

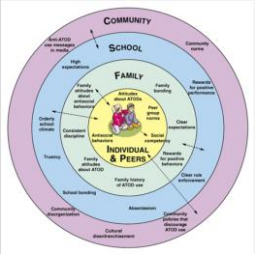
Start At My Feet

Bronfenbrenner

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory identifies the influence that environmental systems has on human development, it also highlights how the environments we encounter throughout our lifetime influences our actions. (Sincero, 2012) The microsystem is recognised as the most influential system, as it consists of relationships that have direct interaction with the child. Family is considered as the most significant connection within the microsystem, as a child's immediate environment has a direct influence on their development. In Iram Siraj and Aziza Mayo’s book titled Social Class and Educational Inequality they discuss that “*Not only do parents provide a substantial amount of the actual proximal processes, they also influence children’s proximal processes outside the family context*” (Mayo & Siraj, 2014, p.127) this links to how the microsystem impacts relationships with school, peers, and the community. Characteristics of the family microsystem, such as parenting style, differ between ethnic-culture and socio-economic groups, these characteristics are likely to have an important effect on the level of support that children experience.

The macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, is the system which envelopes the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. These indirect influences within the macrosystem such as socioeconomic status, culture, ethnicity and society, are factors that make up a community, which in turn can have a positive or negative impact on individuals. (Baxter, 2009) See picture 1 for a visual diagram of Bronfenbrenner’s theory. (Raunagiah, 2013)

Picture 1



Family Involvement

In order for progression to be made within a child’s learning, parental engagement needs to be embedded within the home, and encouraged through an attitude that fosters learning. (Abouchaar & Desforjes, 2003) A partnership between families, schools and the community needs to be formed, with the aim of supporting lifelong learning and academic success. My placement school makes efforts to provide families with a first-hand experience of their child’s learning, and provides opportunities of extending learning outside the classroom. Some examples are: Family members volunteer to read stories; Homework set is to visit a point of interest within the local community; Dewi the Dragon is taken home to read a Welsh book and write about his day. It is worth mentioning that two of these tasks will need to be differentiated in order for the learning to be inclusive, for example, it is unfair for teachers to assume that every child has access to travel, another task needs to be arranged.

Soviet Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, places an emphasis on parents being active partners throughout children’s growth. His beliefs were that development of a child’s language was enhanced due their interaction with others. It is crucial for adults to speak to their children about familiar everyday experiences in order to build knowledge of language, creating an awareness of different ways of thinking and interpreting their experiences. His theory Zone of Proximal Development describes the gap between what a child can do alone, and what they can do with the help of a more knowledgeable other, such as a parent or teacher. Vygotsky’s theory is underlined with an apprentice approach whereby the learner learns from someone more skilled. (Pound, 2006)

Community

My placement school is set in a village in the local authority of Swansea. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 5.1%, which is considerably under the average for Wales at 21%. (Welsh Government, 2019) Majority of pupils are from White British Ethnicity, with few pupils from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. (Estyn, 2019) When discussing the AOLEs in Successful Futures, Donaldson says “... *provides rich opportunities for learning beyond the school walls, for example through exploring the local environment and learning from the experience of people and organisations and businesses in the community.*” (Donaldson, 2015, p.46) My placement school has started making advances towards Curriculum for Wales 2022, and in doing so they are making a conscious effort involving the community as best they can in all aspects of a child’s learning and development. Some examples seen are: Students taking regular visits to local nursing homes; Monthly, students donate food to local foodbanks; The school and local community worked together using sustainable materials to build an EcoHouse on the school grounds. An excellent practice of involvement with the community is a project called ‘Working Whispers’, created by two contrasting schools in South Wales. The project is an exploration of the industrial heritage where the schools are located, this allowed children to consider how their community has changed over time. Careers within the community, such as actors and sculptors, were invited to lead workshops in order to create a piece of work related to the theme, that will be displayed in the local gallery. Outside influences also worked with members of staff in order to upskill them, so that their influences can be carried forward in their teaching.

Picture 2



Inclusivity

Inclusive teaching and learning acknowledges a child’s entitlement to an education system that separates barriers, respects diversity, encourages participation and recognises the variety of learning needs and preferences. (Higher Education Academy, 2016) This coincides with Article 28 of the UNCRC which declares that “*States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity*”. (UNICEF, 2019)

Learning Environment

Teachers responsibility is to create an environment where children are able to question, have opportunities to work collaboratively, feel relaxed in expressing thoughts and feelings, encouraged to take risks and tackle challenges, whilst feeling a sense of belonging, respected, and security. (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009) Barry J Fraser, makes a fantastic point in his book Classroom Environment clarifying the importance of the learning space “..*even if teachers are inconsistent in their day-to-day behaviour, they usually project a consistent image of the long-standing attributes of classroom environment.*” (Fraser, 2014, p.2) Donaldson acknowledges children’s needs in having an environment that fully engages with learning “..*require rich, stimulating environments where they can explore and experiment with ideas and resources, collaborate actively with their peers and make dynamic connections with a clear sense of purpose to construct meaning.*” (Donaldson, 2015 p.66) In line with Curriculum 2022, schools in Wales could take influence from excellent practice that includes a sense of community support and involvement.

Internationally respected teacher and philosopher, Loris Malaguzzi utilizes his belief that “..*the environment should act as a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and life-style of the people who live in it*” (Malaguzzi, 1998) to create stimulating environments within the infant-toddler and pre-school centres in the town of Reggio Emilia, Northern Italy. Malaguzzi refers to the environment as the third teacher because it is an active player in developing children cognitively, socially and emotionally. (Pound, 2006) The buildings in and around the classroom are designed to be inhabited and changed over time by children from diverse backgrounds, culturally and socially, and individual personalities. Some aspects of a classroom in Reggio Emilia are: Subtle colours to give a varied landscape; Shadow screens and mirrors encouraging children to observe themselves and others; Materials that stimulate sensorial and functional qualities (Thornton, 2016) Picture 2 gives an example layout of a Reggio Emilia classroom. (Inspired by Play, 2016)

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