graham et al., 2019; PHE, 2020) and accelerating (further) involvement into criminal and/ or sexual exploitation (Swire, 2020; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020: Children’s Commissioner, 2021). Evidence shows that excluded children are at higher risk of exposure to crime (Children’s Commissioner, 2020); becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence (Department for Education, 2019; Ofsted, 2019, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020); or involved with the criminal justice system (Commission on Young Lives, 2022). The longer-term consequences of exclusion from school are also ‘associated with ill mental and physical health, substance misuse, antisocial behaviour, crime, low educational attainment, unemployment and homelessness’ (MartinDenham, 2020, p.28); however, this should not be inevitable.

The challenge for teachers is how to best engage children, in a trauma-informed way, with violence reduction themed learning as ‘thorny issues’ (Alexakos et al., 2016) or ‘difficult knowledge’ (Lange & Young, 2019). For police and VRU educators, guidance states that their learning should be delivered without shocking, frightening or shaming pupils or students (PSHE Association/ National Police Chiefs’ Council, 2019).

Ofsted propose that for effective teaching, teachers’ essential knowledge should comprise:

“Content knowledge [...] as teachers’ knowledge of the subject they are teaching, pedagogical knowledge as teachers’ knowledge of effective teaching methods, and pedagogical content knowledge as teachers’ knowledge of how to teach the particular subject or topic.” (Ofsted, 2019, p.9, italics added)

For some thorny issues or difficult knowledge many school teachers do not have the content knowledge (or lived experience) of violence, lack confidence in their content knowledge (see, e.g., McWhirter et al., 2017; Bragg et al., 2021) and are unprepared for, what are often, intense and uncomfortable discussions with their students without (re-)traumatising them as they recognise and unlearn inaccurate and troubling misinformation in ‘learning climates in which victims of violence can grow and learn without fear’ (Lange & Young, 2019, p.318). Many teachers find such an open pedagogy which intentionally stimulates ‘collective discussion and critical reflection in order to

shift social norms. [...] difficult to manage' (Bragg et al., 2021, p.276). However, it is only from having such interactions that trusted relationships are formed; and trust needs to be earned through tenacity and persistence to enable these children to share their lived experience, concerns and fears for the future.

Facilitating greater student engagement enhances protective factors and minimises or mitigates risk factors, however, teachers often require additional *content knowledge* and ask for a more prescriptive *pedagogical content knowledge*. Coe and colleagues, for instance, emphasise (*pedagogical*) *content knowledge* and found strong evidence that:

“The most effective teachers have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach, and when teachers’ knowledge falls below a certain level it is a significant impediment to students’ learning. As well as a strong understanding of the material being taught, teachers must also understand the ways students think about the content, be able to evaluate the thinking behind students’ own methods, and identify students’ common misconceptions.” (2014, p.2)

The Northumbria VRU, Education Team (combining Ofsted’s three types of knowledge) has an established portfolio of preventative, interactive sessional learning for primary and secondary school students, including for those in AP settings, on violence reduction themes (such as knife crime, criminal and sexual exploitation, online safety). However, for some children, particularly those in AP, the ‘dose’ of learning and more traditional pedagogy is not enough to overcome the consequences of their exposure to violence.

When the VRU reviewed the function of our own *pedagogical content knowledge* for violence reduction-themed learning they found that, in addition to learning about the causes, myths and consequences of knife crime, developing non-cognitive skills, contributing to identity formation, shaping values, providing a sense of belonging and building skills and confidence, and enlisting the lived experience of pupils was important too. Non-cognitive skills have been associated with positive outcomes for young people as “[factors] such as self-control and school engagement are correlated with academic outcomes, financial stability in adulthood, and reduced crime” (Gutman & Schoon, 2013, p.2). For example, Fazel and Newby propose schools “should provide opportunities for children to participate in a broad range of activities to build academic, social and physical skills” (2021, p.85) which can break the cycles of vulnerability arising from adversity, living with concentrated disadvantage, poor mental health or exclusion from schools.

In partnership and with the support of Newcastle University, the VRU Education Team have incorporated our content, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge in developing Project Based Learning (PBL) for AP.

In this report we focus on primary prevention through PBL in Alternative Provision (AP) settings for children who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs or who have been permanently excluded from school.

2. Evaluation approach

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach, stimulating curiosity and creativity as pupils learn collaboratively as engage with a relevant and real-world challenge. Engagement in education is a strong protective factor against children and young people's risk of involvement in serious violence' (Home Office, 2021, p.32), however, the efficacy of traditional classroom-based learning delivered by VRU or police educators on violence reduction themes is unclear. The current guidance for police in the classroom (PSHE Association/ National Police Chiefs' Council [NPCC], 2019) is general and considerations for children in AP/ PRU settings are absent.

PBL in AP/ PRUs introduces children to violence reduction themes thereby stimulating their curiosity and creativity, as they direct and take responsibility for their own learning ('agentic engagement' after Lawson & Lawson, 2013) to address a real-world challenge with relevance to them and their communities. PBL scaffolds pupils' learning as they 'go places and meet people' developing their cultural and social capital (Leat et al., 2021), which strengthens protective factors. Such protective factors could minimise or break the cycles of harm from Adverse Childhood Experiences, coercive family interactions, poly-victimisation through exposure to multiple forms of abuse and lack of positive social interactions with trusted adults (Asmussen et al., 2020). PBL has been used in mainstream school settings (Leat et al., 2021) but its use in AP/ PRU settings with vulnerable children in the context of violence reduction is novel. This evaluation examines the use of PBL in challenging settings and its impact for this population of vulnerable children.

2.1. The key principles of PBL

According to Leat, Thomas & Whelan (2021, p.9), Project Based Learning (PBL) is founded in the principles of:

- Student Agency
- The authenticity of the challenge/ brief/ question
- The authenticity of the outcome – a final product for a real audience
- The opportunity to go places (cultural capital)
- The opportunity to meet lots of different people (social capital)

Early findings from a pilot of PBL in an AP/ PRU setting demonstrated pupils' and teachers' enthusiasm for this pedagogical approach to explore authentic violence-related themes which affect children's

daily lives. The PBL is bespoke to the needs of the pupils and the novel social interaction created with teachers and the VRU Education Team contributes to developing trusted relationships with nonschool adults. These new social interactions facilitate learning across themes, such as domestic abuse, knife crime, exploitation, and malicious communications. These themes are often challenging to talk about in more traditional classroom approaches.

Introductory training was provided for teachers/ school staff by the Newcastle University team, with ongoing support as the VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers engaged with the school to design bespoke sessions to meet the needs of pupils. Following the initial (or 'hook') session, pupils and teachers worked with the VRU to decide on an aspect of the theme to explore further. Pupils decided on their showcase product to publicly exhibit the evidence of their learning to an authentic audience (see Littlefield in Leat, 2017, pp.160-170).

2.2. Alternative Provision Settings

This report evaluates delivery of five collaborative PBL projects in four different AP/PRU settings:

- **The Beacon Centre** is an Alternative Education Behaviour Support Service in South Shields, South Tyneside;
- **River Tyne Academy** is a Special Sponsor-Led Academy in Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, and is part of the River Tees Multi Academy Trust;
- **Trinity Academy Newcastle** (Upper Site) and **Trinity Post 16 Solutions Academy** are part of Trinity Academy Newcastle Trust and are both situated in Newcastle-upon-Tyne;
- **Collingwood School and Media Arts College** is a Community Special School in Morpeth, Northumberland.

Each setting used knowledge of each pupil's background and capabilities to select the violence reduction theme to develop a schedule for sessions over an 8 to 10 week programme. PBL relies on building trust between the VRU Education Team, the pupils and their teachers to stimulate and sustain pupil motivation to help them cope as they encounter difficult topics (Kazdin & McWhinney, 2018). However, it is important that pupils are not (re-)traumatised by their involvement in PBL so the VRU engaged with teachers, parents and carers to ensure that the theme was appropriate for each pupil. There was the option to withdraw and several pupils left the project for a variety of reasons; however, some pupils also joined the projects part way through the process.

Working with external partners and drawing on their expertise and specialist knowledge is vital in PBL, so the VRU and Newcastle University teams drew on their contacts with statutory services, the voluntary and charitable sector and police, justice and community organisations to facilitate the pupils' learning journey.

2.3. Aims and objectives of the evaluation

At the core of this evaluation is the learning and development of students in AP and PRU settings. This will be explored by engaging with participants including students, teaching staff, senior leaders and support staff, and the VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers (VRLOs). We aim to examine:

- What benefits do the students perceive from engaging in the interventions led by the VRLOs using the PBL approach?
- What benefits do the teachers, senior leaders and support staff in the AP settings perceive from engaging in the interventions led by the VRLOs using the PBL approach?
- What benefits do the VRLOs perceive from using a PBL approach to deliver these interventions?
- What can be learnt by all participants from the projects which have been undertaken in these four AP settings in order to further develop the approach and enhance or improve the delivery in future projects?

3. Data collection

Data was collected throughout the process by the university research team, consisting of Professor David Leat, Dr Alison Whelan and Ulrike Thomas from the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) within the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS) at Newcastle University. Additional data was collected by Nurul Bahirah, postgraduate student on the MA International Perspectives in Education programme at Newcastle University, who had previous experience of implementing PBL approaches in alternative settings in her home country of Indonesia.

3.1. Methods

Interviews were conducted with teachers and staff members involved with the delivery of projects in two of the settings, one an SEMH school and one a PRU. Interviews were also conducted with three

VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers (VRLOs) who had been instrumental in designing and delivering the projects. Interviewing pupils involved was more problematic due to the nature of the settings and the safeguarding procedures in place, and only one interview was conducted with a pupil at the SEMH school in the presence of his teacher. These interviews were a mix of online (recorded using Zoom) and in person, conducted at the school following the showcase event, due to the still present COVID-19 restrictions which impacted the research team visiting the school in person, alongside stringent safeguarding procedures in place in some of the alternative provision settings.

Questionnaires were distributed to pupils in each setting, both in paper format and as an online survey, though these were not completed in all settings. Online questionnaires were also distributed to staff members, some of whom were unavailable for interview.

Several teachers and senior leaders had been interviewed or recorded their reflections for a video shown at the VRU PBL conference in October 2021, and these reflections were also used as secondary data. The student questionnaire and interview schedules can be found in the Appendices.

In terms of visual data, the research team had access to the resources produced by both the VRU team and the pupils as part of their output or showcase materials. Some of these showcase materials were in the form of videos produced to show to the invited audience, and as such these also provided useful data.

Questionnaires, interview schedules, information sheets and consent forms can all be found in Appendix A-E. The table below outlines the data that was collected:

Data Collected
Lesson Plans
PBL planning meetings with Newcastle University and VRLOs
Examples of teaching resources/presentations etc.
AP/ PRU Teacher / School staff interviews n=5
Pupil questionnaires n= 7
Pupil interviews/statements n=5
VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officer interviews n=3
Samples of pupil work, outputs and showcase materials

Table 1: Data collection methods

Throughout this evaluation, all participants are de-identified and referred to by an identifier which specifies their school and role (teacher, pupil or VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officer) but not their name or specific role within their setting:

KEY	
PC1	Pupil from Collingwood School and Media Arts College, Morpeth
PRT1/PRT2/PRT3/PRT4	Pupils from River Tyne Academy, Gateshead
TT1/TT2/TT3/TT4	Teaching staff from Trinity Academy, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
TC1	Teaching staff from Collingwood School and Media Arts College, Morpeth
TRT1/TRT2/TRT3/TRT4	Teaching staff from River Tyne Academy, Gateshead
VRU1/VRU2/VRU3/VRU4	VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers (VRLOs)

Table 2: Key to interview and questionnaire identifiers

3.2. Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using a reflexive Thematic Analysis approach (TA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). TA offers a flexible approach to describe patterns of rich data, creating new interpretations (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This allows the researcher to extract the key themes from the interview responses and survey comments and therefore explore a wide variety of topics, which consider how the participants think and feel, developing meaning from discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by four members of the research team, recorded using Zoom (zoom.us) and transcribed, then coded to establish a bank of themes. Ethical approval to conduct the research was obtained via Newcastle University's full ethical process and approved on 26 November 2021 by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

3.3. Limitations

As stated in section 3.1. the COVID-19 pandemic imposed restrictions that changed the format and delivery of some of the PBL projects. In some cases, planned sessions were unable to be delivered due to staff or pupil absence, and showcases were adapted to meet safety guidelines. This also altered the data collection methods for the evaluation, as in some cases the research team were unable to attend showcases in person due to illness, and some interviews were conducted using Zoom to avoid unnecessary visits into schools.

4. VRU PBL Case Studies

Case studies were developed on the projects which took place in the four AP settings. Additional data was supplied in the form of lesson plans and resources developed by the VRU VRLOs, in some cases in collaboration with the teaching staff, and project materials and outputs developed by the pupils during the sessions.

4.1. Lesson plans and resources

The VRLOs developed bespoke lesson plans and resources for each of the settings they worked with and each of the projects they delivered. The research team were able to see some of these materials in planning meetings throughout the project duration and in their interviews, the VRLOs were able to expand on the design process of the materials.

4.1.1. Example: Collingwood School and Media Arts College lesson plans

VRLOs developed a series of lessons based on previous delivery on this theme combined with discussion with the teaching staff at Collingwood, who were able to contribute the requirements of their pupils and the structure of their curriculum. Examples of these are shown below.

Collingwood School and Media Arts College Working in Partnership with  violence reduction unit



Controlling Behaviours / Peer Pressure

Some materials have adapted from Operation Encompass -The Next Steps credit to : <https://www.operationencompass.org/school-participation/next-steps>

Collingwood School and Media Arts College Working in Partnership with  violence reduction unit

Today we are going to:

- Look at the qualities we should show and expect from others in positive relationships.
- We are doing this to understand healthy and unhealthy relationships and know what controlling behaviour is.

Collingwood School and Media Arts College Working in Partnership with  violence reduction unit

This series of lessons is:

- About breaking the cycle of unhealthy friendships or relationships
- About helping you make decisions to keep yourself safe
- For Key stage 3
- We need lots of input from you – discussion!

Collingwood School and Media Arts College Working in Partnership with  violence reduction unit

Ground Rules

- Join in
- Put hands up if we want to talk
- Support others who are less confident
- Listen to and respect what others have to say
- Discussions are confidential unless we need to involve a Teacher to support you

Image 1: Examples of lesson resources for Collingwood School

4.2. Case studies

The VRLOs reflected on the planning and delivery of several of their intervention projects as part of their review process. This enabled them to develop case studies which the Newcastle University research team included in the 2022 revised edition teacher planning guide, [Project Based Learning: Developing curiosity, creativity and skills for life](#) (Whelan, Thomas and Leat, 2022). The original guide was developed as a result of the Edge Foundation funded project “PBL Goes to University” where the research team at Newcastle University worked with a number of schools and colleges across the North-East, developing case studies of the PBL happening in these settings and supporting the teachers through the process. The revised and abridged guide included several new case studies about projects which took place after the original publication, and included case studies of three of the VRU projects. This guide was published and distributed at the VRU PBL Conference, held at Newcastle University in March 2022.

The case studies on the following pages are taken from the 2022 teacher planning guide. As such they include logos or terminology from the original project and some roles and titles may have been subsequently changed, for instance the VRU Education Liaison Officers have moved to the title of VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers (VRLOs). However, these case studies give a summary of the projects delivered and provide a useful starting point for other educational settings considering developing a PBL approach to deliver sensitive topics.

4.2.1. The Beacon Centre, South Shields: Knife Crime

Project Summary

The aim of this project was to explore a Violence Reduction theme with an Alternative Provision setting and was delivered by Education Liaison Officers from Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit. The topic chosen by the school was knife crime. The Education Liaison Officers usually deliver a one hour, knife crime awareness lesson, in various settings using a structured lesson delivery method. Using Project-Based Learning allowed the students to explore the topic in much greater depth and explore the topic in different ways. The school involved all year groups, taught in 3 separate groups, ensuring that all students had the opportunity to participate.



The hook session was delivered in partnership with staff from Northumbria Police Community Engagement Team. The session involved the use of Virtual Reality Headsets which allows the user to be immersed in a knife crime scenario.

Meeting people

Throughout the project, students had the opportunity to meet a range of people who from outside organisations. Members of Samantha's Legacy attended to share their experience of losing a loved one to knife crime. A First Aid session was organised which saw members of the Great North Air Ambulance and North East Ambulance Service teach the students how to treat stab wounds. The students were also given an insight into prison life from a former prison officer who worked in secure units and a Young Offenders Institute.



The showcase

As the whole school was involved in the project, the students had a range of ideas of what they would like to do for the showcase. Some of the students wanted to make posters about what they had learned whilst other students wanted to create models. We used all of their artwork to create a larger display.



Other students used their lyrical creativity to produce work that the audience could listen to. One student likes to MC and wrote a piece that allowed him to tell a story from a perpetrator's perspective. Another student used her experience of singing to write a song which she and another student read together as a poem. This piece was more unusual in that it was from the perspective of a knife.

The year 11 students used their showcase piece towards their Citizenship course. They created a PowerPoint which covered all of the issues we covered throughout the project.

4.2.2. Trinity Post 16 Solutions, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Project Summary

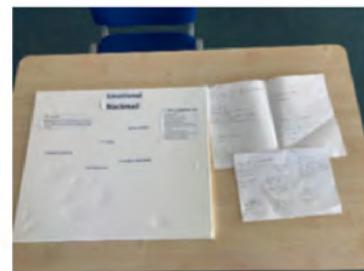
This project linked Education Liaison Officers from Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit to KS5 students at Trinity Solutions Newcastle. The topic chosen by the school was Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships with an element of looking at independent living as these students would soon be leaving education and living more independently.

As Education Liaison Officers we worked with the students on a weekly basis for around 10 weeks. We covered sessions around gas lighting, coercive control and domestic abuse as well as looking at the media and how this impacts on relationships, for example the use of social media. We took the students on a visit to the Princes Trust who facilitated some activities around learning styles and how our behaviour impacts on others. The students also had to plan their travel to the Princes Trust using public transport which linked in to their independent living targets for the project.

Project-Based Learning allowed the students to identify key themes and explore relationships in much greater depth and gave the students a voice on the direction and learning during the project.

The hook session was to engage the students and inform them about the project and find out what topic's they would like to discuss. It was important for the students to take ownership of the project and so we took a poll to work out the areas they were interested in. From this some things were discounted – for instance they didn't want to go and visit a radio studio and instead we tailored the Princes Trust visit so that they were able to have that opportunity to step outside of their usual school environment. From the poll it was clear that gaslighting and coercive control were the areas the students wanted to learn more about.

During all the sessions we explored how different types of behaviour in our friendships and relationships could affect us. We explored domestic abuse, types of toxic behaviour, gaslighting, and how a young person might be vulnerable and coercive control through a mixture of discussion and different activities.



We used virtual reality headsets to work with the students in a different way, exploring and discussing the red flags in a relationship and things that can happen, the students loved the experience of using the headsets and found this activity very interesting.



During the project we talked to the young people about how we could represent their learning in a creative way at a showcase event. It was suggested by them that they would like to think about “advice they would have given their younger selves” and so this was the catalyst for producing some excellent artwork around this theme.

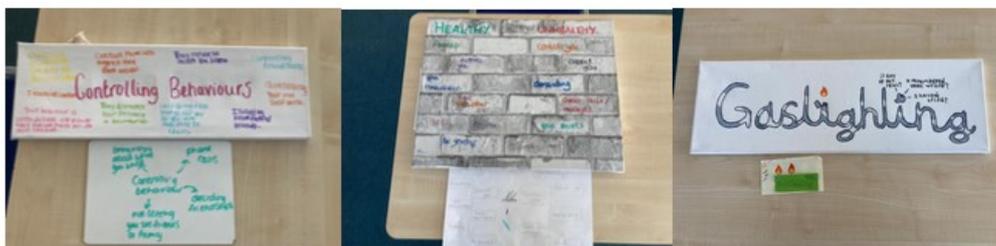


Off-site session with Princes Trust

For this session we arranged to go to the Princes Trust centre in Newcastle, and part of this involved getting the bus to develop their independent learning skills. Whilst there, we explored activities around our learning styles and team building. The aim of this session was to help the learners develop team building skills, by understanding the values, roles and procedures of a team and being able to work with others towards shared outcomes. We explored the purpose of “Plan – Do – Review” to increase success in a team and also Kolb’s Learning Styles.



The showcase event was arranged in school to show the work the young people created, and what sessions were covered, highlighting the great work the students did and canvasses they created to demonstrate their learning. Students from lower down the school were invited along with senior members of staff and representatives from the VRU and Newcastle University to really praise the students for their learning and their work on this topic.



4.2.3. Collingwood School and Media Arts College, Morpeth, Northumberland

Creating lesson plans around healthy and unhealthy relationships

Project Summary

This project was delivered by Education Liaison Officers from Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit to KS4 students at Collingwood Media Centre, an SEMH school. The topic chosen by the school was Operation Encompass the Next Steps, looking at Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships. The Education Liaison Officers delivered one-hour sessions on a weekly basis for around 10 weeks. They used materials from the Operation Encompass Website to support the students in creating a lesson plan which was suitable or accessible for Key stage 3 students within their school. Using Project-Based Learning allowed the students to identify key themes and explore the topic in much greater depth.



The hook session was to engage the students and inform them, they were the experts to create the new lesson plans and materials for other students in their school. The year 11 students are using this work in school to teach Key stage 3 students.



Lesson planning

The young people worked on lesson planning to develop some new sessions that could be delivered to younger students. They got to understand what was needed to structure a lesson plan and to deliver it. The ambition was to develop the 3 lesson plans, one for each theme and PowerPoints to accompany them. Within these sessions they got to be creative and develop drawings to create Scenarios for the young people to discuss how to help their friends. We used the expertise of a qualified teacher to support this.



We developed 3 separate lesson plans and PowerPoints around

- Healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Controlling behaviour / peer pressure
- Ok or not ok



The Media suite

Throughout the project, students had the opportunity to meet Lauren from the VRU to discuss Media and work with the staff in the Media suite in school to develop Video's for the lessons.



The students also got to interview Sarah as part of their ASK project in school to find out more about the VRU and the project. This was a great opportunity and the confidence in the young people doing the interviews was amazing.

The showcase

The showcase has been arranged in school to show the work the young people have created, in the form of new lesson plans, activities and videos.

Project Summary

This project linked Education Liaison Officers from Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit to KS4 students at Trinity Academy Newcastle. The topic chosen by the school to investigate was whether some of the language used between students is Banter or Sexual Harassment, The Education Liaison Officers delivered one-hour sessions and worked with the students on a weekly basis for around 10 weeks. We covered sessions around Sexual Harassment using examples from the media and scenarios which reflected the experiences of the young people. We also used materials from the recent and current advertising campaigns to support the students learning.

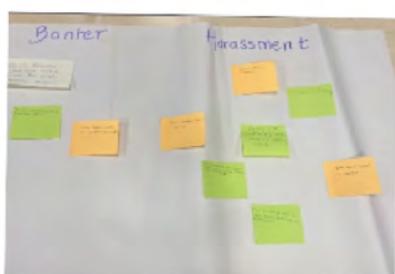
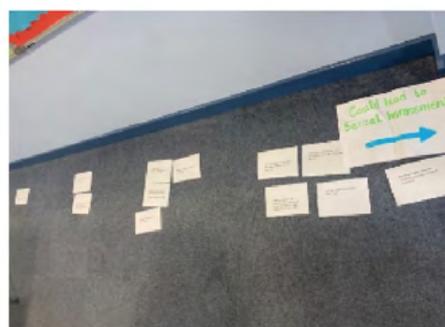


Project-Based Learning allowed the students to identify key themes and explore the topic in much greater depth and creative ways. We worked with an artist to look at violence against women in the history of art and to develop the students' ideas into a finished piece of artwork.

The hook session was to engage the students and inform them about the project and find out what they would like to work on/ cover and our reasons for doing this topic

During the sessions we challenged the students' thoughts and values on the following:

- Banter vs Harassment (derogatory language)
- Controlling behaviours in relationships
- Vulnerability
- Data on Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Harassment online
- Inappropriate touch



The Art sessions were an opportunity to work with Lauren Curry to explore the use of art to express Sexual Harassment and Violence against Women. We looked at Lauren's University projects around the origins of fairy tales and the students explored some historical artworks including Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece" and 19 year old Emma Krenzer's artwork which really inspired them.

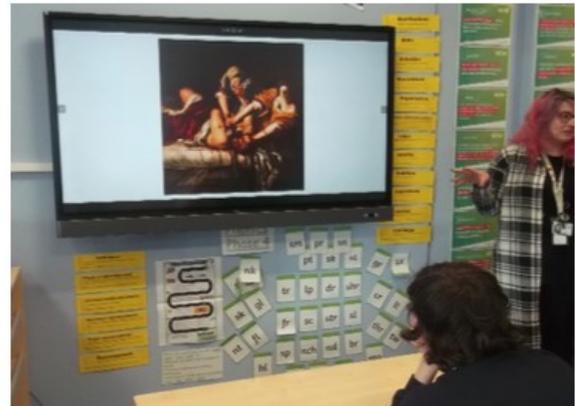




Coding Map - Who can and can't touch you



- RED** - Stranger / Private and sexual assault
- GREEN** - Family, Friends and Pets
- BLUE** - OK with permission / consent
- PINK** - Lover or partner



The students went on to produce some artwork using 3D mannequins to display their thoughts around inappropriate touch and the important of consent.

The project ended with a showcase event in school to which members of staff, other students from the school and colleagues representing the VRU and the University were invited. This was an opportunity to really showcase the work that the students had done and involved recordings from the students themselves as well a "big reveal" of the artwork at the end.



5. Findings

The aim of section 5 is to present the findings from the data analysis. Whilst the discussion will predominantly focus on the generalised findings across all the AP settings, where any significant differences arose due to the nature of a particular setting, these will be specifically highlighted. The implications of the findings and their relationship to the objectives identified in Section 2.3. of the evaluation will be addressed in sections 6 and 7.

5.1. The pupils

Our ethical approach to fieldwork was informed by the vulnerability of some pupils and the sensitive nature of the content of each PBL; ensuring that children were not shocked, frightened or shamed. One interview was conducted with a pupil from Collingwood School with the supervision of his teacher (PC1), and questionnaires were also completed by seven of the Collingwood School pupils. These gave mixed views of the project. However, this was a new approach and many of the pupils in AP settings can find a change from their regular routines difficult to manage. Statements were also made by four pupils at River Tyne Academy and recorded for the virtual PBL Conference held in October 2021.

5.1.1. Teamwork and group interaction

The Collingwood questionnaires showed that the pupils were happy with their groups and generally felt that the groups worked well together. There was a division in agreement as to whether relationships were formed or strengthened, but these pupils were in Year 11 and have been in small class groupings for several years together.

GROUPWORK	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was happy with the group I was in	1	4	2	0	0
Our group worked well	2	2	2	1	0
My group got worse as the week went on	0	0	5	0	2
I got to know some people much better/really well	1	2	1	1	2

Table 3: Collingwood Pupils questionnaire results - Groupwork

Two comments were made about the “the discussions we had in class” being a particular high point of the process. One mentioned that they would remember “how we interacted with the project”. PC1 stated that the project had “helped further my skills like teamwork and communication and that sort of thing and coming up with ideas for lesson planning”. He explained that “there were a few people” who he hadn’t worked with previously, but that in general his group “worked quite well, I think we worked well”.

When asked if there had been defined roles such as a leader in his group, PC1 commented: “I don’t think there was leaders in our group, there were leaders in other groups but I don’t think there was a leader in our group”.

The questionnaire responses about the groups working well together were mixed, and PC1 was able to highlight one of the issues that he had encountered and which he would like the team to address in future projects:

“Well, one thing I think, but I don’t know how you’d do it, when we did it, there’s a few people who just dominated the conversation with the whole class so yeah I don’t know how you would, but maybe you could find a way to stop that from happening as much. I’m one of the quieter ones, like if they [the other pupils] weren’t doing what they were supposed to or like just talking, I think there’s a few times where they were talking and I had my hand up to say something and they’d just talk over us.”

This approach to learning was new for many of the pupils and being able to voice their opinions and take an active part in how the lesson was directed was exciting and different. Though this suited some of the more confident, vocal pupils, quieter pupils perhaps felt unable to consistently make themselves heard, as PC1 mentions in their interview. The VRLO who worked with pupils at Trinity Academy noted that during their PBL sessions:

“we always give the opportunity when we sort of ask questions to talk to somebody within your setting or talk to the person next to you, so it’s all about having them open conversations and promote that because obviously for SEN children, when they do go into the world, they are going to have to speak to different people so it’s a bit of independence and learning as they go along as well.” (VRU3)

5.1.2. Content knowledge

The Collingwood pupils gave positive feedback on their planning, reviewing and final quality of their work. One pupil commented in their survey response that the best part of the process was when “we saw our poster”, while another said they would remember “seeing the giant project”.

CONTENT	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was disappointed in the quality of the work we produced	0	1	3	2	1
Our planning and reviewing was not strong enough	1	2	4	0	0

Table 4: Collingwood Pupils questionnaire results - Content

PC1 was asked whether the pupils or the VRLOs came up with some of the ideas for the content of the lessons and the showcase. He commented that “I think they [the VRLOs] had just some general ideas and we all put our own ideas into it. I think we, we all just talked sort of thing and we all decided what to put in each [lesson]”. Talking about the final showcase videos, PC1 said that “I don’t know [who came up with the idea], possibly one of us but I can’t remember, I’m pretty sure it was one of the pupils”.

The River Tyne Academy pupils also commented on the content of the learning, with several of the pupils mentioning the success of using PBL as a vehicle for ‘thorny issues’ (Alexakos et al., 2016) or ‘difficult knowledge’ (Lange & Young, 2019). PRT5 said that “Project based learning was so good to learn about violence and domestic violence” while PRT3 commented that “project-based learning, that was really, really good, I found it super interesting as I think everyone else did”.

The visit to the media centre was a particular highlight for students, and PRT2 mentioned that they “loved learning about all areas of domestic violence and the tour of the radio station was amazing”, with PRT3 adding that “the radio, that was a great idea personally I think and I’d love to do more of it”.

5.1.3. Confidence, self-esteem and personal development

CONFIDENCE	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was worried at the start of the project	0	1	1	3	2
I got more confident as the project went on	1	0	2	3	1

Table 5: Collingwood Pupils questionnaire results - Confidence

The teacher at Collingwood commented on the pride the pupils displayed while their final videos were shown during the showcase event, and one pupil mentioned in their questionnaire that they would remember “the certificate that we got at the end”. PC1 agreed with this, saying

“Two real things that I remember, first of all it would be the interview, the second thing that I also quite liked was like that we got something out of it at the end with the presentation and the certificates”.

Self-confidence and self-esteem are difficult concepts to assess and evaluate, but for the teachers who observe the pupils as they go through school, it is possible to see changes after engaging in PBL. One such case was the pupil (identified in this evaluation as PC1) who was interviewed at Collingwood. His teacher commented that she had “noticed an increase in confidence because I don't think he'd have done that [engaging in the project and showcase] a year ago, in fact I know he wouldn't have done that a year ago.” She discussed the class who had participated in the PBL project and how their attitude and behaviour seemed to have improved over the course of the project: “I've noted, I don't know if this is just happened to be coincidentally happened at the same time, or whether it's caused by the project based learning but that class's classroom is literally next door, there's a very thin wall here and I can hear them, a lot, and but there used to be some children in there that had issues with articulating their emotions and struggled and lots of sort of disregulated behaviour. Not all the time, not much, but it seemed to sort of decrease and decrease and decrease and decrease, and now you go in and it's a really productive working atmosphere in that classroom. It doesn't feel the same as it did in September it really doesn't, and I don't know whether it's coincidental whether they just hit year 11 and they've grown up. You know they do. Whether the young people, they were disregulated have just worked through their issues. And they do, and one definitely has worked through their issues. Or whether it's tied in with working as a group it's an impossible to unpick isn't it really, but I would like to think that the project based learning has an impact on that and some accelerated development into actually a really lovely little class team they've got they've got in there.” (TC1)

At Trinity Academy, Year-10 students engaged in a project about healthy relationships, safety and violence against women and girls. They produced artwork after working with a visiting artist, and their completed pieces show the care and thought that they put into the work. The teaching staff and VRLOs all commented on how the students had developed in terms of their interpersonal skills and their self-confidence throughout the process.



Image 3: Photos of completed products by Trinity Academy Year 10 pupils

When delivering a project on knife crime to students at the Beacon Centre, a VRU team member spoke about the visible boost in confidence she witnessed from one of the students there: “I definitely think some of them improved in their confidence, so we did have one girl, in particular. When we first started the project, we could only work with her in a very, very small group of two to three students. And she wouldn't give me eye contact, she you know, you would ask her a question and she would sort of giggle and shy away from it. And then week on week she started to improve with that so she would talk a little bit more, and you could see that she was wanting to be involved, and then by the end of that 10 week process, her confidence had grown massively. [...] By the end of that she was demanding that she be part of the interviews with the actual film crew. She was like, no, no, I want to do this, and so we could see her confidence grew massively and so her work was actually presented in the showcase as an individual piece, she had written a song/poem and she recorded it with her friend and that was played at the showcase and for her that boost in confidence that she got that you know not only are we individually recognizing that work, but actually we want to show that work to others, and I think was really key for her to see. And then, and several months after we finished the project we had a national conference and the school brought some of those young people along and this young person was actually one of those that came. Now again for me, seeing that from that original session, where we came in and she wouldn't go into a room of people, she wouldn't sort of talk openly, for her to come to an unfamiliar building with lots and lots of unfamiliar adults and just to be able to sit in that room and then be talked about in front of those is

absolutely huge and that just shows how much her confidence improved in a very short space of time.” (VRU1)

Like several other showcases, The Beacon Centre showcase featured video recordings and audio recordings of the students, and the school also created a video of their PBL, inviting in a local media team to film the students, staff and VRLOs. Here again there was a noticeable improvement in the students’ self-confidence and willingness to be involved:

“Initially they were reluctant to speak on camera and do an interview, by the end of it, they were so happy with what they had done and so happy with the way the project had gone that they wanted to speak on camera and kind of be part of that and show them what they've done.” (VRU1)

The VRLOs who worked with students at Trinity Academy agreed that students’ confidence visibly improved over the course of the project:

“Sometimes you know when we're in school like definitely at the start, they were quiet and they wouldn't kind of talk to you first and then, by the time we were going out, they were talking more, they were engaging with people that they hadn't met before, they were doing things in a group, you know and I just think that there's got to be positive experiences for them, they might not maybe see that at the time, but I think that that's part of their learning definitely.” (VRU2)

5.1.4. Enjoyment/engagement

Responses in the student surveys regarding their engagement and enjoyment were mixed, but this may have been partly due to a potential lack of explanation and support from their teacher when completing it, or perhaps because this way of learning was quite different to their traditional learning. For the students of Collingwood School and Media Arts College, who completed this survey, a change of routine can impact their attitude to learning and their comfort levels. All the students in this setting have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in place outlining their special educational, health, and social care needs, and can be “particularly upset by a change in routine and function better in an environment that is always the same” (Hanks, 2011). However, their qualitative comments were positive, and the teaching staff involved all felt that they had seen noticeable enjoyment and engagement throughout the project.

ENJOYMENT	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed the project	1	2	1	2	1
I would recommend this week to my friends	1	0	2	1	2
School could be more like this	1	1	4	1	0

Table 6: Collingwood Pupils questionnaire results - Enjoyment

Comments made by the Collingwood students included that they enjoyed being able to “chat to people about the VRU” and that they “liked the interview we did with them near the end of the project”. PC1 commented during his interview that PBL was

“just so it was like something different, that I hadn't done before. And it was quite interesting. And at the end we actually did an interview with people now as part of that.” (PC1)

This ties in with our assertion in our planning guide (Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021) that “PBL underpinned by powerful subject knowledge has many advantages for young people – motivation, collaboration, self-esteem, identity, self-regulation and agency (the ability to tackle the challenges in their lives).” (p.7). In such instances as PC1 is describing, the students have the opportunity shift from being passive to being active agents with the challenge of developing their interaction skills to get other people (an interviewee) to co-operate with them. If we become fully human through our relationship with others (Gergen, 2009), then such opportunities are important.

Like their peer at Collingwood, a River Tyne student (PRT1) also acknowledged both the importance of the content and the enjoyment:

“we learnt really important things when the project based learning people came in and we really enjoyed it.” (PRT1)

The teacher at Collingwood had one theory about why the engagement from her group was so high, saying

“the fact that their ideas could be listened to and their ideas are valuable and important - it's giving them a lot of power when sometimes in a school, pupils don't really have a lot of power do they?” (TC1)

As we point out in our planning guide (Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021):

“In some quarters PBL and powerful knowledge are presented as a binary choice, you must choose between them. This is a false binary. Anna Sfard’s paper ‘On the Two Metaphors of Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Only One ’ (1998) is critical in this context. Sfard identifies the two metaphors as Acquisition and Participation. Acquisition refers to the processes that dominate the school system, mastering subject knowledge for examination purposes, while participation refers to learning from experience and application of knowledge, as represented in apprenticeship, outdoor education, performance art or indeed projects. The point of the paper is that there is greatest benefit in finding the marriage between the two.” (p.7)

With experience or participation being given its due place through the medium of the PBL and thus students being listened to and being able to shape aspects of their learning, the levels of engagement increase. Without engagement, usefully seen as having cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects, many desired outcomes in education are out of reach. Indeed Lawson and Lawson (2013) describe engagement as:

“the conceptual glue that connects student agency (including students’ prior knowledge, experience, and interest at school, home, and in the community) and its ecological influences (peers, family, and community) to the organizational structures and cultures of school.” (p.433)

The VRLO (VRU1) who worked with pupils at the Beacon Centre on a knife crime project explained how she saw the enjoyment and engagement increase as the project went on:

"Week on week, we could see that they were encouraged and engaged more and more, the more that we delved into it and the more we did things that were of interest to them and we're doing it in a different way to what they would normally have that done as well." (VRU1)

She saw a marked difference in their interaction and how they engaged with the rest of the group, particularly as they initially showed little interest in producing something for the showcase, and given the nature of this challenging topic:

“In the first couple of sessions, some of the students might be reluctant to talk to us openly in front of a group and they might not be sort of showing much interest in some of the things we were saying about their showcase and about the fact they had to produce something [...] as we went through the project they were opening up, engaging in conversation, not just about what we were talking about, but actually other aspects of their lives as well, even things

like you know what they've done at the weekend and so on, so that permission or the relationships were building that they were keen for us coming in [...] throughout the week in between our visits, they were talking about the topic with the staff within the school, so we knew that it was something that they were interested in, and they would look forward to the next session.” (VRU1)

VRU1 later attended the Collingwood School and Media Arts College showcase as an audience member, and was impressed with the students’ hard work and what they had produced:

“I think the showcase that I went to at Collingwood, where the students have produced the work for the younger year group, just seeing the work that those young people have created. Again that's something they would not been given the opportunity to do had PBL not been used. And I think again it's really important that we're recognizing that they have a value in terms of being able to educate other people as well.” (VRU1)

5.1.5. Working with external partners

The overall theme of the Newcastle University work on Project Based Learning is summed by the strapline “Going places, meeting people, doing and making things”. This encapsulates our belief that “at the heart of any enquiry/project based learning opportunity is the desire to create real-world projects that are underpinned by subject content/procedural knowledge, but which draw on the issues, expertise and resources in the local ‘community’ to give that knowledge a meaningful and therefore more engaging context.” (Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021, p.9). The opportunity to work with external partners can help

- develop students’ social capital and networks,
- develop students’ subject content knowledge and skills through meeting and working with experts,
- help students imagine possible futures through hearing about different careers and learning pathways,
- help students learn about different people and their views,
- provide role models for students.

(Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021, p.46)

Working with the VRLOs and invited guests provided vital contact with external experts and people who came from a context which was outside the school gates, providing social and cultural capital

and an opportunity for students to connect with the 'real world'. PC1 discussed working with the two VRLOs, and it was evident that the group had formed a positive working relationship with them: "It was quite good. I can't remember which one is which, one of them did all the talking and presenting and then the other one wrote down so like added a little bit more detail, and I think that's quite good because like they both knew what they were doing and what role they have, which is quite good".

When asked if he enjoyed working with external partners PC1 said:

"yeah it's nice working with people [from] outside yeah, it's a different perspective for us, of what they do, and you don't see them all the time".

The final showcase at Collingwood was an excellent opportunity for the pupils to celebrate what they had achieved and how they had progressed, and though they had been unwilling to stand in front of the audience due to a lack of confidence, most were happy to pose with their certificates with the teaching staff and the VRLOs.

The River Tyne students were equally as enthusiastic about working with the VRLOs. PRT1 commented that "the staff that came in and taught us were really nice and we had a very lovely experience", while PRT2 said that "the staff were great", PRT3 mentioned that "the staff were super friendly" and PRT4 added that they "used to look forward to the PBL lessons, because the staff were so lovely."

At The Beacon Centre, the VRLOs noticed how well the pupils began to respond to visitors:

"They did start to feel more comfortable not just talking to us as kind of unfamiliar adults but amongst each other as well and starting to challenge each other a little bit around some other ideas as well." (VRU1)

One VRLO (VRU2) involved with projects with the Trinity Academy Trust noticed how their status as an outsider helped the pupils to feel more able to engage with 'thorny issues' or 'difficult knowledge': "It's usually a smaller group, and so they get the opportunity to discuss things and talk about things that they probably normally wouldn't at school and I think we've always said, and the teachers have always encouraged them to be as open and to say what they want to say, and I think that they like that aspect of it because it's almost like we're saying to them look, we're not judging anything here, we say that don't we care and we're not judging anybody, you can say what you want in these sessions, you know and it's all part of the learning process." (VRU2)

As part of the project with Trinity Post 16 Solutions, the students took public transport to [The Prince's Trust in Newcastle City Centre](#), where they took part in activities and teambuilding development, and one VRLO involved (VRU3) commented that this was a great opportunity for the students because:

“The Prince's Trust is maybe somewhere they'll use in future, for future learning or courses or development, so what we were doing was already building that bridge in the same place.”
(VRU3)

5.2. The teachers and educational staff

A number of teachers and educational staff in each setting were interviewed about their involvement in the PBL process and their perceptions of the students' engagement and enjoyment.

5.2.1. The value of the PBL approach

Though some of the teachers and school staff were either aware of or had been involved in PBL in either their current or previous school, for some it was a completely new approach. The research team at Newcastle University delivered three Professional Development sessions online, in February 2021, May 2021 and January 2022, for all the VRLOs and school staff involved, although not all were able to attend. This training outlined the key principles of PBL using case studies of previous PBL work (see Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021), as well as providing participants with materials and resources to help plan and deliver a project.

One senior leader from Trinity Academy Newcastle (TT2) had been involved in PBL at his previous school and was a key instigator of the plans to embed it across a key stage in his current school. He recognised the difference between traditional teaching and learning, and a project-based learning approach:

“PBL is a different way of learning, isn't it? That's the whole thing. It's a different model of learning compared to your formal sit down behind a desk or your book right away. It's not about that. It's about getting involved with a relevant topic and authentic topic, something that the kids can relate to that are interested in. The learning then just flourishes, doesn't it? It goes in a different direction, but it's whether it works for SEND kids in the same way as it works for perhaps a mainstream student.” (TT2)

His Trinity Academy colleague (TT3) echoed this, stating that she ensured that the curriculum content was delivered to the students, but with PBL, “it’s just been delivered in a different, but in a better way.” (TT3)

One element of the PBL approach is how the students are able to showcase their work to a wider audience at the end of a project. For some of the teachers, this is a key difference between traditional teaching and assessment and PBL, as Trinity Academy senior leaders commented:

“I think the fact that they had a final product is the key for me. They could have all just had loads of pictures. But to have the final product was just the icing on the cake.” (TT1)

“[the showcase] was where it hit home how proud the students were of their work and how proud they were of themselves as a group. And they were very keen to get their voices heard, but obviously a little nervous, which is why we did the recordings.” (TT3)

In terms of delivering PBL in Alternative Provision settings, teaching staff and senior leaders are conscious of the differing needs of their pupils compared to mainstream pupils. One senior teacher at Trinity Academy Newcastle explained:

“Our students don't fit the mould, and we try to think outside the box for them as well. Pupil X is a perfect example. Pupil X is not the type of student who would sit down and write in a book. He gets very frustrated. He needs to move a lot because of his ADHD. He has to kind of be on the move a lot. This project here, he's been in charge of the project. He's talked on the video recording... if I was to ask him, what have you learned from this? He'd be able to reel it off. You probably couldn't see what he's learnt in his maths lesson or his science lesson, but because this project was so different, it just opened up a different sort of part of his brain, I suppose, a different learning style, which is what we are always looking for.” (TT2)

Teachers talked about the often difficult circumstances and backgrounds the pupils in AP have experienced, and the lack of opportunities they may have in other areas of their lives as a result as their lived experience. PBL is invaluable in this context, as two teachers commented on the questionnaire (submitted online anonymously) that “it gave [the students] ‘real world’ skills and experience which increased their confidence” and “students enjoyed it and gained new experiences. They talked about it after the event.”

Social and cultural capital can both be developed through the use of PBL as it incorporates visits offsite, such as the visit made by Trinity Post 16 Solutions to the Princes Trust, and visitors into school, such as those made by Samantha's Legacy and Lauren Curry. In our previous research, we have found that visits and visitors "will provide your students with rich and memorable experiences which will hopefully inspire the learning back at school as well as broaden horizons." (Leat, Thomas & Whelan, 2021, p.43)

PBL also promotes discussion and conversation, which again may be more difficult to embed with AP pupils in traditional curriculum models. One teacher felt that:

"With project based learning, because they're talking to each other, although it maybe doesn't feel as if you're teaching them because they're talking to each other, correcting any misconceptions and misperceptions and making sure they've got the right idea, I think you get a higher quality of dialogue going, especially about tricky subjects." (TC1)

One VRLO (VRU2) said that often the teachers she works with on PBL comment on the pupils' retention and their willingness to continue to talk about the project:

"They often say that, like after we've done sessions and things, that the young people will be talking about it afterwards, or even days later, they might mention something, you know that we did that was either fun or that they remember has had a positive impact, so I think that that's a that's a really good thing that can come out of it." (VRU2)

5.2.2. The curriculum content and connection

Though pupils in AP settings follow a variety of curriculum paths which do not always end in formal, national assessment, all pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum. However, teaching staff were keen to point out how PBL could make curriculum content more meaningful for the pupils by connecting it the wider world, real life experiences, or existing knowledge. For instance, at Trinity Academy Newcastle, the pupils had already engaged in a lesson about the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, which prompted the teacher involved to approach the VRU team and incorporate this theme of violence against women and girls into a wider project. As the project unfolded, the pupils became aware of allegations against certain footballers in the news at that time regarding violence against women, and began to discuss this in class, linking it to the work they were doing with the VRU: "They were seeing the footballers with the allegations, and they were connecting that to the learning that was happening in the classroom, and they were seeing the news in a different way." (TT3)

PBL for pupils in Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units (AP/ PRUs) within the landscape of Violence Reduction

Following the showcase, one of the senior leaders agreed that the pupils had understood the content on a more meaningful level:

"To see that now being delivered to students in a way that they can understand, it makes it more real. And for me today, seeing the students who were part of the project, sitting in on the showcase...hopefully they'll sit there thinking about what that means and ask questions and take that home" (TT2)

Being able to relate the curriculum content to their lives is an important aspect of PBL, and one senior leader (TT1) at Trinity Academy commented that:

"Everything that you ever read about PBL, basically it has to be relevant and it has to be high quality and it's plain and as simple as that. And if it's something that they can relate to, then you're on to a winner. I know they'll go home tonight and will talk about that with their parents or their carers." (TT1)

Teachers are understandably worried that PBL may not address the curriculum content required for the National Curriculum or GCSE and A Level syllabus criteria. One Trinity Academy teacher (TT3) commented that although she had enjoyed the experience, she felt that:

"in order to make sure that it covers the full part of the curriculum that we have the statutory elements of PSHE or careers or whatever it is, whichever subject you're doing, [PBL] needs to be planned very carefully. So I think it needs an expert to be able to do that." (TT3)

Their colleague (TT1) mentioned the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) stating that pupils "need to be able to recall the learning. That's what it's all about at the moment. That's everything that Ofsted is still looking for. And if that's what we're going to get from projectbased learning, then that's where we've got to look." (TT1)

5.2.3. Wider curriculum and pastoral benefits

Teaching staff were keen to point out how beneficial the PBL approach is for their pupils due to crosscurricular links and the development of social and cultural capital. Multiple subject areas can be delivered within one project, which is useful for AP settings where many pupils may not be entered for examinations or may come into the school midway through a school year, for instance. A senior leader at Trinity Academy Newcastle (TT4) acknowledged this, noting that

"most subjects can be delivered in a way that's similar to this [project] and can be incorporated into one project so that you have the maths, English, the science subjects, the ICT, all of that can be built into a project." (TT4)

Their colleague agreed with this, and commented that

"When I'm thinking about OFSTED, as I often do these days, and you think about cultural capital, anything about enrichment, [PBL] embodies it. It just embodies it absolutely." (TT1)

The pastoral benefits were also noted by the teaching staff involved in the projects, from friendship groupings and teamwork, to the feeling of ownership and responsibility the pupils got, and the active participation that the projects inspired.

At Trinity Academy, the teacher (TT3) noted the engagement of her pupils and how their ideas and plans directed the project:

"I enjoyed the different approach. I enjoyed the students, I enjoyed their engagement of the project, I enjoyed the things that they were bringing and the direction that it took. And I enjoyed the fact that they kind of had ownership of that and led it, really, which was nice. It's nice, especially at Year Ten, taking that ownership of your own learning. I think it's necessary because we're not preparing them fully for the next step if we kind of stand and dictate to them rather than allowing them to find our own way of learning." (TT3)

The teachers at River Tyne Academy were also impressed with how the pupils engaged with the project and how the VRU team worked to maintain their enthusiasm and encouraged the pupils to interact, with one (TRT2) commenting:

"Even though it was quite a difficult topic, it was portrayed in such an interesting and fun way for learners to be engaged in and we noticed that, after the workshop had taken place, learners were talking to each other, asking what they'd done, how they'd done, things that they'd spoken about so we realised it was something that really grabbed the interest of our learners. The team were actually amazing, each workshop and every lesson was different which kept the learners really engaged and I thought was an absolutely amazing opportunity. All learners worked really hard, and it was an absolutely amazing experience for everybody involved." (TRT2)

The nature of AP can be quite different to mainstream schools, as pupils may arrive partway through an academic year or leave after a short time at the school. This can impact friendship groups and classroom dynamics. The teaching staff at Trinity Academy recognised how PBL had helped their pupils to work together more constructively and coherently, though acknowledged that carefully planning the groups may have been beneficial to this process, with one teacher commenting “there are the groups that I tend to put together because I know there are friendships within those groups so I kind of put those together” (TT3). In terms of interaction and social skill development, two Trinity Academy colleagues commented on the positive outcomes of the PBL project and the progress they had seen the pupils make during the process:

“I think when you consider the vulnerability and you consider the complex nature and the backgrounds that they come from, for them be able to have the conversations and to create something that they have with such maturity, more than anything, it's just incredible. Absolutely incredible.” (TT2)

“I was watching their faces as well while they were listening to their own voices and they weren't cringing or embarrassed or anything, they were quite proud of themselves, which was nice.” (TT3)

5.2.4. Working with external partners

One of the most exciting aspects of PBL is the opportunity for pupils to work with people from outside their normal realm of experience, either inviting visitors into their school, or going on visits to museums, employers, cultural organisations and charities. The teaching staff at each AP setting were keen to stress how important this contact with external partners was, not only for the success of the project, but also for the personal and professional development of the pupils and staff involved. One comment from the anonymous teacher questionnaire summed this up: “It’s more of a real-world approach and using outside experts gives a 'real' outcome.”

At Trinity Academy, the VRLOs brought in an artist, Lauren Curry, who also worked for a local children and young people’s charity. The pupils formed an excellent working relationship with Lauren, and combined with their positive relationships with the VRLOs on this project, this led to the pupils showing good levels of engagement and collaboration:

“Our students are used to staff coming in especially from the VRU because of the subject I teach [PSHE], obviously you can't have a specialist in every single area of that subject and with careers I do need a lot of external visitors. Over the last couple of years all of our visitors

have been online, I think they've had a bit of overload with visitors. So this academic year there's just been lots and lots of visitors in school so they're kind of used to it but the fact that these visitors kept coming back, I think Yellow Group did build up a relationship there, a rapport with them and I think that kind of made them feel at ease in the event.” (TT3)

The showcases at Trinity Academy, like the other settings, offered an opportunity to invite in the external partners that the school had collaborated with, as well as the university team, governors and most importantly, other teaching staff and pupils. This gave the PBL team the chance to not just show off the work the pupils had done but to inspire and encourage others to become involved:

“In my nine years we haven't done anything like that before where we've had what we call VIPs coming along to our school to look at what we've done. And I think that went really well. And I think that the other students that came in to witness that as well, I think the impact was on them was great too. They realized the importance of their learning, they realized the importance of what we've been doing.” (TT3)

The teacher at Collingwood School and Media Arts College acknowledged that for their pupils, meeting people with jobs in the “real world” could have a big impact on their understanding of the world and give them an expert’s view:

“[When] someone's coming out [to visit], it's got that real world experience, and this is our job, this is what we do, this is what we see. [PBL] gives a greater understanding of the world out there, you're actually seeing people from outside come in and building that relationship, and hopefully teaching them a little bit about the world not being too scary and there being nice people out there.” (TC1)

At River Tyne Academy, two senior colleagues (TRT1 and TRT2) commented on the positive collaboration and how working with the VRLOs and invited visitors enriched the project and their pupils’ experience, as well as supporting the staff in delivering something which was quite new for many of them:

“Because of the nature of our students, topics such as domestic abuse can be difficult to cover due to potential adverse childhood experiences our students may have had. And the staff from the Violence Reduction Unit were fully prepared for this, though, and put me at ease immediately by letting me know how sensitively they had planned on delivering the context, so that was brilliant and to have staff already prepared for that sort of barrier that they may or may not come up against is exactly what we need.” (TRT2)

“With the support of working with the university and the VRU, we really have felt we've had all the tools necessary to make this project a real success.” (TRT1)

The impact on the staff of working with external partners was noted by several of the teaching staff interviewed. Support with planning, expert input, and creating a more varied curriculum offer were all mentioned:

“The other thing is it's a time factor as well. It's having the time to plan these projects because these projects take an awful lot of planning. I mean the VRU coming in, doing what they've done, they've taken a lot of planning off [the teacher] which has been fantastic but for us to then sit as a team and to develop projects, it's a mammoth job.” (TT1)

“I think obviously one meeting of somebody turns into another and another and another so I think it's obviously all positive, isn't it? The more people you meet in education the more collaborative work that can be done... I would probably do one of them per half term, but I would have different visitors in each time. So I think that would be my idea of how to move that forward.” (TT3)

5.2.5. Advantages for Alternative Provision Settings

As discussed earlier, pupils in AP settings have differing needs and requirements than those of mainstream schools, and the VRLOs take this into account when planning and delivering the PBL approach. Senior leaders at River Tyne Academy commented on how well this approach had worked for their setting:

“We weren't sure to be honest about how the children would take to that [approach], but the impact has been staggering. Not only have to be able to welcome visitors into our school, ask really curious sensitive questions about big issues such as domestic violence, coercive control and gaslighting, but they've also enjoyed the real creative outlet. It's one of the highlights of the school day and when we're working on this with the children and I'm sure you know that they are just surprised with themselves, of how well they've been able to engage with this. We were obviously concerned about the subject matter, meaning that some children may disengage from that, but actually they've been so open, allowed themselves to be, you know, vulnerable in some of the discussions that we've been having and have produced some really fantastic work so far.” (TRT1)

“It's so rewarding to see our students achieving and succeeding when pushed outside their comfort zone. This is no easy task for our students, but the resilience they've shown, alongside the tangible joy from being involved in a project is an absolute pleasure to witness and be a part of.” (TRT2)

At Trinity Academy, the senior leaders interviewed acknowledged that their pupils needed to be supported in a different way to those in mainstream education, and how the PBL approach had managed this:

“The majority of the students that have come to us have not managed in a classroom setting, in a formal classroom setting, which is why they come to a specialist setting. So if we were to replicate what goes on in large mainstream schools, there would be no point. They would still struggle. So for project based learning, for them to be taking the lead in the learning and for them to be working with their peers, alongside their peers, for them to be just doing something different is really important. And that for us, this showcase today was an experiment on how it would work for us, if it would work, if it could work because it's something we've thought about a long time. But to get the opportunity with the Violence Reduction Unit and Newcastle University to do it in a way that's the proper way, really with using the benefit of everybody else's experience and bringing it into the [Academy] Trust for me has been perfect, the timing has been perfect, people working with us have been perfect and they understand our students.” (TT4)

The staff at Trinity Academy particularly noted how important it was to recognise the vulnerability of their pupils, and how this can affect the teaching and learning process:

“We are academically driven, yes, but not in the same way as maybe a mainstream school would go, because many of our students come with additional needs. They all have an Education, Health and Care Plan [EHCP]. Not quite all but they're very vulnerable. So we have to be very specific in what we teach them and how we teach them.” (TT4)

“I think you worry more about taking risks because of what could potentially come from it. You've got unpredictable students in the sort of SEND students that we have. They're so unpredictable, you know all the familiarity and routine. Absolutely all of those things. To put that [PBL] in, it is a bigger risk.” (TT2)

This comment about risk-taking was discussed further by the senior leaders who had instigated the PBL project:

“Both of us come from secondary schools where it wasn't frowned upon taking risks. It was encouraged to take risks so we've done that all the way through our careers and we're trying to bring that here as well. So our teaching staff are not scared to take a chance. That's what it's all about, isn't it? Because you want to get the best way of learning for our kids and sometimes you've got to take that risk to see if it works and sometimes it ain't going to work. Sometimes you're going to fall flat on your face but you've then got to not be scared that that's going to happen and you're going to get into some sort of trouble for it.” (TT1)

“Because we want every one of our students to be successful and we want them to have the best chance to succeed. And if the best chance to succeed is by them learning in a different way to the formal sit down, like explained earlier, then you got to take those risks. And if you don't take the risk, you're not going to know. So it's not necessarily about being brave. It's about just wanting the best for your students and trying to find that way that's going to work for them.” (TT2)

Collingwood School and Media Arts College is a Community Special School and as such every pupil has an EHCP and requires additional support. The teacher involved in the PBL delivery (TC1) understands the impact this approach can have on their pupils:

“We have a curriculum but it's also about the softer skills and interpersonal skills, because they've all got EHCPs which have the targets on which are about talking with other people, turn taking in conversation, emotional regulation. So in many ways it's easier for us to justify, we get out these EHCPs and go look how this has helped them hit these targets.” (TC1)

The VRLO who worked with pupils at the Beacon Centre on a knife crime project explained why a well-planned PBL project delivered over a number of weeks works better for AP pupils than isolated sessions:

“The engagement from the young people is so much improved by doing PBL you know, one hour is not long enough to work with some of these students [...] thinking about students who have got learning difficulties or social emotional needs, throwing information at them as quick as we can in an hour is not going to be retained, it might not be understood, they might not be able to access it. And so it gives us the opportunity to take a slower pace to cover

things in more detail, and to think about the best way they will learn that information as well.” (VRU1)

She commented that for many pupils in a PRU setting, PBL offers the opportunity to engage in education, something they may struggle with:

“a lot of these young people who are in PRUs are very disengaged from education, because they don't find it interesting or because they don't see how that relates to where they're going to be in five years time. By doing PBL we give them that ownership and we allow them to be interested in what they're doing and to take pride in what they're doing.” (VRU1)

5.2.6. The potential for Continuous Professional Development workshops (CPD)

As PBL is a new approach for many teaching staff, time and support must be allocated for training and planning. The senior leaders at Trinity Academy Newcastle discussed how they are hoping to increase the implementation of PBL initially in Key Stage 3 and then potentially wider across the Academy Trust, but they recognised that there will need to be time set aside both for training their staff and for planning with collaborators. In their two projects with the VRU, it was the VRLOs who took the lead in the planning and delivery process and the senior leaders were aware that in future projects, their staff would need time to plan:

“There was some bits of planning for our staff, that would be unfair for me to say that [the teacher involved] hasn't done any [planning], but I think the main project has been sort of built by the VRU and we've sort of done what we need to do as we're going along in that process.” (TT1)

“The impact on the students is great, but that takes a lot of planning... I think to do this well and to do this in order to have the greater impact on the students, it needs an awful lot of planning time because you need to have those visitors, you need to have those different types of resources to kind of make sure that they're going to get the full impact. And I think that's something, you have heard this many times before, it's something teachers lack, time, because there's that mentality especially in schools like my school, in special schools or in PRUs, because we wear so many hats, because you're normally a smaller team where we have lots and lots of different roles, prioritizing those roles.” (TT3)

At Trinity Academy Newcastle, in order to encourage and motivate their teaching staff, several were invited along to the showcase. It was hoped that by being involved in this final showcase and seeing the impact on the pupils, teachers would be willing to give it a try in the future:

“I purposely picked certain staff to be there today to see the final showcase. So the staff that were there were kind of purposely picked to think in the future they're going to be running with this type of thing.” (TT2)

“My way-in would be the need to go and see it. Yeah. Examples of it, what it looks like, feel it, smell it, touch it, breathe it. You know what I mean? That's what they've got to do. It's not a case of me or two staff in front of them saying, right, we're going to do project based learning, and this is what you're all going to do. First, they need to digest it and then come back to us with questions about what it is and what is that they've got and whatever it may be and then you can start moving forward but I don't think we can do that until we're in that position. They've got to see it.” (TT1)

These senior leaders were hopeful that their staff will be motivated to get involved in PBL as they begin to increase their delivery across the Trust due to this network of support:

“I think quite often the challenge is around sometimes staff understanding what it's about and for them to be motivated and excited and to get that translated into the project. I think the two [projects] I've seen so far have been really good, but I'm sure it hasn't been without hiccups because it's about the level of understanding of how far can we go, what can we do, what's the expectation? But I think once those discussions have been had and everybody knows what the expectations are and just how far you can challenge, I think that's one of the motivations because everyone then sings from the same sheet, they're doing the same thing. So, yeah, I think those challenges initially at the start, I'm not quite sure about this, I don't know whether I've got the skills set to do this. Those challenges have been overcome because of discussions and support that was received.” (TT4)

One senior leader (TT1) has been visiting other local schools who already implement a PBL approach in order to get a better idea of how it will work in his setting. Thanks to previous connections, one of these schools has offered them the possibility of Trinity Academy teachers visiting them to see PBL in action, an idea which the senior leader is keen to act upon:

“We're lucky because our staff they go over and above anyway. It's tight because of just the vulnerability and everything else that goes with that. So when we come to a new idea, they're

usually quite receptive about it anyway. So I would hope that they would want to go down that [PBL] route but I think if we can do something that shows them at first, that would help with it and obviously [the showcase] today is great but I think also sometimes when you go out of a school to another school that's more powerful than anything else that you can ever do and you can just learn so much, can't you? Even if they come back and tell us well, actually that's not for us then, fair play. But at least I'll have some tangible ideas on why it's not for us." (TT1)

At Collingwood School, they are equally keen to establish Professional Development sessions which will train those teachers who are interested in PBL. One of the teachers involved (TC1) has explored innovative pedagogies in their setting previously, and hopes to implement this on a wider scale at Collingwood School and Media Arts College, and has the support of the leadership team to do so:

"I planned it, I coordinated as part of my role in school and when they came in to do the project based learning, I was involved as having oversight is all my idea, but then the class teacher was the one that was involved because she taught them, she thought it was a really good idea, she was interested in project based learning as well, and she happened to be teaching them the lesson that [the VRLO] could come in so it just worked itself out perfectly." (TC1)

Though TC1 worked with a fellow teacher on the VRU project, this teacher had other demands on her time and could not maintain the same involvement as TC1, and as a result her contribution diminished as the project went on, meaning that TC1 had to lead the project more than she had planned: "I'd be ecstatic to train someone else. Because that's what it should be, I think, in an ideal world, it would have happened. And with the teacher this year, she was very interested in sort of action based research and all these sort of things and it just somehow, I don't know how it happened, whereas, yes, I would like to train someone else to do it and let them, that could become their little project to turn into big projects. And then share it, then they can just cascade it out without me being involved because it should be sustainable, it shouldn't just be like, oh look what we can do here, this one off marvellous thing. Yeah, it should be this works, this is why this works, this is how this works, can we try it or can we try aspects of it." (TC1)

TC1 is hopeful that with effective designated training sessions for teachers run by trained teaching or senior staff or by external visitors (known as Professional Development or PD) in the autumn, a

number of staff members will be trained who will be able to integrate PBL more sustainably into their curriculum:

“We do weekly CPD [Continued Professional Development] sessions, so [...] what I'll do in the new school year in September is I'll say is anyone interested in Project Based Learning, come along for a session on it and I'll explain what it is, I'll obviously use the university materials, because I picked some of those up on the event day and I'll share with them what it is and then talk it through and then see if anyone's interested in doing it. And then I'll support them to do it, and so, hopefully just let them flourish but be there to support as they need me.”
(TC1)

Like the staff at Trinity Academy, the Collingwood School and Media Arts College staff are skilled at working with SEND pupils and the teaching staff who have already been involved in PBL hope to encourage others to follow their example and integrate a PBL approach into their teaching:

“They are outstanding at what they do, they're used to what they do, some of our teachers are outstanding at what they do and like almost, I want to try something new, I want to try something more innovative, I want to go and find out about this, I want to do research, I might be interested in this, and then when they see how well it goes, they can then get the other ones on board.” (TC1)

5.3. Northumbria VRU Education Team

Each of the projects discussed in this evaluation were developed and delivered by the VRU Education Team, who comprise colleagues from different backgrounds and with different types of experience in working with children and young people. This gives the team a broad range of expertise and allows them to select the appropriate VRLOs to work with different pupils in different settings.

5.3.1. Development of a PBL approach

The VRU Education Team have been gradually developing approaches to violence reduction themed learning over the last few years, including, for example, *Operation Encompass the Next Steps* (a programme of domestic abuse-related learning for Key Stage 1 to 4). The use of PBL has been in development since February 2021, and the Education Team are exploring other pedagogical approaches, such as co-production of sessional learning and *Philosophy for Children* in primary settings. The Newcastle University team trained members of the team to ensure that VRLOs

understood the key principles of PBL and how to structure and plan an effective PBL project. The VRLOs used their existing good relationships with the schools and particular teaching staff to have initial conversations about their needs and requirements, and how they could embed these needs into a PBL approach:

“Generally, we have a bit of discussion first don't we with the school, talk about what they want to do, and then we would probably go in with that kind of idea of a subject and talk to the young people about what they saw that involving so that we get them right on board, from the start.” (VRU2)

“We have the initial meeting with the teacher, we'll talk a little bit more about Project Based Learning so they've got a greater understanding, so that might be one or two meetings, and then we go to meet the people where we might come with suggestions and ask them to give us suggestions, but I think the majority of the time it's been the school and then peoples' suggestions that have been sort of put forward. And in the main, in that initial meeting we've always booked out eight to 10 sessions, so we are fully organized and it's in the schools diary, so it's all about planning and organization really.” (VRU3)

One important aspect of the PBL approach was recognised to be the longer duration of delivery of the projects, as opposed to the standalone sessions that they were used to delivering:

“I mean when we deliver a one-off session for an hour it's a very different target audience and it's just about getting the basic information out there to as many people as possible, this is about this is the stuff that will make a real difference.” (VRU1)

“We were delivering a lot of those just a standalone sessions all the time and a lot of the materials we've used in some of the projects that we've done because they've been about relationships, healthy and unhealthy relationships and you can definitely see a difference from when you would deliver, you know to work with a group one time to delivering that and talking about those subject areas over several weeks.” (VRU2)

Building relationships with both teachers and pupils is especially important given the nature of the topics the team deliver:

“If you've got a one off lesson you don't have the time to build up that relationship so you don't get that openness very often, you do sometimes and but generally it takes a little while, at least two to three sessions before they'll really start to open up and thinking about the

issues that we're trying to cover it's really key that we give them that space and build those relationships and that trust and I think now, when we go back in to do more PBL in that school, because we've already got those trusted relationships with quite a few of the students, then new students who've come into the school will trust us a lot quicker and be more engaged a lot quicker because they see how the other students interact with us." (VRU1)

"Having that social interaction with students, you know it's important that they see we're not just there as a teacher, which is what they would see it in their eyes, we're not just as a teacher, we're there as somebody who wants to spend time with them. You know we're choosing to spend our break with them, we choose to talk to them about things that aren't just to do with work that has to do with their life. And that's so important to then start getting them to change mindsets, change behaviours and being able to feel safe and secure to talk about something that's affected them." (VRU1)

The VRLOs use the PBL approach as a way to develop trust and openness, with the aim of pupils being able to discuss sensitive topics in a group environment:

"If you think about mainstream schools, if they have a PSHE lesson basically they'll go in for the hour, they might be doing about domestic abuse, they'll see that teacher for an hour and then they leave that room and they might not see that teacher again for another week, they could actually be really upset by what's happened. There might be something that they want to disclose but they're then kind of just out the door and that's it. But within the settings that we've gone into they've got the consistency of staff that they've got good relationships with those staff that they can speak to. And so it really does allow us to be able to challenge, to sort of adapt to those topics where they might not be able to even cope with that in the mainstream system." (VRU1)

In terms of planning, the VRLOs collaborated closely with the teachers to adapt the lessons and resources according to the needs of the schools as the project progresses:

"It allows us to be more creative, it gives us more time just to cover topics in more detail and at the students' levels, so we've got bit more of a free range and where it can be tweaked, or we will say they all really enjoyed that session, where can we expand on it next week, what can we add back into it so, even though we have an idea of what we want, we lead off the students, so if they're engaging or liking something we put some more of that in." (VRU3)

“It's good to have that kind of a rough plan in place and then be able to adapt if you need to.”
(VRU2)

However, in the early stage of the project delivery, the VRLOs were developing projects based on their previous work, and as such they had the expertise and the resources (as ‘content knowledge’) already available to begin adapting their original lesson plans to a PBL approach:

“I was involved right from the planning stages, with this one and it started really with me and [VRU4] who was the other leader and officer who was involved and sitting down to discuss kind of structure ideas about what sort of content, we could look at what sort of themes, what would be important.” (VRU1)

“With this one [VRU4] and I planned just between us, we didn't involve the school with the planning and I think part of the reason behind that is that it was on knife crime, which is a topic that, you know, we deliver week in, week out, it's something that you know, we are delivery practitioners on, so our understanding of the knowledge content is very, very high.”
(VRU1)

5.3.2. Working with teachers, school staff and external partners

Collaboration was key between the VRLOs and a wide variety of people within the AP settings, including teaching staff, non-teaching staff and senior leaders. The VRLOs discussed initial ideas for the project with senior leaders at each setting in order to establish what was needed in terms of planning and resources:

“The headteachers would be involved right at the very beginning, sort of saying that they were definitely wanting a project to happen in their school. But then it would generally be the class or group teacher of the young people, and maybe one or two of the support staff that would be involved with the group as well.” (VRU2)

In general, teaching staff involved with these projects were enthusiastic and willing to learn more about PBL. In order to do this, some attended one of the three Professional Development (PD) sessions held online by the Newcastle University team. The VRLOs were keen to involve teaching staff and support staff at all stages of the project so that pupils were supported and so there was a shared feeling of creation and progress.

One VRLO (VRU1) commented on the high levels of engagement they encountered from the teaching staff they collaborated with:

“There was varying sort of experiences of engagement, but there were a couple of members of staff, in particular, who were very motivated to be involved in the projects, not just about turning up to the classroom and you know just making sure they behave, they were actively encouraging the students, they were engaging in those discussions about what they wanted to produce in the showcase, they were spending time with the young people between the sessions to help them create things and you know, so I think their enthusiasm and their engagement was really important as well in keeping the students being engaged.” (VRU1)

VRU1 also detailed the importance of teaching staff building strong relationships with students, and how the PBL approach used in the projects could help with this:

“That member of staff spending time with them to create something and going out of their way to do that is something that they will sense and have that improved relationship, [and with one pupil you] could see the relationship between him and the member of staff who supported him to do that, and he really flourished so they could see they already had a positive relationship, but the time they were spending together on doing this, you could see there was a real connection there, there was a lot of laughter, there was a lot of banter between them and having those relationships is so important, not just in terms of completing the project, but actually getting those people to engage in education as a whole, getting them to be able to be challenged about their behaviour as well, and so, by having those good relationships, it opens the door to other things.” (VRU1)

The relationships that the VRLOs developed with the teachers were equally as important as those developed with the pupils:

“It's a whole school approach which means I review whatever we develop, we will liaise with the teacher and we take feedback, are we pitching it at the right level, is this right, do you want to tweak it, what more do you want, and it's got to be that sort of relationship in this. For us, we need to establish those relationships with that teacher, they've got to have trust in us delivering. And they need to understand that the message we're giving to their students is correct, so it's about having a working relationship and them trusting us.” (VRU3)

In each of the AP settings, the showcase provided an opportunity for the school staff involved to evaluate the success of the project, and the VRLOs were aware that this could demonstrate the impact and motivate the school to move forward with a PBL approach, as VRU3 explained:

“When we've created something positive, it gives the boost and the teachers are like, wow this is fantastic, this is really powerful and so it is, it's really good. There is no better way of learning and but it's how people can adapt to change [...] if they have seen a positive impact and other teachers have seen the students engage and participate, that might encourage them. So it's about encouraging them, it's not a lot of work, it does take time, but actually the planning they normally do is just a different way of planning and that can come in, so a project is a project.” (VRU3)

Forming trusting and supportive relationships was vital with each of the people involved in the PBL collaboration, and this included the students themselves. It was observed by two VRLOs that these relationships took time to develop but the process was noticeable and had a real impact on the success of the project:

“The main thing I noticed is that they just become much, much more relaxed around you so at first, you know, the first time you go in, first or second time it's a bit more formal, you try to kind of make it a bit more relaxed, because you can be a bit more creative with PBL but then you notice that they start to become more relaxed so when you go in it's like, we're used to seeing you now, you know the what we're doing today type of thing and I think that helps them learn because they're able to be more relaxed.” (VRU2)

“When you build those relationships or you can really start to have in depth conversations, you can really start to get them thinking and it's for me personally, I just enjoy it, I enjoy having that interaction, the relationships with the students and so yeah absolutely it's definitely something that we will be doing more of continuing further ahead as well.” (VRU1)

This kind of social interaction and trust-building is particularly important in an AP setting, where many pupils are vulnerable or have experienced difficult backgrounds, often developing negative feelings towards, for example, education, the emergency services and people in a position of power as a result:

“I think for them to see people who, you know, work for an organization linked to the police is actually really important as well, so, as much as we don't work for the police, we obviously have the Police and Crime Commissioner in our title because that's who we work for, and

we've had the police in. So for me to know that we're starting to break down those boundaries, that we've been able to celebrate the work that those young people have done, it's huge for me, because a lot of these young people have had a rejection from education. And you know, the fact is they've experienced and celebrated something that they will not have done for years, if ever." (VRU1)

5.3.3. Using authentic materials and resources

Authenticity is a key part of project based learning, and linking a project to the real world makes the content and process more meaningful and more relevant to pupils. Using a "hook session" engages pupils from the outset and sets the tone for the project, so they are aware that this is not "traditional" teaching and learning.

"They were really engaged, especially in the practical activities, when we did things that had the VR [Virtual Reality] headsets so that that was our hook session. And they absolutely loved that session, they really engaged very well and it was an opportunity for them to have a laugh as well as that introduction to a really serious topic." (VRU1)

The VRLOs were aware that many of the topics they were covering were sensitive but also connected well to real world issues and current affairs, such as the #MeToo movement and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) campaigns.

"A lot of different pupils will have had some experience of some of these topics, so we can look at how we can best support that student to address this and that's really sensitive. But also, they can take the direction so if there's something that they want to talk about and it comes up in the session, then we can follow that up and it gives them that outlet as well. And we do try and create a safe environment where they feel they can talk but also knowing that they've got the support there." (VRU1)

The authenticity of the projects seemed to resonate with the pupils, and the VRLOs and AP setting teaching staff noticed that pupils were engaged and enthusiastic about discussing their work, as mentioned earlier:

"If they were in a geography lesson they wouldn't talk about it normally, it's like oh yeah well, this is what we've been doing for the last few weeks in geography, you know, it just wouldn't be talked about, whereas we could see that was happening, and they were really trying to include each other as well." (VRU1)

5.3.4. Further development and moving forward

The VRLOs noted several impacts that could be further developed and reviewed in order to take the PBL approach forward in the future, either with the same schools or with new schools. At The Beacon Centre, it was felt that the approach had been able to improve relationships, behaviour and social interaction and development:

“[The Beacon Centre headteacher] could still feel and sense the success of the project [after its completion], so there was a better relationship between the pupils, there was better behaviour within the school and that's really kind of a legacy that was left by the project and because we are planning on going back in that's something that we can continue to build on moving forward.” (VRU1)

However, there was a great deal of collaboration between all partners in this AP setting, and the VRU acknowledged that more structured collaboration was needed in all projects, with all those involved: “One of the things that I'm keen to look at for a lot of the project is how we better include the school in the planning process because sometimes that's being done with some of the other projects that have been done by the team, other times that hasn't been and I think in terms of really getting that engagement with the school and getting them to understand how it needs to be embedded throughout PBL, and in the curriculum then actually that is really important that we have that and making sure that we're getting it right as well, because it may be that we've got an idea of what should be covered and this is where is the school will have another idea, and so I think that's something on reflection and it's something that we do need to get better at as well.” (VRU1)

The team recognise the need to include visits and visitors frequently in their projects:

“I plan to use more external partners to help or go out on a visit, you know it's going to make it number one more fun for the students, but number two less work for us” (VRU2)

Pupils are also a key collaborator, and in PBL, they have greater ownership and direction over how the project develops, its structure and its outcomes as a more open-pedagogy. One VRLO (VRU1) explained the importance of including the students in the process:

“That challenges us as well as practitioners to change our style of you know, how we deliver education, because you know typically within schools it's kind of like the teachers at the front, they kind of give them that knowledge content, give them an activity to do and that's the lesson, whereas this is obviously very different [...] I think the benefit is that the students

come up with that idea, so if they want to do graffiti, for example, it might be something that I've not thought of and probably wouldn't have. But because they have a say actually, yeah well we'll go with that if that's what you want to do." (VRU1)

VRU1 then summed up their philosophy of the approach:

"It doesn't matter to me whether it's one child that benefits or all of them, as much as I want it to be all of them, it's about making the smallest difference we can you know, and if that's one person, that's fine, but we've seen so many young people change and improve in a variety of ways because of it." (VRU1)

5.3.5. Challenges

One VRLO summed up the key challenges that they had faced as being "not having the teacher on board or not fully preparing the students to what they would be getting involved with" (VRU3). Another added that a challenge specific to PRUs and AP is the fact that

"not being a regular group of students as well, which is very difficult for them, because they had them coming and going and new ones starting all the time, But if you've not got that consistent group they can't kind of follow it through from the beginning to the end and if you've got people dropping in and out then it's not really a project is it's just a one off session for those kids." (VRU2)

Other barriers they commented that they had faced were institutional, whereby some pupils had negative perceptions of or experiences with the police and therefore were reluctant to join in a project which they regarded as being led by police officers (albeit the VRU Education Team are not part of Northumbria Police); and general pupil behaviour issues which threatened to derail the project for the other pupils and which could, as one VRLO put it, "spoil it for everybody" (VRU3).

Planning and having a flexible approach to the delivery of the project was also mentioned. This need for flexibility and adaptation has an impact on the VRLOs and on the teaching staff involved, as it may be a different way of working to how they usually work:

"I think one of the challenges of PBL and some members of the team will feel this more than others, based on background, but I think for some being creative and coming up with different lessons and for the length of that project can be a challenge. So you know they may be very well versed in delivering a standard one hour lesson and how they'll do it, but with PBL,

obviously, every project is different, so, even if we did ten knife crime projects, we know that each of those projects is not going to be exactly the same. And so it's having the confidence to step out of your comfort zone, a little bit, I think, and also being able to be a little bit more creative." (VRU1)

This flexibility extends to within the project sessions, as the pupils can change the course of the lesson through their discussion and personal reactions to the content:

"You know yes, you might have an agenda when you go into the room and think like, this is kind of what we're covering today. But you've also got to have that flexibility to say right, actually, this has been completely off-piste and we've gone somewhere else, but that for me, the difficulty for me, it's like letting them run with it and so that's been something that I've had to learn to do and that's certainly not a bad thing, and I think at points we're responding to what the young people are identifying that they want to learn about." (VRU1)

Despite this flexible approach, a coherent plan from before the team go into the school right through to the final showcase and evaluation is required so that all partners are aware of how the project will progress. This included a regular debrief with teaching staff after the sessions to discuss how the project was developing and agree any changes needed:

"Something that really helped us was planning in the debrief sessions after we would have the sessions, because then we can look at, okay what's gone well, what hasn't gone so well, what's the plan for next week, and making sure we keep on track with that planning to make sure we're not falling behind and we're also aware of anything that we may be facing next week." (VRU1)

Working with the teachers was generally successful but a limitation largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the occasional change of staffing or a lack of communication between teachers about why the VRU team were there and what was expected of the teaching staff during the session, particularly if they not been involved with the initial planning and discussion, or as one VRLO pointed out:

"If the class teacher isn't there and sometimes you might get like a support teacher in or a supply teacher they don't always know the whole kind of background just that maybe we're coming in that day to run a session." (VRU2)

VRU2 also mentioned that teachers frequently have other roles, responsibilities and pressures to contend with:

“You don't always know what is going on for them [the teachers] in the background, you know we are just coming in to do like a lesson as part of a project that we're working on and that's just one lesson in their day, sometimes, so I always think well I don't know what else what other pressures they've got going on in the background.” (VRU2)

In terms of the pupils, the nature of an AP setting can mean regular changes to classes, with pupils joining or leaving the school at irregular intervals. This created a challenge in keeping a consistent core group of pupils for PBL:

“I think you should have the consistency of a group from start to finish, that's the ideal, but, of course, things change, you can't always have that and that's the one that you would want.” (VRU2)

“My session was supposed to be in two different groups but on the day they put the groups together which can be a challenge when you're moving groups that don't normally work together anyway but particularly in a PRU where they're very used to their own rooms, their own staff and doing very structured work. This showed very well that students get a lot more from when they're working in a smaller group so they get a lot more one to one support and they feel more comfortable in that environment.” (VRU4)

An additional challenge that this caused was a potential negative impact on the relationships being built between the VRU team and the pupils, and between the pupils themselves:

“You can't just expect to go in once at the beginning and once at the end and that the kids respond really well to you. You've got to maintain that and I think it's really important to see those familiar faces, get to know who you are as a person so that they can really explore that subject matter especially when it's something that can be quite tricky to explore.” (VRU4)

The biggest challenge of all is of course the time that needs to be devoted by all partners to the planning, design and development of a large-scale project. The team commented that running more than one project across different settings was particularly time-consuming:

“When you are setting the projects, it can be quite time consuming. So, potentially, you have a lot of planning if there's eight sessions, and so, time is a big factor as long as that's factored in.” (VRU3)

“The other thing I also learned was that I wouldn't want to run more than two at one time, like that's just me personally, because of the planning and I think as you've got to, you've got to plan the sessions, you got to deliver the sessions, and you really need to debrief the sessions as well, and think about what went well, what could change for next time, do we need to change, are we staying on the same track, or are we going off track, so yeah it's the time and the planning.” (VRU2)

However, despite all these individual challenges, the team were keen to point out that nothing was insurmountable:

“No school is a challenge, so I think if it didn't work the first time, it's about being honest with the teacher looking at how can we tweak it, what can we adjust, what would work better” (VRU3)

6. Conclusions

In this evaluation, we hoped to explore three key questions:

- What benefits do the students perceive from engaging in the interventions led by the VRLOs using the PBL approach?
- What benefits do the teachers, senior leaders and support staff in the AP settings perceive from engaging in the interventions led by the VRLOs using the PBL approach?
- What benefits do the VRLOs perceive from using a PBL approach to deliver these interventions?
- What can be learnt by all participants from the projects which have been undertaken in these four AP settings in order to further develop the approach and enhance or improve the delivery in future projects?

This section will draw conclusions on the findings from the data collection and reflect on the observed benefits for AP / PRU pupils and teaching staff and for VRLOs, and the challenges and barriers that can be limitations to the success of the approach.

6.1. Successes and benefits

All those interviewed and those who responded to questionnaires were positive about the use of a PBL approach to explore sensitive and challenging topics. Several key themes were mentioned frequently, including positive relationships between parties and the personal and social development observed for the AP pupils.

6.1.1. Benefits to AP / PRU pupils

The interviews and surveys with the pupils showed there were many benefits. The pupils formed positive relationships with the VRU team and external partners and found the process of welcoming visitors into their settings or visiting off-site locations very enjoyable. In many cases, the visitors provided a viewpoint and range of expertise that the pupils would not have been able to access otherwise, and this broadened their world view and added social and cultural capital to their education.

Teaching staff reported that the VRU team and the external partners involved were able to communicate challenging and difficult topic material in a way that was different and more engaging than the pupils would have otherwise experienced, partly due to the level of expertise and content knowledge held by the team, and partly due to the more immersive, interactive nature of the PBL (as *pedagogical content knowledge*). Staff commented that pupils retained the information longer; were more willing and able to talk about the topic with teaching staff and family members; and were more able to connect the learning to the real world.

In terms of personal and social development, teaching staff reported that pupils demonstrated visible improvements in non-cognitive skills, such as self-confidence and self-esteem. For instance, one Beacon Centre pupil who initially refused to participate in the sessions with her peers but by the end of the project, was able to attend a large conference at Newcastle University with unknown adults.

Teamwork and collaborative working skills were also highlighted as having improved for many pupils during the PBL process, and at Collingwood School in particular, the SEND pupils showed improved leadership skills and an increased ability to take responsibility for the project design and delivery.

The showcases allowed pupils to present their work in a way they were comfortable with, and most of the settings opted to allow pupils to pre-record their input, meaning that they did not have to stand in front of a live audience. This again was beneficial for their confidence, as they were able to attend the showcases and feel pride in their final products but without the pressure of presenting.

6.1.2. Benefits to AP / PRU staff

Staff in the AP settings also reported positive and trusted relationships with the VRU team members who delivered the projects, and most found the PBL process enjoyable and useful. Most of the staff members interviewed were enthusiastic to continue delivery of violence reduction themes using a PBL approach, with the input from the VRU team or other external partners. The lead teachers in each of the settings were supportive of PBL and would like to embed it as an approach for other aspects of the curriculum.

One aspect that was particularly beneficial was the input from external partners who had expertise or experience in areas which the teaching staff felt were outside their own expertise. This included visits to The Beacon Centre from a local charity, [Samantha's Legacy CIC](#), to talk about the impact of

knife crime on families and communities, and working with an artist at Trinity Academy when creating artwork looking at violence against women and girls and healthy/ unhealthy relationships.

6.2. Challenges and barriers

Alongside the benefits and successes, the challenges encountered when adopting a PBL approach must also be considered. Some of these challenges are common across many educational settings when attempting to embed an innovative pedagogy into a curriculum, and some are more specific to an AP / PRU setting.

6.2.1. Challenges for AP / PRU settings and staff

There are several challenges which any setting beginning to implement an innovative curriculum approach will face. These include the time constraints on already stretched teaching staff; lack of training and lack of time, resources and facilitators to conduct training effectively; and a limited capacity within a curriculum which is focussed on assessment. Some teaching staff mentioned that this last point was not as much of a challenge for an AP setting, as often their pupils were not on the same assessment pathway as a mainstream pupil, so there was more flexibility in the curriculum offer and delivery. Bascia and Maton (2015) refer to this concept as “loose coupling”, suggesting that this loose coupling is one of the factors that promote innovation in alternative settings. In their study of Alternative Provision in Toronto, they concluded that curricular innovation is enabled because AP settings are only loosely coupled with the public education system, despite complying with educational policy and regulation. However, other teaching staff interviewed commented that implementing a new, innovative approach could be considered a risk as they had to ensure that all their pupils were receiving the highest standard of education regardless of assessment and national achievement, and as such any new initiative needed to be effective and demonstrate visible positive impact.

Many of these barriers match those highlighted in other studies exploring barriers within the curriculum offer for AP settings and their pupils. Kendall (2019) concluded from her study of inclusion within a North-East primary school that to enable effective inclusion for all children, collaborative practice is required both within the school and with outside agencies. In this context, the PBL approach offered by the VRLOs and integrated into the curriculum by the AP settings can be considered an effective method of overcoming these barriers.

A particular challenge for AP and PRU settings can be the vulnerable nature of pupils and accompanying factors such as previous trauma, additional needs or repeated absence or frequent transition between schools. This can lead to a disrupted education experience and a reluctance or refusal to engage in class. There are many advantages of a PBL approach for pupils in these settings, as discussed throughout section 6.1, but for some pupils, the change in routine and the appearance of unfamiliar adults, especially those in “authority” roles such as police officers, can be unsettling.

The SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health) requirements of pupils must also be taken into account when implementing a PBL approach that relies heavily on interaction and the development of interpersonal skills such as communication and teamwork. PBL projects may also encourage a more open discussion environment than pupils may be used to, and this can be difficult for some pupils to engage in effectively due to confidence or social interaction issues.

6.2.2. Challenges for the VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers

The VRU Education Team recognise that they have a wide repertoire of violence reduction projects which they have either adapted to a PBL approach or developed from scratch. In some cases, this has involved collaborating with teaching staff in the AP and PRU settings, and this can be a challenge. The existing challenges for education, such as low teacher motivation and/or capacity, staffing changes and a lack of support from leadership or additional staff members can all hinder a collaborative approach to planning and delivery of PBL. The relationships formed between VRU team members and staff in schools have in general been very positive but not all teachers have been able to commit the time and enthusiasm required for successful collaboration. In one case, this meant that the coordinator at the school had to step in to work with the team when, to respond to competing demands, the lead teacher withdrew from the project. In another case, the project in a PRU was curtailed due to the three pupils’ lack of appetite and preparation for anything new leading to low motivation and engagement, and the teachers’ lack of understanding about their own role in the project delivery – a new project with different students is planned.

A change in staffing structure can also derail progress. For instance, at Trinity Academy, the lead teacher, who was passionate about using PBL as a vehicle to deliver challenging and difficult topics, has since left the school. Effective networking and infrastructural support are needed so that AP settings do not default to their previous curriculum methods once the VRU Education Team has left.

This links to the final challenge for the VRU Education Team, whereby they may be perceived as an external service who come into a setting, deliver a project over a number of weeks, then leave. This can lead to teachers being reluctant to engage fully or believing that their input is unnecessary while the VRLOs lead the project. This can be mitigated by successful collaboration and communication during the planning stage of the project as well as the delivery, and by teachers and support staff being aware of their roles in the process, and how they can continue to support pupils and incorporate a PBL approach in their own teaching after the project has concluded.

7. Learning for future projects: Discussion points

In this section, we would like to reflect on the successes and challenges discussed in the previous section, and examine how the VRU Liaison Officers and AP / PRU settings can learn from the projects which have taken place so far.

7.1. Learning from successes

There are many positive aspects which could be built on by the VRU Liaison Officers and by the AP and PRU settings in order to further develop their PBL approach in delivering violence reduction themed learning.

- Pupil engagement is positive. Pupils report enjoying the interaction with the VRU team and visitors, and this could be extended by increasing the visits and visitors incorporated into each project. AP and PRU settings could also begin to think about how they could use external partners more effectively in other areas of their curriculum delivery, in order to enhance the curriculum and offer greater opportunities for social and cultural capital. For more inspiration, see Leat, Thomas & Whelan (2021, pp.69-71).
- Showcases provide an excellent platform for pupils to share their work with others. Effective showcases have enabled pupils to take part without undue pressure, for instance, by using pre-recorded audio or video. This could be further developed by creating showcases and final products which could be shared more widely or creatively (subject to safeguarding). The creation of lesson materials by the Collingwood School KS4 pupils to be used by KS3 pupils is an example of a final product which provides sustainability and continued impact.

7.2. Learning from barriers and challenges

The barriers and challenges outlined in section 6.2. should not be seen as insurmountable, but rather as diagnostic of further work and development.

- Time for planning, training and delivery is often cited as an issue. Teachers within AP/PRU settings are subject to time constraints in terms of their curriculum delivery and role responsibilities, and as staffing arrangements can differ to mainstream schools, some teachers may find that the demands of several roles leave them with little time to spend on

anything perceived as “extra”. The ideal scenario for the VRLOs is to collaboratively plan with teachers, but this can be difficult if the teachers have to prioritise other aspects of their roles. Equally, time within the constraints of an already tightly planned curriculum can be an issue, as teachers and senior curriculum leaders may need to examine mid- and long-term planning in order to accommodate a series of lessons which includes visits from external partners and visits to off-site locations. A way to mitigate this issue is to ensure that planning is done well in advance and that PBL is regarded as a vehicle to teach a subject, topic or module, rather than an “add-on”.

- Effective training is imperative for teaching staff involved in PBL. This can be delivered by university staff, VRU team members already trained in the approach, or teaching staff already trained in using the approach (such as the situation at Collingwood School and Media Arts College). However, training through Professional Development (PD) programmes must also be factored into a teacher’s workload and role, and avoid being perceived as an extra responsibility or task for an already overstretched teacher.
- AP/PRU settings may have greater flexibility in terms of assessment of their pupils, but assessment is still an important aspect of the PBL process. This needs to be factored in during the planning process between the VRU team and the teaching staff and senior leaders from the AP/PRU setting, in order to ensure that not just pupils can see the value in their work, but also teachers, leaders and governing bodies understand the value. Thinking about how different types of achievement and progress are measured is an important starting point.
- Whole school/setting issues can derail a PBL approach, such as planned or unexpected staff changes, lack of support from senior leadership, or a whole school ethos which does not fully embrace an innovative curriculum approach. As with the previous points, effective collaborative planning, fluid communication, and the involvement of all stakeholders throughout the whole process can help to cement relationships and increase the chances of PBL being sustainable, replicable and embedded in the school ethos.
- As with any intervention by external partners, there is the risk that the VRU team’s delivery of a PBL project on a particular topic can be perceived as an external intervention, whereby a team of experts come into a setting to deliver a topic that may be too specific or complex to be delivered effectively by the teaching staff. The teaching staff may have differing levels

of input in the project, with some collaboratively planning the approach while others may assist in the delivery or act as teaching support for behaviour, SEND or pupil-specific needs. However, the perception is of the VRU team leading and delivering the project, and on completion, leaving the setting, with the teachers unsure how to build on the work done, or replicate some or all aspects of the project. Again, effective collaborative planning and training for teaching staff could mitigate this issue, as it would enable teachers to feel more confident in continuing the delivery of the topic and/or integrating a PBL approach into their teaching.

8. Final summary

The evidence above regarding the introduction of PBL into Alternative Provision sites by the VRU Education Team can be said to have been generally successful with a positive impact on most students and staff. It can be regarded as a disruption to business-as-usual, by offering a more engaging curriculum in which students are offered more autonomy, have significant opportunities to collaborate and produce artefacts in which they take pride. A powerful lens through which to analyse this phenomenon is provided by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2000; Edwards, 2011; Nussbaumer, 2011). Without going into too much theoretical detail, CHAT would regard a school as an activity system with the following interacting components or nodes:

- Subject – the transformer
- Object – the deep motive of the system, the centre and focus of the activity
- Tools – practical and conceptual tools, including language, used to achieve the object
- Rules – the norms pertaining to the activity
- Community – the subject must obey the rules within the community
- Division of Labour – the object decides the division of labour within the system

Given the current education policy focus on National Curriculum and standards and the accountability system that reinforces it, the object of most schools can be seen as achieving success in terms of measured outcomes and inspection grading. However, many teachers and schools, not least in alternative provision, sustain a belief in the importance of human flourishing or the development of the whole person. There can be an ongoing tension or indeed a contradiction between these competing motives, although in the current climate the standards agenda dominates school leadership thinking and school improvement.

PBL, with a focus on very meaningful and contemporary issues such as knife crime and domestic abuse and supported by VRU staff and community partners recruited to support the projects, represents a contrasting activity system, with a different object – that of reducing the chances of experiencing further adverse events, such as being perpetrators or victims of crime. These are dimensions of human flourishing. The interaction with this alternative activity system, not only creates logistical challenges, such as altering the timetable for visitors or excursions and arranging transport, it creates contradictions. Here are four simple examples:

- The normal tool for achieving the end point of learning activity is transformed from book work to a project product, which creates new realisations for some students;
- The community involved in school changes from teacher and student to now involve VRLOs and an array of visitors or hosts in out-of-school trips;
- The division of labour is altered, as students are participating in decisions and some work now has very little teacher involvement;
- The rules governing learning activities shift as students are now have some say over the direction and pace of learning, as well as the learning product.

All these changes, as befits a system, have repercussions in other nodes resulting in positive feedback loops. The teachers are aware of the changing dynamic and in some instances will reinforce it. Some students are engaging, relating, acting and thinking differently. In many instances the senior leaders are monitoring and are aware of the shift. In CHAT theory, the way is opening for *expansive learning*, when contradictions are resolved in a positive fashion which sees the activity system adapting and resolving the contradiction in a positive manner. However, there is a certain inertia in school systems, as the standards discourse has a stultifying effect on curriculum making imagination – the ‘dominant activity’ (Sannino, 2008) is hard to shift as there is an aversion to risk when the stakes are so high. The stakes being the potential loss of employment for senior leaders and an intense period of stressful inspection scrutiny if a school is judged to *require improvement*. Therefore, generally successful experiments are often not scaled up and the status is resumed as soon as there is a modest challenge to the development, such as a key staff member leaving, budget difficulties, a change in leadership or a new policy directive connected to curriculum.

Evidence from Scotland (Drew, Priestley and Michael, 2016) suggests that for teachers to engage in curriculum development and thus ‘own’ facets of the curriculum they need a supportive environment. This is related to theories of Teacher Agency. Biesta & Tedder (2006) argue that agency, the capacity to achieve what matters to us, including overcoming barriers and challenges, is not a fixed trait which you have on a sliding scale from nothing to game changer. Whilst there are personal differences, agency is as much something that is achieved through one’s context or environment, through the resources, relationships, networks and opportunities available to one. Consequently, one can have agency in one aspect of our lives and be helpless bystanders in others. In Scotland therefore, there are differences in the degree to which schools have been able to realise aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence, which reflect the environment and culture offered by the school to its teachers. The implication is that for more AP sites and teachers to achieve the potential benefits of

PBL there needs to be a supportive professional environment, in which high quality PBL ambition and practice are not gradually swamped by competing agendas.

The implication is that there needs to be ongoing investment in and support for PBL practice development. This might include, but is not limited to:

- Ongoing CPD and practice sharing by VRU Violence Reduction Liaison Officers;
- PBL training and support offered to new AP sites;
- Sustained networking of relevant AP and VRU staff to give access to news, resources (especially apps and websites), exemplars, practice development, impact evidence, professional and academic literature, visits, local and national conferences – in effect there needs to be a discourse that normalises PBL;
- Planning for accreditation of teachers and schools;
- Development of (or linking to) appropriate accreditation for students reflecting the wider outcomes (related to life skills and employment);
- Publicity and showcasing of the PBL work and its impact, so that Northumbria and the north east of England has increasing profile for this groundbreaking work;
- Partnerships between the VRU and other stakeholders with a concern for violence reduction, social justice and combatting disadvantage.

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Appendix A

[Questionnaire for students \(completed by Collingwood School students only\)](#)

Student questionnaire – end of project

You recently took part in Project Based Learning about [project theme] as part of your lessons. The project included [activities, visits etc] and was planned and delivered by your teachers in collaboration with Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

As part of the project a team of researchers from the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University is conducting some research to find out what the students who took part thought of the project. We would like to find out this information in order to help your teachers and the Violence Reduction Unit plan future projects and to help us, as researchers, understand more about Project Based Learning. We will present our findings in a final report and journal articles and at conferences and events.

We do not need any personal information about you i.e. your name, contact details etc., just which setting you are in. The answers you provide will be anonymously stored on Newcastle University's servers in password protected files that can only be accessed by the research team.

Completing the survey is voluntary and can be stopped at any point.

If you have any questions about the information you have provided please get in touch with either the research team:

Dr Alison Whelan (alison.whelan2@ncl.ac.uk) or Professor David Leat (david.lead@ncl.ac.uk) or Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer: rec-man@ncl.ac.uk

Newcastle University is the data controller and you can find out more about how it uses your information at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/>.

Year group

Setting name

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was worried at the start of the project					
I was happy with the group I was in					
We received enough support					
I felt that we were under pressure					
I enjoyed the project					
Our ideas were listened to and respected					
Too much was expected of us					
Our group worked well					
I was disappointed in the quality of the work we produced					
School could be more like this					
I have talked to family and/or friends about the project					
I enjoyed working with people from the VRU					
I got to know some people much better/really well					
I got more confident as the project went on					
I developed skills that I can use in future					
PBL is a good way to learn about sensitive and difficult subjects like knife crime, domestic abuse etc.					

Thank you for taking part in this survey. The answers you provided will enable us to help your teachers and the Violence Reduction Unit plan future projects and help us, as researchers, understand more about Project Based Learning.

Appendix B

[Interview schedule for teaching staff](#)

Possible Interview questions: teachers

- Can you talk me briefly through your project e.g. who was involved, which students, the theme, product, showcase etc.
- To what extent were you involved in the planning of the project? If yes, what did it involve/who with etc.
- What impact did the project have on your students?
 - What impact did building sustained relationships with the VRU education officers have?
 - What impact did creating a product for an audience have?
 - What impact did going on a visit out/having visitors in have?
 - What impact did the project have on your relationship with the students involved?
- Do you feel confident that you understand the principles of project based learning?
- Do you feel confident to run a project again in future? Do you want to?
- What challenges did you face?
- What were the main positives?
- Do you think the PBL approach is a good way to address sensitive/difficult themes in your setting?
- How is the approach different to how you normally teach (if at all)?

Possible Interview questions: VRU education officers

- Can you talk me briefly through your involvement in the project in the various settings?
- How did you go about planning the project? Who did you plan with?
- How was this different to how you have worked in the past?
- What impact did building sustained relationships with the students have on you? • How do you think the students and teachers benefitted from taking part in the project?
- Do you feel confident that you understand the principles of project based learning?
- Do you feel confident to run a project again in future? Do you want to?
- What challenges did you face?
- What were the main positives for you/the education team?
- Do you think the PBL approach is a good way to address sensitive/difficult themes?

Thank you for speaking to me.

Appendix C

[Interview schedule for students \(only one student was interviewed, from Collingwood School, due to availability and consent\)](#)

Interview questions: students

These are provisional and may be influenced by the questionnaire results.

- You recently took part in [project name] can you tell me what you enjoyed/did not enjoy?
- Did the project help you understand more about [project theme]? What did you learn?
- Did you work as part of a team? If yes, what was that like?
- Do you think you learnt any other skills that will be useful in the future?
- What impact did creating a final product (xxxx) for an audience have on you/the quality of your work?
- What impact did visiting xxxxx have on you?
- What impact did meeting/working with xxxx have on you?
- Did you talk about the project with your family and/or friends?
- How could the project could be improved in future?

Thank you for speaking to me.

Appendix D

Information sheet and consent form (teaching staff)

Project Based Learning (PBL) for children in AP/ PRUs within the landscape of Violence Reduction.

Information and Consent form – teachers

The Research

You have been participating in a project exploring the role of Project Based Learning (PBL) for children/young people in Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units (AP/ PRUs) within the landscape of Violence Reduction. This project was funded by the Police Science, Technology, Analysis, and Research (STAR) Board.

As part of the project research is being undertaken by a team of researchers from the School of Education, Newcastle University in order to determine what impact (if any) the PBL approach has had on the following:

- The confidence of the teaching staff to teach/introduce sensitive violence reduction themes such as domestic abuse, knife crime, exploitation and malicious communications;
- The confidence of the teaching staff to adopt a PBL approach in their work in future; what challenges have been faced, what benefits have been experienced?
- The students' engagement and motivation, the quality of their work; their selfconcept and agency;
- Understanding of how disadvantaged young people can be supported to develop beyond ego-centred stances towards understanding the views of others.

What will the research involve?

The views of the teachers taking part in the project are critical to the research. We would therefore like to conduct an interview with you in order to understand and learn from your experience. The interview will take place over zoom, at a time that is convenient for you. It should take **approximately 30 - 45 minutes**. If you agree to take part you will be sent the interview questions prior to the interview taking place.

Who will conduct the research?

Dr Alison Whelan will be conducting the interviews. She is a Research Associate in the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University. <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/people/profile/alisonwhelan2newcastleacuk.html#background> Nurul Bahirah will be assisting the interviews. She is a Postgraduate Researcher in MA Education International Perspectives

What will we be using the data for and how will we keep it confidential and secure?

The interview will take place over zoom, using the University's zoom account and will be audio recorded. A transcript will also be created. The recording and transcript will be saved by the interviewer in password protected folders on the Newcastle University sever that can only be accessed by the research team (see end of information sheet for the team members). The original recordings/transcripts that are in the zoom folders will be automatically deleted 30 days after the interview takes place.

The interview data will be analysed and the findings will be used to write a report for the Police Science, Technology, Analysis, and Research (STAR) Board and the project participants. They will also be presented in academic journal articles, a dissertation, and at conferences/events.

Any quotes that we use in these contexts will be anonymised and you can choose how you wish to be represented e.g. *teacher, head of year, education officer*. You will state this on the consent form. Your participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time or decline to take part without providing any reason. You are also free to ask any questions that you have at any point in the process (before, during and after). During the interview itself you are free to decline to answer specific questions without providing any reason.

The data that we collect (audio recordings, transcripts, analysed data) will be archived by the research team in password protected files for 5 years, as per the British Educational Research Association guidelines, before being destroyed/deleted.

Data protection:

If you have any questions when the research project is over about the information you have provided or you wish it to be deleted please get in touch with either the research team or Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer on the email: rec-man@ncl.ac.uk. Newcastle University is the data controller and you can find out more about how it uses your information at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/>.

Research Team:

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Email: u.thomas@newcastle.ac.uk

Nurul Bahirah Postgraduate Student in MA Education: International Perspectives

Project Based Learning (PBL) for children in AP/ PRUs within the landscape of Violence Reduction.

Consent form

Name of participant:

Before signing this consent form please read the information provided about the evaluation and your potential role in it.

(ü)

I am at least 18 years of age.	
I have been provided with the participant information sheet. I am satisfied with the information I have been given so far about the research and know I am free to ask any questions at any time before, during and after the study.	
I have been informed that the confidentiality of the data I provide will be safeguarded during storage and will be archived and kept securely for 5 years before it is destroyed/deleted.	
I have been informed that any reports, journal articles, presentations will be written maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.	
I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any point should I so wish, and I also understand my rights to withdraw my data without explanation and retrospectively. I confirm that I have been provided with the information on how to do this.	
I am happy for the anonymised data that I provide to be used in the evaluation report.	

I would like to be referred to as [please insert below] in any written reports, articles, presentations e.g. teacher, Curriculum Lead , Deputy Head, Education officer etc.

Name of participant
(print).....

Signed..... Date.....

Name of researcher (print)

Signed..... Date:

Researcher’s contact details –

Appendix E

Information sheet and consent form (students)

Information and consent form for students and their parents/carers

Please read and discuss this information sheet with your parent/carer before you both sign the consent form.

The Research

You recently took part in Project Based Learning about healthy and unhealthy relationship as part of your lessons at Trinity Academy Newcastle. The project included activities to design artworks and videos, the lesson was planned and delivered by your teachers in collaboration with Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

As part of the project a team of researchers (see p.2) from the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University is conducting some research to find out what the students, the teachers and the VRU education officers thought of the project. From the students we would like to know:

- What did you enjoy/not enjoy?
- Did the project help you understand more about healthy and unhealthy relationship? What did you learn?
- Do you think you learnt any other skills that will be useful in the future?
- What impact did creating a final product have on you?
- What impact did the visit have on you?
- What impact did meeting/working with VRU education team have on you?
- How could the project could be improved in future?

We would like to find out this information in order to help your teachers and the Violence Reduction Unit plan future projects and to help us, as researchers, understand more about Project Based Learning.

What will the research involve?

We would like to conduct a group interview with some students to help us find out answers to the questions above. Your teacher has suggested that you might be happy to speak to us as part of this group. The interview will take place on Zoom during the school day and a member of staff will be present in the room with you.

Participation in the group interview is voluntary and you can decide not to take part at any point or decide not to answer a particular question. You do not need to provide any reasons for this. If you change your mind about taking part in the interview, just tell the interviewer or your teacher. You are free to ask questions about the interview/research at any time in the process (before, during and after). To do this you can ask during the interview itself or via your teacher.

Who is conducting the interview?

Alison Whelan is a Research Associate in the Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University. She has enhanced DBS and is cleared to work with young people.

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/people/profile/alisonwhelan2newcastleacuk.html#background>

What will we be using the information you give us for and how will we keep it confidential and secure?

The information you give us during the interview will be used to help us write a final report and academic journal articles and will be presented at conferences/events. Any quotes that we use from

the interview will be anonymised. You will be referred to as a *Year X student*. Your name will not be included.

The interview will be audio recorded and immediately saved on the university's secure servers in password protected folders. These can only be accessed by the research team. The anonymised interview data will be archived securely for 5 years and then destroyed as per the British Educational Research Association guidelines.

Data protection:

If you have any questions when the research project is over about the information you have provided or you or your parent/carer wish it to be deleted, please get in touch with either the research team (see below) or Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer: rec-man@ncl.ac.uk). Newcastle University is the data controller and you can find out more about how it uses your information at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/>.

Research Team:

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Ulrike Thomas: Research Associate, Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, School of Education, Communication and Language sciences, Newcastle University

Email: u.thomas@newcastle.ac.u

Consent form for students and their parents/carers

please tick as appropriate ✓

I have read the information sheet and understand the purpose of the research

I understand that the interview recordings and information will be securely stored and I have been told who will have access to it

I understand that any quotes used from the interview in the report will be anonymised

I understand that I can change my mind about taking part in the interview at any point before or during it and that to do so I just need to tell the interviewer or my teacher.

I understand that if I or my parent/carer change our minds about letting Newcastle University use the data collected (i.e. you want it deleted) once the project is over, we need to get in touch with the research team or the university's data protection officer

For the student to sign

Signed (student) _____

Print Name: _____

For the parent/carer to sign

I have discussed the information sheet and am happy for _____ [student name] to take part in the group interview.

Signed (parent) _____

Print Name: _____

Relationship to student: _____



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