

Targets	How you have worked on this	An example can be found on
1. Ensure that you are discussing quotes that you include and that they do not 'stand-alone'.	I have only used quotes when I can properly discuss and acknowledge the meaning after the quotation.	Throughout my assignment, I have tried to paraphrase so I can use my own words to evaluate relevant literature.
2. Consider the use of sub-headings to help organise your writing.	As ECAD6014 is a short assignment, I have been told that the use of sub-headings was not necessary.	As ECAD6014 is a short assignment, I have been told that the use of sub-headings was not necessary.

Supporting your discussion with theory, research and practice, critically reflect on how you would support an individual learner whose progress is being affected by specific barriers to learning during one transition period (horizontal or vertical).

Word count: 2821 (Excluding title and reference list)

This assignment discusses how an individual learner experiencing barriers to learning can be supported during a transition from primary school to secondary school. The discussion concentrates on strategies to support the pupil's progression and well-being during the transition period. The child's barriers will be discussed in further detail throughout the assignment, including suggestions on how to help him overcome specific issues to support his development and progression of positive health and well-being. Following the BERA ethical guidelines (2024), complete anonymity will be ensured by referring to the individual pupil as '*child x*' and the pupil's school as 'school x'. Moreover, there will not be any confidential information revealing the identity of the child, school, or stakeholders'. *Child x* is an eleven-year-old boy who comes from a background of relative poverty and poor family dynamics, due to his father being in prison he has adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This alone creates a barrier to *child x*'s education as ACEs are associated with restricted life opportunities, such as low-income employment and underachieved academic attainment (Asmundson & Afifi, 2020, p.18). *Child x* is often reported for poor behaviour as he acts out in class and rarely cooperates with his teacher. His poor behaviour is thought to stem from his ACEs, as traumatic experiences can significantly alter a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, increasing risks of behavioural issues, aggression, and withdrawal (McRae *et al.*, 2021).

Due to *child x*'s age, he will be transitioning into secondary school the next school year. The transition from year six to secondary school is a significant milestone for pupils. New opportunities and challenges are introduced, such as academic pressures, social dynamics and new, unfamiliar environments (Coffey, 2013). *Child x*'s significant life experiences will have a detrimental effect on his beliefs, behaviours and attitudes, hence the importance of supporting him during this period.

Recent studies show that approximately 29% of children in Wales were living in relative poverty from 2021 to 2023 (Welsh government, 2024 A, p.5). Poverty is an issue in education, as those children who are identified as living in poverty are expected to perform the same as any other pupils in schools regardless of the disadvantages they face (Buck & Deutsch, 2014). Children who are raised in poverty, are at risk of poor academic achievement and health and well-being (Engle & Black, 2008), which can make their transition into adulthood difficult, especially when it comes to employment and managing finances. When living in poverty, families are restricted from essential resources such as food, heating, and clothing (McKinney, 2014), therefore, the children receive inadequate nourishment, due to living in an unhealthy and unequipped environment. It is advocated by UNICEF (2024), that most children in poverty have restricted holistic development, resulting in them achieving less than their peers and at a slower pace.

Additionally, Brando & Schweiger (2019) suggest that from an early age, children living in poverty endure humiliation due to the negative stigma attached to families living in poverty, reporting that these children feel less superior to their peers. Evidently, this emphasises how crucial it is to support children in poverty's development and well-being throughout their education, as they are struggling with circumstances that they cannot control or change. The Welsh Government (2024 B) has acknowledged the issues of poverty in Wales and intends to improve poverty statistics by working towards five objectives. Their objectives focus on addressing income inequality, ensuring access to essential resources and services, and promoting children's rights. The principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) reinforce the protection of children's well-being, education and health regardless of their socioeconomic background, highlighting the importance of supporting all children (UNICEF, 2019).

Another barrier that *child x* experiences is ACEs, due to his poor family dynamic, as his father is in prison. The term ACEs refers to traumatic events or chronic stressors that are experienced by 0–17-year-olds, often impacting the individuals throughout their lifetime through effecting behaviours, beliefs, and overall development (Walsh *et al.*, 2019). ACEs shape the brain's function and response systems, resulting in individuals becoming more vulnerable and developing unhealthy coping mechanisms throughout their lifetime (Waite & Ryan, 2020). ACEs are often linked to deficient emotional regulation, resulting in behaviour mannerisms such as aggression, withdrawal, hypervigilance and defiance (Romero., Robertson., & Warner., 2018). It is believed by Roberts (2024), that the consequences of ACEs can be reversed to an extent, through engaging with ACE children using a playful, accepting, curious, and empathetic (PACE) approach to interventions. This approach encourages the release of pro-social hormones in children, therefore improving their overall health and well-being. Burke (2019), advocates that all stakeholders connected to an ACE child should collaborate to present a trauma-informed intervention as early as possible, to reverse the damaging effects of ACEs and protect the future outcomes and health and well-being of ACE children.

As portrayed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if children do not feel safe or comfortable within themselves or their environment, they are highly unlikely to learn or cooperate (Maslow, 1954, quoted in Duplechain, Reigner & Packard, 2008). It has already been identified that *child x* does not cooperate well in school and fails to align with any of the hierarchy of needs, thus being psychological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (McLeod, 2024). Namely, *child x* would not be progressing or learning in school, due to his poor mindset that is influenced by his inefficient living circumstances. However, Bronfenbrenner (1996) proposed that five ecological systems shape an individual's development, suggesting that a child's growth is influenced by various

environmental contexts and social circles. Unlike Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which focuses primarily on individual motivation and psychological needs, Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights how external environments play a crucial role in children's development. Poverty has a direct effect on a child due to their family dynamics, education and broader social interactions (Phillips, 2007). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that child x's holistic development may be hindered by the economic hardships that surround him.

It was implied by Dreikurs and Soltz (1990), that children's behaviour patterns are usually motivated by a need for belonging and significance. This resonates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, suggesting that the development of positive development can only be achieved if children feel a sense of safety and belonging in their lives, meaning their behaviour patterns should be viewed as a way of communicating their need for attention. Positive mindsets in children are often fostered through the cooperation and respect between parents and their children (Dreikurs, 1979). However, as *child x's* father is in prison, his parental dynamic is significantly different. Without the consistent presence of both parents, children develop unhealthy behaviour patterns, where they may struggle to develop a sense of security, leading to poor self-esteem and well-being, and withdrawal from social situations (Norman & Enebrink, 2023).

Bandura (1971) argues that children adopt new behaviours, values and attitudes vicariously from observing their role models. Cole *et al.* (2022), present that 60.2% of children believe that the most popular role model is a father. In contrast, Bandura also implies that children will not imitate the behaviour of their role model if they experience them being punished because of their actions (Ozer & Cooper, 2022). If *child x's* situation was viewed from Bandura's point of view, it would be assumed that *child x* would not develop anti-social behaviours, due to the fear of being punished like his father. Nevertheless, if interventions are not put in place to support ACE children, the long-lasting effects of their trauma often result in the repetition of anti-social patterns as they grow older (Public Health Network Cymru, 2017). Trauma-informed interventions can support children's development and improve their mental health outcomes by lessening the detrimental effects of ACE (Asmussen *et al.*, 2022). This emphasises the importance of supporting *child x's* development and well-being by using interventions throughout his transition, as he will be navigating his way through an overwhelming and unfamiliar situation while dealing with his existing issues.

There are two key concepts of transitions in a child's life, these being horizontal and vertical transitions. Vertical transitions are significant changes to a child's routine, for example moving schools, whereas horizontal transitions are minor and consist of short transitions throughout their daily life, such as travelling from school to home (Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, *n.d.*). A transition from primary to secondary school generally involves a

move from a small building to a larger one and promotes independence by taking control of their daily routines (Howe & Richards, 2011). Due to the significance of the transition, *child x*'s move from primary to secondary school would be considered a vertical transition. Throughout school transitions, children are subject to a variety of pedagogical subcultures and expectations, they are expected to engage with new peers and social dynamics, take on a range of responsibilities and navigate their way around complex environments (Pietarinena, Pyhältöb & Soinic, 2010).

There is a strong correlation between poor socio-economic circumstances and school bullying victimization (Chen *et al.*, 2024). Research suggests that children who are bullied during a school transition, develop negative opinions towards the school and have difficulty adjusting to the new environment (Cross *et al.* 2018). Consequently, *child x* may find his transition difficult due to his poor socio-economic situation and become a target of bullying victimization. Additionally, victims of bullying are associated with negative behaviours and face many emotional difficulties (Wolke *et al.* 2000), which would be concerning for *child x* due to his existing behavioural issues.

Currently, *child x* has poor well-being due to his ACEs and inadequate living conditions and family dynamics. Research suggests that vertical transitions can be particularly challenging for pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, leading to higher levels of stress, anger and anxiety (Slee & Allan, 2019). For this reason, *child x*'s Health and Well-being progression will be the main priority during his transition period. The Curriculum for Wales Health and Wellbeing progression steps offer flexibility and child-centred approaches that nurture pupil wellbeing to ensure resilience and motivation towards the rest of their learning (Welsh Government, 2020). Meaning supporting *child x*'s progression within this area of learning, will benefit him in all areas of his development, including aspects of his school and personal life.

During *child x*'s transition, both the primary and secondary school teaching staff and stakeholders should collaborate to ensure the best possible support, to provide a smooth and comfortable transition. Due to *child x*'s barriers, he will be vulnerable during such a significant transition, therefore, he will require extra support and intervention to maintain a positive experience. To facilitate an adequate understanding of *child x* among the secondary school staff, school x should provide a personalised and detailed individual profile, encompassing relevant information about his needs, challenges and personality (Estyn, 2020). Nevertheless, although individual profiles are a simple way of providing important information about an individual's characteristics, they are created by an adult rather than the child it involves. Receiving the profile primarily from an adult could influence a subjective perspective, leading to an inaccurate discussion of the child's capabilities, challenges and needs (Wang *et al.*, 2013). Instead, as well as relying on the individual profile, it would be

beneficial to allow time for the secondary school teachers to form a personal relationship with *child x*, allowing time to get to know him personally and form their own perceptions.

Stakeholders are the centre of a child's education, they could include family, school staff, school counsellors and administrators and the community ([REDACTED] 2024). It is important, that relevant stakeholders are involved in *child x*'s progression during his transition, as they can collaborate to ensure that a whole-school approach can be fostered to ensure the best possible learning and well-being outcomes (Mayer *et al.*, 2019).

Various studies highlight the importance of transition days to ease pupils into their transitions between different educational stages (Weham *et al.*, 2013). Transition days are widely used by schools to help pupils adjust to new surroundings, routines and expectations (Rice, Frederickson and Seymour, 2011). However, many schools fail to provide adequate time for pupils to adapt and make efficient use of the transition days (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019). In this case, the transition days serve no real purpose and make it harder for the pupils to adjust, as they would feel stressed and overwhelmed as they are expected to quickly adapt within a short period, leading to a negative attitude towards their secondary school before their transition. On the contrary, *school x* ([REDACTED] 2024) provides transition days for pupils from year 5, giving pupils two years of transitional experience and adequate time to get an insight into a secondary pupil's routine. This suggests that *child x* would already have experience of various days in secondary school, so he will be aware of what to expect to an extent.

In accordance with the Curriculum for Wales, schools should be actively listening to learners to develop student agency, building inclusive, adaptable comforting learning environments to enhance their learning journey (Welsh Government, 2020). Studies suggest that if pupils feel their opinions are valued by teachers, they feel more comfortable and stable, creating a supportive relationship and environment to enhance their learning (Zhang, 2022). In a research study by Rice, Frederickson and Seymour (2011), a questionnaire was created for pupils in years 6 and 7 to discuss and assess their concerns regarding their transition. The results highlighted the importance of valuing children's voices, as they provide significant differences in teacher perspectives and assumptions. This emphasises the importance of providing *child x* with ample opportunities to share his concerns and opinions, accordingly, *child x* must be allowed to talk to a trusted adult when he pleases, during his transition period. Through listening to *child x*, and understanding his perspective on his experiences, *school x* can form appropriate interventions and support systems to facilitate a smooth transition and ensure his well-being remains positive.

The Welsh Government offer a 'pupil development grant' (PDG) that supports children and families in poverty in hopes of decreasing economic barriers that hinder academic attainment. The grant funds any education-related spending, such as uniforms,

resources, educational trips and school dinners (Welsh Government C, 2024). Through providing financial support to *child x* and his family, he will have access to more educational opportunities such as trips, additionally, *child x's* mother will be relieved of some financial strain, improving her mental health and well-being also. However, some limitations that have been highlighted are the lack of collaboration between the grant facilitators, schools and families. Consequently, this has often resulted in underfunding families, which causes additional and unnecessary emotional and financial strain (Tiesteel *et al.*, 2024).

To conclude, this assignment has highlighted the barriers that *child x* may face during his transition from year six to secondary school while discussing support systems to aid his progression during this difficult time. The focus was on the strategies that will best support *child x's* health and well-being progression while fostering resilience and motivation, regardless of his challenges and barriers due to ACEs and socioeconomic difficulties. The discussion introduced specific suggestions for assisting *child x* through his transition, such as transition days, continuous collaboration with relevant stakeholders, government financing, and fostering nurturing, motivating, and learning-rich environments. The discussed strategies highlight the effectiveness and importance of supporting *child x's* holistic development and the cruciality of addressing his behavioural issues and childhood trauma.

In conclusion, *child x's* behaviour, academic attainment, engagement, and health and well-being are likely to improve if he is offered effective trauma-informed interventions. The personalised strategies aim to ensure that *child x's* holistic development is supported. The strategies will help build his resilience and sense of belonging, resulting in a more positive outlook on his education and helping him control and improve his negative behaviours and emotions. As *Child X* transitions into secondary school, he will feel more motivated, prepared and supported, which will help his self-esteem and academic attainment. By involving *child x's* mother in his transitional period, his mother may feel more valued and supported, therefore more willing to discuss her knowledge with other stakeholders. Moreover, *child x's* mother can provide further insight and share strategies that she finds support her child well. Additionally, by ensuring that teachers are making a conscious effort to establish stronger, trusting relationships with pupils, the school will be working towards a positive, nurturing teacher and pupil dynamic. The implementation of trauma-informed interventions will equip teachers with valuable knowledge to support future pupils who may be experiencing the same issues as *child x*.

The knowledge I have gained from this assignment will be very helpful to me during my practice and future as a teacher. I understand the importance of trauma-informed responses and interventions to support pupils who are struggling with issues such as poverty and ACEs. I hope to use this knowledge to foster strong, trusting relationships with my future

pupils, ensuring they feel comfortable and esteemed through actively engaging, listening and supporting them.

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