

ECCP7001/C

Critical Reflections of Academic and Professional Practice

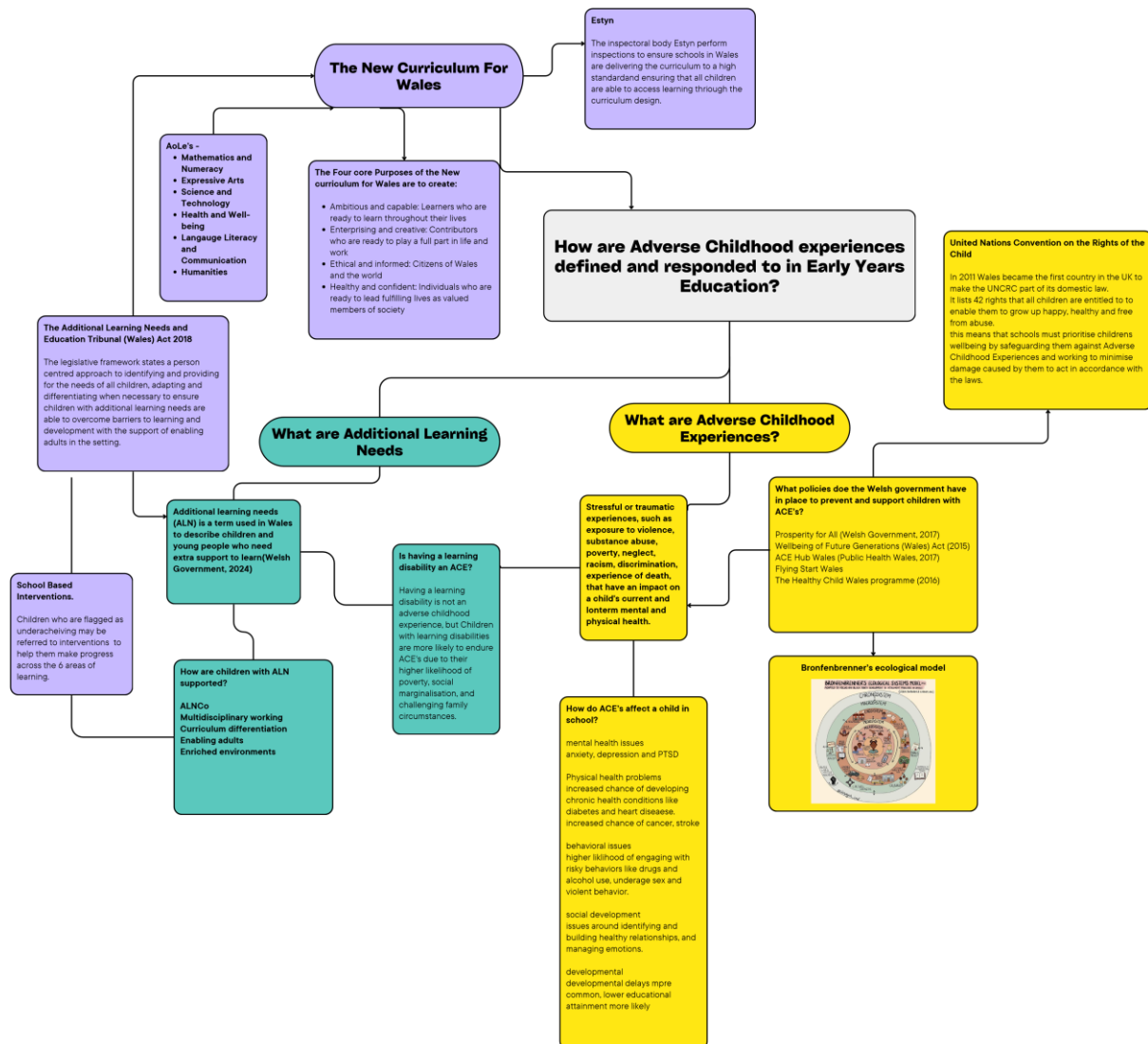
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Professional development Plan

Objectives.	Success Criteria.	Actions.	Implementation.
Widen my knowledge and understanding of services outside of primary school settings Identify and research how community wide create engagements integrate with school key curriculums	Feedback and discussion with tutors. Update my cv to include any new skills. Build a list of potential organisations/individuals that I can look to seek advice or information regarding subjects relevant to this course.	Active engagement with learning resources, attending the MA lectures Seek courses that will help me to better understand areas of interest. Keep up to date with Local Authority circulars for opportunities to attend. Make connections with RCT. Attend local community meetings.	Immediate start – 3 years. One self-initiated course per school term. 1 year. 1 year. By introducing myself as someone who is looking to improve their skills in order to benefit the community, I aim to create relationships where I can be of service to the community and in return improve my skill set in order to meet the needs of the community.
Self-directed learning	Have I been able to manage my schedule? Am I experiencing healthy work life study balance?	Scheduling. Forward planning. Timetabling study. Breakdown assessments into time slots.	Immediate start – 3 years. The skills I will be working on to keep on top of the university workload will be transferrable in whatever career step I will progress to. Good planning and forward thinking are essential to managing extra responsibilities.
Professional boundaries	Am I able to regulate my emotions in difficult scenarios? I am able to challenge authority when necessary and advocate for myself, and the people I work for (the children and their families attending school).	Use formal models of reflection to breakdown events of the day/week/term. From these breakdowns, take an impartial look at events and appreciate them from a wider lens.	Daily/weekly/termly Reflecting on practice at regular, scheduled intervals allows for analysis of events and practice that will keep my goals and strategies relevant and identify areas of strength to capitalise on and weaknesses to improve on so I am able to work efficiently. Decentring myself while reflecting can help me see the bigger picture and form arguments that are not personal and can help me meet people on common ground when issues arise.
Health care	I am well enough to keep on top of tasks. I am not missing university time due to ill health. Concentration and memory are consistent.	Keep up to date with appointments. Be organised with medication to avoid missing doses. Practice mindfulness and physical activity to optimise physical and mental	Immediate start – 3 years. Staying in control of my physical and mental health will ensure I am able to be consistent in my studies in order to successfully obtain an MA and subsequently, be present and consistent pursuing the avenues of development the qualification

		wellbeing, preventing future illness.	will allow me to take in the future. By 'practicing what you preach' in regards to holistic learning, I can gain a more meaningful connection to the ideas and philosophies that I will be studying and be more able to communicate them from a place of experience in a professional setting.
Obtain a driving licence	I will complete the driving test successfully and obtain a full driving licence.	Making time to partake in driving lessons with a registered instructor. Prepare for a practical test. Complete the theory test. Book and attend the test.	3 Months. The ability to drive will make me more flexible when it comes to agreeing to attend opportunities in areas that are currently difficult or impossible due to their location, or the time I need to allow for travel by public transport. I will be able to take more professional risks if the costs to time and energy are lowered by being able to transport myself easily.

Concept Map – How are ACE's defined and responded to in Early Years Education?



Concept map Analysis

The concept map highlights the adverse childhood experiences that funnels children beginning with Early years settings, into the school interventions pipeline, spending less dedicated time with the class teacher who has the authority and influence to gain additional support and create changes to the curriculum design to benefit those who are most in need, which then leads to lower attainment in education as they grow up. The results for these children with additional learning needs compound to the same outcomes despite their experiences being so diverse. The New curriculum for Wales creates an idealistic set of freedoms when designing a curriculum that should allow for all children's needs to be responded too in real time, which is crucial to the fast-developing minds of children in the Early Years, but in reality, the broad and undefined markers for success have meant that this still is not being achieved.

Adverse Childhood Experiences are stressful or traumatic experiences, such as exposure to violence, substance abuse, poverty, neglect, racism, discrimination, experience of death, which have an impact on a child's current and long term mental and physical health (NHS, 2024). The Welsh government have developed policies to prevent and support children with ACE's, such as 'Prosperity for All' (Welsh Government, 2019), a national strategy to prevent ACE's and build resilience in the community by creating 'ACE aware' public services, for example, by providing trauma informed practice courses for schools.

To assist families in the early years (Welsh Government, 2019), the government has advised Wales to expand its early intervention initiatives, such as Flying Start, the Healthy Child Wales Programme, and the First 1000 Days Programme (Future Generations Wales, 2020). Upon reading these recommendations, these documents do not provide specific strategies to meet the needs of children seeking asylum or with EAL, an issue that is growing in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021) as the number of people applying for asylum has grown exponentially due to war and political unrest in the world, with 40% of the applications being made for children (UK Government, 2023).

However, Estyn (2023) expect schools to play an essential role in supporting children seeking asylum and refugee children by, responding to the educational needs of these children by responding to their arrival by being welcoming and hospitable, providing a learning environment that provides holistic learning and development activities that supports their unique educational experience.

Estyn refers to 'Wales: Nation of Sanctuary' initiative, as guidance of best practice. The initiative is supported by the Welsh Government aims to create an inclusive country where displaced people can join the rich tapestry of Welsh life and actively contribute to its evolving richness and feel fully integrated into the community, a sentiment mirrored by the Cynefin of the Welsh Curriculum that practitioners should already be adept at creating so that children with all ALN, including those from families seeking asylum, should be being responded to naturally. Early Years practitioners should be able to adapt their skills and resources to provide an experience that fulfils the criteria expected by the inspectorial body Estyn, however, the barriers and confusion caused by language and cultural barriers are not accommodated for well enough to allow assimilation to happen in a meaningful way, Fumoto, Hargreaves, and Maxwell (2007), document how children with EAL in the early years go on to have lower attainment throughout school and cite teachers sensitivity towards them as an aspect that influences that trend, failure to bond with these children is having a ripple effect that we can refer to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to view a clear picture of, and the importance of the reciprocal relationships in the micro and mesosystem are to a child's development. Antony (2022) describes how family resilience can be bolstered by effective interactions between parents, teachers and children, this sentiment is strengthened by the research of Thompson, Corcoran and Hodges (2024) who found that children's wellbeing saw greater improvement when families were supported effectively with a collaborative approach, therefore, an obvious and dedicated framework, similar but separate to the ALN framework would be beneficial in practice as the changes to the ALN framework mean the system is already overwhelmed with children who face cognitive and health barriers that are associated more with ALN (Hutt and Con, 2020).

The healthy child Wales programme aimed to support the health and welfare of all children up to the age of 7 (Welsh government, 2016) the programme addresses health inequality is

particularly as a result of child poverty and the significant challenges caused by growing up in unstable situations multidisciplinary approach to minimise possibility of families and their children missing out on early interventions to improve outcomes free basic areas of intervention are screening immunisation and the monitoring of children's development with the goal of maximising each child's potential and readiness for beginning education.

The best practise guide for social workers in Wales dealing with children seeking asylum directly links to the additional learning needs tribunal act (Welsh Government, 2022) stating that children coming to Wales may be experiencing adverse experiences as a result of the displacement (Welsh Government, 2022) Children's development and positive engagement with their learning environment, may be impacted by threat and deprivation at home or in the community. Challenging circumstances like poverty, domestic violence, or parental mental illness - which are likely effects of having to flee your home, and country of origin - can harm children directly while also hindering caregiving that fosters healthy development (Giallo *et al*, 2018).

The Social Services and Well-being Wales act (2014) states that the holistic well-being of the child needs to be considered, and that their education experience may have been different, in addition to the disruption caused by their experience seeking asylum, so a child with English as an additional language who is seeking asylum should be considered as a child with additional learning needs, and extra care and attention should be made to make them feel supported and welcome in their educational environment as it will be crucial to their assimilation and future health and happiness as a part of the new community (Cummins, 2000).

An NHS (2024) report found that the quality of a child's relationships with others is affected by ACE's due to attachment difficulties.

Insecure attachment prevents a child from being able to feel safe and secure enough to engage meaningfully with the learning environment or enabling adults, this prevents them from thriving as children with fewer ACE's. The more ACE's a child has, the likeliness of them failing to bond with trusted adult increases and their confidence in themselves and the education system decreases, Hong, *et al* (2019) describes how inherent racial bias from teachers informs students and perpetuates bullying by role modelling how to treat children with racial

differences to children, this study was conducted in the US with children of middle school age, but does highlight how characteristics of marginalisation, such as race, and poverty do not occur alone and are subsequently perpetuated as stereotypes by the people whose duty it is to challenge and reverse those stereotypes, further driving these children to fulfil those poor expectations which is a failing of the education system, not of the children who have been let down by it. These traits are documented by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), who delivered a report detailing how the prolonged exposure to stress endured by children with ACE's can disrupt the development of the brain and cause negative long-term effects on the nervous and immune system making these children more susceptible to risk of illness and injury throughout their lifetime. Having a learning disability is not an adverse childhood experience, but children with learning disabilities are more likely to endure ACE's due to their higher likelihood of poverty, social marginalisation, and challenging family circumstances. Additional learning needs (ALN) is a term used in Wales to describe children and young people who need extra support to learn (Welsh Government, 2024) therefore, schools must appoint an Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) who will advise and support the school to best meet the needs of children with ALN.

There is a grey area between children with ACE's and ALN which means the level and urgency of the support they receive, and the training staff have to give support is not consistent.

The New Curriculum for Wales is an inclusive and equitable curriculum that provides schools to tailor its curriculum to meet the unique needs of the children in the communities across for core purposes, these Four Purposes are to create:

- Ambitious and capable: Learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising and creative: Contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- Ethical and informed: Citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy and confident: Individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

in compliance with the ALN Code, Chapter 3.2, the curriculum intends to create “strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being”(Welsh Government,)

The legislative framework states a person-centred approach to identifying and providing for the needs of all children, adapting and differentiating when necessary to ensure children with

additional learning needs are able to overcome barriers to learning and development with the support of enabling adults in the setting.

- inclusive curriculum including inclusive pedagogy
- collaboration
- personalised learning
- learner participation - pupil voice

It is necessary to modify teaching methods in the classroom to accommodate the needs of learners with ALN. This could include considering the child's abilities and interests.

The new curriculum for Wales should make it possible for these things to take place in schools, however the inefficient training for educators in Wales means that there is growing disparity for children under the new curriculum (Evans, 2023). The New Curriculum for Wales is an idealistic one with sensible and achievable goals provided the Welsh Government invests in further training for all staff so it can be a truly holistic and equitable curriculum that improves outcomes for all learners.

Case Study

This Case study tracks my introduction into the Primary school setting, here I learned how to develop my practice to adapt to a more formal learning environment, using my skills as an early year's practitioner, that made me a desirable candidate for the role, effectively. I also learned how to navigate power dynamics within the setting to overcome obstacles I recognised as being detrimental to the holistic well-being of the children I work for.

I began working at a primary school when I joined a child I supported at a Flying Start centre who required a 1:1 in his nursery class, this child had Cerebral Palsy and required support to meet his physical needs and carry out physiotherapy during the day, I was responsible for finding ways to meet his needs in a way that I saw fit to best support him during the school day and to help him integrate with the other children and build social bonds that would help him to mature and progress holistically alongside the other children, I found it easy to achieve these needs by integrating his needs with the day to day activities that were occurring in the nursery and soon found that his needs were not dissimilar to the needs of the other nursery children and that inclusion was not only easy, it was best practice across the entire class, this child soon became confident, social and beloved by his classmates and staff and exceeded the expectations staff and outside agencies had for him. I was approached by SLT in reception to use my approach to this child with others and was given groups of children to perform interventions with alongside H to help bridge some gaps in development that had appeared during the lockdown experienced during the covid19 pandemic. I agreed to this during my performance management and began undertaking the new responsibilities the following term. I was quickly given new groups of children, many had emerging needs that meant the activities planned by the teacher were not sufficient to meet the cognitive needs of my 1:1 and left no time for me to meet his physical needs. I voiced my concerns informally to the class teacher who was also the ALNco, confident that she would respond well in order to provide the best outcomes for children with additional

needs in her class, however, the resolution offered was further training in an intervention called Language Link that I was asked to perform.

The wellbeing of two children who were attending all of my groups, and missing most of their class participation as a result, was becoming an issue and I had been logging my observations in a physical log of class concerns. These children were from families who spoke English as an additional language and presented to me as children living in poverty, in this case, I felt that the interventions I was being asked to conduct with them was not addressing the real barriers to these children learning, The Equality Act (2010) states that schools must treat all its learners fairly, I was concerned that , as a school, this legislation was not being followed while these children were missing out on formative learning experiences, which was resulting in behavioural issues in the classroom that would dissipate when they were attending interventions and enjoying the play based activities that I had set up in following guidance from the Welsh Government (2016) on Inclusion and pupil support and referring to theory that tells us that that the experiential, child centred learning that occurs through play are optimal for the development of skills and abilities that will improve educational attainment as they grow (Smolucha and Smolucha, 2021).

This aspect of my job is the one that keeps me motivated and sparks professional joy, however the workload was too much and I felt meeting such diverse needs without adequate support or specific training that the New curriculum for Wales states is essential for raising standards of support staff(Welsh Government, 2019) was putting all children in my care at a disadvantage and I quickly began to experience burnout, a phenomenon where a person will experience exhaustion anxiety, reduced efficacy and mental distance as a result of work based stress (Rubilar and Oros, 2021).

I raised the issue of the interventions not being fit for purpose with the teacher/ALNco again, presenting concerns log together, to consolidate my thoughts on how the issues may be linked and I felt unsatisfied with the response, which was to carry on as normal.

I followed Safeguarding protocol (Welsh Government, 2020) and escalated my concerns to the Headteacher, believing that under Section 32 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014), the local authority would review and make decisions on offering support to the children and families being discussed. As a result of this interaction, I was told that it was the teacher's discretion how I was to be used in the classroom and as the

Designated Safeguarding Officer of the school, the behaviours of the children I was worried about were not serious enough to be raised with Social services.

These interactions , where I was sure the professional opinions that were noted in my professional development would be respected, but were in fact rebuffed and minimised had knocked my confidence and made me question my judgement. I felt there was an insinuation that my position at the school was tenuous and it was in my best interest to comply and ensure the class teacher was not further burdened with an extra case.

I was visited by an occupational therapist who was checking on H's progress, she questioned the group set up that was taking place on her visit, and I opened up to her about the circumstances I was facing and how I felt it was impacting the development of H and the impact on the other children under my supervision. She explained that my job description made H my priority and this exceeded the desires of the class teacher, section 5 of the ALN Code (2021) discusses the school's capacity to meet the needs of disabled children and this was an issue that needed to be addressed. The occupational therapist encouraged me to revisit the conversation and made herself available for support in doing this. I now felt emboldened and a renewed sense of duty, Article 3 of the UNCRC charges me with the responsibility of making sure the best interests of children are being served.

I requested that my groups be revisited and began differentiating on behalf of the children to better meet the needs of H, and attempted to help the other children feel safe and cared for by providing a stimulating learning environment for them to explore while I carried out my duties in a manner that met SMART goals i.e.. Are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (Weintraub, Cassell, and DePatie, 2021). I observed and evaluated each session to protect my professional decisions.

My 1:1 was continued making considerable progress and I felt that the wellbeing of the other children at school was being raised overall, however I was still concerned that my observations had been ignored so I made an independent MASH referral.

Standards across the school dropped noticeably and criticism from Staff and Parents began to accumulate, increasing tension between all levels of staff, the ALNco and Headteacher both resigned as a date for the Estyn Inspection was declared.

Upon reflection and my reading of Foucault's theory of Power dynamics, the SLT at this time were occupied with other issues in the school and ignoring aspects they deemed less important, therefore may have wielded their power ineffectively (Olssen, 2021).

Foucault theorised that power is in a constant state of change in schools power relations are important in order to enforce good practise however the concept of power is perpetuated by those relationships and can be actively changed by anyone in the chain of command this is how legislation and policy is created to maintain good practise in schools I feel that this case study can be seen as an example of how power is enforced to control and or demand change in a small way but significant way (Haugaard, 2022).

The school was put into special measures by the inspectoral body Estyn (Estyn, 2023), the issues I had raised were compounded in the reasons for the schools failure, so although the outcome was negative when first confronted, I felt relief that the problems being faced by the most vulnerable in the school community were finally being recognised and appropriate measures would finally be put in place to support them, recognising that the child is paramount duty to support and protect the rights of each child to allow them to thrive within the school community.

Critical Reflection

Reflecting on my first two years working at primary school, described in the Case Study, I have learned that within a larger organisation although the shared goal should be the same as a smaller setting like the flying start centre that I had previously worked, which is to improve outcomes for children and their families, the distance between this leadership team and the lower level workers can cause disparity between matters of importance, with each level of responsibility each sharing an offset of values and issues that they feel deserve immediate attention.

at my previous setting, responsibility was divided more equally among staff and the close proximity of nursery workers to the onsite nursery manager, meant the issues could be raised and dealt with in a time efficient way and as the flying start centres were early years specific, I was accustomed to concerns regarding children in their formative years to be received with the utmost importance and my opinion, as a professional who had successfully completed early years specific training to be considered for that role, was respected and appreciated.

Furthermore, the uncertainty that the COVID-19 lockdown brought to all aspects of life, and the increase in workload people took on to adjust for these uncertainties, which could be considered a 'wicked problem' by Lönngren and Poeck (2021) who describe this term as a situation where the information is confusing, values are conflicting, and the ramifications for any decision making are not only unclear, but potentially worse than the initial problem, reflecting on this challenging period and the negative ramifications, I have gained insight into power structures in the workplace and have had to redefine my worth as a practitioner by external means, such as the pursuit of higher education.

Hub schools were formed to serve at risk children and children of Essential Workers during the pandemic, these hubs were staffed mainly by support staff working in the school

environment, who had agreed to put their health, and the health of their families at risk to physically attend settings to ensure that their roles weren't compromised when the financial impact of the lockdown became apparent, and also because we felt a duty to provide care to the children that qualified for placements in the hub schools, i.e., children at risk of exposure to adverse childhood experiences, so by the time I joined the reception class with my 1:1, I like many others was already experiencing anxiety caused by the trauma of living through a pandemic.

I believe that my confidence in my decision making coupled with the threats of unemployment and the decreased executive functioning associated with stress and as a long-term side effect of contracting COVID-19 Made me more likely to accept a larger workload and more responsibility against my own judgement.

Experience of burnout more alarming to me as someone who has never experienced ill health not only has the experience jolted me into taking better care of my physical health in order to avoid feeling the effects strongly, but I am also taking control of my mental health in order to recognise when things are in need of rebalancing.

Being a mindful and reflective practitioner has helped me deal with serious and often negative aspects my work, but it has also reminded me of the joy of experiencing the wonder of childhood and the privilege of being a facilitator all learning during these formative years.

Upon receiving a workplace circular with details of a bachelor's degree in early years education that could be completed without taking time off from work which would have been financially attainable as a learning support assistant I felt this was the right decision to improve not only my own career prospects but my current practise as an early years worker and hopefully lead to a position where my views and strategies I respected and taken seriously as effective ways to help children become confident and resilient individuals ready to engage fully with their learning as I currently feel that I am fighting an uphill battle when it comes to having my suggestions realised in order to provide the best care for the children I engage with in the classroom and their families.

In my current role, the teachers and other members of staff who I work alongside recognise me as a practitioner who is able to develop positive relationships and encourage participation class activities, with children who struggle to do so. In part, because of my vocalisation of my

concerns when it was considered to be against my better interests, I a most valuable skill as an early years worker is to be able to decipher what a child needs in order for them to feel comfortable enough to trust me and allow me some insight into their inner world where I am then able to differentiate and tailor tasks assigned by the class teacher for me to deliver. This meets expectations detailed in the four purposes of the new curriculum I feel that staff are happy that I am able to make sense of as part of my existing role.

These children are often children who speak English as an additional language, whose families have come to the school as refugees, children from challenging backgrounds displaying behaviours but are challenging to school staff children with learning disabilities or a combination of all these characteristics, The child centred approach I adopt to facilitate each child's learning is in accordance with the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales (2021).

These characteristics are listed as Adverse Childhood Experiences, which are known to be detrimental to the positive development of children and a contributor to poor health and economic outcomes as they grow into adults (NHS, 2024).

As a practitioner, I begin at the bottom of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Gross, Novey and Triskett, 2022) and make sure each child feels safe and secure and recognises me as a person who will be present and approachable. When I feel I have the child's trust I am then able to be more specific with planning learning experiences to help them progress in the class.

It is part of my job description to ensure that I complete the task of delivering the activities planned by the teacher who I am directly accountable for I use my knowledge and understanding of early brain development to help children to decode remember stand the information in ways that is meaningful to them, the New Curriculum for Wales expects this of its support staff to maintain a high quality of education (Welsh Government, 2019).

During the degree, I was given the opportunity to complete a Level 3 certificate in safeguarding children and adults The additional knowledge gained through the safeguarding module and the subsequent qualification made me feel legitimised when approached by parents and carers, and when I felt it was important to approach them to let them too events taking place in the school go to communicate feedback on the progress they children have been making go to try and gain information that will help me Support them better.

Specifically, with regards to children who are learning English as an additional language, It is my duty as a person responsible for the wellbeing of others, to act as an advocate to ensure families are aware of their rights and opportunities and help them push for better services for their children. I am mindful to be sensitive to these family's unique life experience and circumstances and how this affects their child's learning.

I have noticed a trend that the children that spend the most time engaging with me in out of class intervention work, are mostly from families experiencing challenging circumstances such as poverty, domestic violence and displacement from their countries of origin (Giallo *et al*, 2018). I understand that these families may feel under threat or that their position in the community is uncertain their desire to be discreet and avoid standing out or causing conflict may dissuade them from asking for things parents from more affluent and straightforward backgrounds may feel entitled to (Graham, Minhas and Paxton, 2016). Thompsons Personal, Cultural, and Structural (PCS) model - a framework for recognising the ways in which discrimination and oppression function in society – is a model that I would like to study further and use to benefit the families I work with, children who endure ACE's, often belong to families with ACE's, it is important to be informed and unbiased when interacting with any family and assume that everyone involved in that child's life wants what is best for them (Narayan, Lieberman, and Masten, 2021).

To be a good advocate, I will refer to the concept of Luga de Fala, (Ribeiro, 2020) and be mindful that I use my perspective and understanding when it is appropriate so that these families can use me and my position within the school to their advantage and that I only speak on behalf of them and their children, never for them, or assume I know what they want, to do this I invest time in building positive relationships with the parents and carers when possible.

Working with children is emotionally and physically challenging, but incredibly rewarding. For all the positivity that children bring to my life, I want to repay them by studying to be a better and more confident practitioner.

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