

Define the concept of Advocacy and describe how this relates to power, oppressions and agency in the context of your choice.

This essay will be introducing the underpinning characteristics of what Advocacy is and how it is connected to the different theories of power, oppression and agency in young children in different circumstances and situations such as education, social care and health. It will also be touching on how empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice can ensure that individuals, are able to remove themselves from oppression over to self-advocacy, in particular women. It will also be exploring a number of strategies that will help individuals, such as those in communities seeking empowerment, ensure that they are able to have their voices heard .

Advocacy ensures that individuals who are classed as vulnerable or have difficulty expressing themselves, have the opportunity for their views and thoughts to be heard, and it is an advocates job to certify that the individual is made to be aware of their rights and to put across the thoughts and views of the individual. Power is a major aspect of advocacy, and unfortunately many of the individuals who advocates speak on behalf of lack it. There are many forms of Power in this world, there can be power in numbers, power in authority, the power of money and the power of knowledge. However, when power is applied to advocacy it can have several forms, many of which are positive including the ‘power to’ do something, meaning to take action and making a change. There is the ‘power within’ someone, where the individual is empowered and has the ability to make constructive changes in their own lives. The ‘power with’ which is power in numbers, an organised power speaking out together as a united front. There is also the more negative of the four, which is the ‘power over’ someone, it is an oppressive and controlling form of power where the strong over powers the weak, although it can be a group of individuals enforcing this form of power or a single person (Veneklassen and Miller, 2007).

Individuals who are considered vulnerable, who advocates often speak on behalf of most definitely lack power and are often made to feel oppressed, feeling trapped and discriminated against, and it can often be young children lacking the power to speak up for their rights when in the care system, educational settings and health and welfare. In this day and age children are still in need of a voice and their views and opinions can be unacknowledged. It must be acknowledged that children are citizens and have rights, whether they are aware of their rights or not, they still apply in all settings. In the book “Children as Citizens, engaging with the child’s voice in educational settings” written by Pauline Harris and Harry Manatakis, it is expressed that all children have human rights and they themselves contribute greatly to the choices that will have an impact on their lives. The Australian Child’s Rights Taskforce also presented a report called ‘Listen to Children’ which found that Australia still needs to combine human rights into policy and legislative framework to benefit children, and even though the ratification of the CRC was in 1991, 1,048 children are still being held in immigration detention and almost half of all homeless people in Australia are under 18 years

of age. This is a significant indication that children's voices and thoughts are not considered when decisions are being made about them, and this is how an advocate's role would come in to use. It is an advocates duty and job to encourage empowerment and make individuals aware of their rights and what applies to them, and in relation to children it must be in a context that they understand, and to provide assistance to individuals for purposes relating to their care and support as it states in the the Social Services and well-being (Wales) act (2014).

Empowerment is an essential part of advocacy and it is crucial to make the individuals feel empowered. It is seen as a specific requirement and a place where one needs to reach to move from oppression to self-advocacy. In particular, the empowerment of women in recent years has become more publicly accepted and encouraged amongst women, to remove themselves from the stigma of "gender inequality" and "gender mainstreaming", in relation to inequalities within the workplace, discrimination and the differences in opportunities that are given to men and women globally, which are now recognised and being fought against. Empowerment amongst women is such a positive development within society today, and is being practiced within several developmental agencies. It is clear that Feminism has significantly contributed to the empowerment movement amongst women, and it has been their power that has enforced productive changes in these areas. "Feminists have long recognised that it is when women recognise their 'power within' and act together with other women to exercise 'power with', that they gain 'power to' act as agents. Feminist experience has shown that this is a process that may take a diversity of pathways, but for which there are rarely the kind of short-cuts envisaged by the proponents of empowerment-lite." (Cornwall, 2007).

Agency is another aspect that is required for individuals to promote self-advocacy. Agency in itself is linked to free will and one making their own choices. "Agency as a concept, has been closely linked to the contradictory views of individual freedom for people to make their own and a stable social order. This is defined as the agency v structure debate." (Dépelteau, 2008). Agency and empowerment are closely linked, in fact many debate that you cannot have one without the other, and both elements are essential for being able to remove oneself from oppression. There is also the structure v agency debate, which questions does agency come from individual choice or from the structure of society? According to Giddens's theory which suggests that structure is made up of rules and resources which are arranged and categorised as properties of social systems, and agency is when an individual can recognise their own experience and is able to account for their actions, therefore states that the bond of agency and structure is conjoined as a duality of structure and it is the individuals who are in control of the reproduction of their social lives (Giddens, A. 2001.). To promote self-empowerment, agency is an ingredient that must be used, and individuals must be able to identify problems within themselves, find solutions and enable change, according to (Ling and Dale, 2014).

The term "oppression" is considered to be cruel treatment or unjust treatment, it can have several meanings behind it, however when it is used through the context of advocacy, it is

viewed as “oppression as power”, meaning that the oppressor has power over the oppressed. According to Iris Marion Young, there are 5 faces of oppression, which are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Exploitation is someone using other’s labour to gain profit for themselves while not giving them a fair wage. Marginalisation is restricting or enclosing a group of people that are considered to be of a lower social class. Powerlessness is when some people have power and other people do not, linking to Marx theory of socialism. Cultural imperialism is when the highest social class is manufactured to be the social norm, and then there is the most easily perceived and most understood form of oppression, violence. To enable one to to remove themselves from oppression to self advocacy, they must use anti-oppressive practice, which is mainly used within the field of social work. To do this the individual must abolish discrimination and detach any remaining barriers that will prevent them from furthering themselves on the path to self-advocacy.

To ensure individuals have their voices heard within communities, there are different strategies which are used to empower them. Simon Stevens, the CEO of NHS England argued his speech stating that he believed national agencies should be joining together to generate success. Part of his speech was in relation to empowering communities, and how the health and social care area must reform and change its relationships with communities, which is essential to ensure that they are strong and positive communities. To promote community power there are different approaches, some of these include developing ‘social capital’, which is the progress of social interactions with those such as neighbours, to inspire, motivate and encourage individuals to welcome diversity in all forms to their communities, transferring the power from the professionals and authority figures over to the individuals of the community and particularly those who have been marginalised, and those in power acknowledging that there are individuals within the community who have certain skill sets and experience through education which will be beneficial and can be used within the community.

It is clear that advocacy is an essential and important thing in this world for those who are considered to be vulnerable, and advocates can really help individuals by using different methods to promote empowerment and agency when using the right strategies. Regardless of who the individuals may be, whether they are women seeking empowerment to step out of the gender stigma, vulnerable children in social care or communities seeking empowerment, it is evident that an advocate can be extremely useful in encouraging these varied groups to step away from oppression and to step towards self-advocacy.

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