

Social Inclusion in Practice

Our vision is to end social exclusion. Our priority is to redirect and reform social programmes and the welfare state towards that goal. Whilst, further stating the fruits of that success will be that Britain has become a more equal society. (Mandelson, 1997, p.1)

Following a momentous defeat over the Conservative party (Levitas, 2005), “New Labours” (Ibid) vision for a more inclusive society led to the implementation of the “Social Exclusion unit being formed” (Ibid). Although no distinct classification for the term “social exclusion” was ever made by the government, Blair believed it mainly to be centred around “multiple deprivation” (Blair, 1997, p.1). Quoting, it is more about monetary destitution thus, more about the impact created by “poor housing, ill health, poor education but most of all lack of work” (Ibid). In a speech made by the prime minister, Blair committed to restore the United Kingdom with an ethos of “community or one nation” (Ibid). Furthermore, in 1999 Blair astonished his viewers by “promising to halve child poverty within a decade and eradicate it within twenty years” (Lansley and Mack, 2015, p.4).

This essay will examine the concept of social exclusion and the people who are most at risk. An emphasis will be placed on children living in poverty and the effects this may have on a child’s education, and well-being. Furthermore, a discussion on the influence theorists such as Maslow and Bronfenbrenner have had in the understanding of child development and learning. Whilst further discussing the role they play in the implantation of policy’s and interventions practised in educational establishments. An analysis on the well-being of pupils will be discussed in one’s own setting. With an emphasis on the effectiveness Flying Start plays in the inclusion of pupils in education.

Through their time in office New Labour implemented many positive interventions including “the introduction of Sure Start centres” (Thane and Davidson, 2016, p.38) and Tax credits which CPAG believe lifted “600,000

children out of poverty” (Ibid). Furthermore the “2010 Child Poverty Act” was introduced setting out a list of targets aimed at eradicating child poverty by 2020. Including, decreasing the amounts of children whose parents were under “sixty percent of the median household income a legal duty for the government” (Lansley and Mack, 2015, p.5). Although (Thane and Davidson, 2016) state through Labours duration in office many concerns were raised regarding the “punitive sanctions against claimants, especially disabled people” (Ibid). Whilst, (Bell, 2006, p.1) states, New Labours policies to tackle social exclusion are found to be “riddled with contradictions. Thus, likely to be counterproductive”. (Levitas, 2010, p.5) states, the governments definition of inclusion steered away from a redistributionist discourse which (Save the Children, 2014) state, has the largest impact on the reduction of children living in deprivation, and alternated between a SID and Mud discourse. Social exclusion for Labour meant a focus on responsibility and employment. Choosing to focus mainly on paid work excluded many women with a family from the labour market. (Yates, 2018, p.1) states, “woman are often excluded from employment due to their gender”. Yet the governments emphasis on employment failed to address this as woman are, “due to the patriarchal nature of current capitalist society statistically” more likely to be in employment without pay, a single parent or has taken on the part as a “stay at home mum” (Ibid).

Prior to Labours victory the “Human Development Report 1997” (BBC, Politics, 1997, p.1) revealed two decades of Conservative rule had led to poverty increasing “by half between 1979-1991 to 14.6 per cent of the population” (Ibid), with pensioners and children facing the full force. Furthermore, the UK, except for New Zealand “had the fastest rate of rising inequality in the world” (Pierson, 2010, p.8). Led by Thatcher whom once quoted “there is no such thing as society” the Conservatives discourse was very much centred around a “redistributive strategy – but it was a redistribution to the rich” (Levitas, 2005, p.11). 2010 saw the Conservative party along with the Liberals regain its power back from the Labour party. Cameron’s discourse was very similar to Labours, where

poverty was focused on the “unemployed and family breakdowns” (Independent, 2015, p.1). (Toynbee, 2015, p.1) describes how “to be poor from now on will mean to be in need of correction not cash”. Austerity measures such as “successive cuts to social security and the freezing of tax credits” (Garnham, 2016, p.1) led to many families and children struggling to make ends meet.

The origins of the “term social exclusion” can be traced back as “far as Aristotle” (Mathieson et al., 2008), although the belief itself derived in “specific context in France in the 1970s” (Pierson, 2010, p.7). “Philosopher Rene Lenoir” (Batliwala and Veneklassen, 2012, p.1) first defined the term to refer to groups of individuals whom had been excluded from “the margins of society” (Pierson, 2010, p.7) were denied the chances of paid work and the “safety nets of the welfare state” (Ibid). Where “Les exclus” (Ibid) dismissed the fundamental “rights of les citoyens” (Ibid), resulting in the prejudice of many people, such as the “disabled” or non-residents of the country, such as refugees (Pierson, 2010).

The term social exclusion can be defined in numerous ways. The (World Health Organization, 2020, p.1) describe it as being “dynamic multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power-relationships interacting across four main dimensions-economic, political social and cultural”. The most predominant factors that contributes to the growth of social exclusion include, deprivation and low wages, absence of employment, impact of community and deprived from services such as bank accounts or health services (Pierson, 2010). These factors often interlace and underpin each other thus, for the promotion of its opposite, social inclusion, entails “a multi prolonged approach to practice that address areas such as strengthening social networks and maximizing options for income” (Pierson, 2010, p.13).

The most powerful factor in the development of “social exclusion is poverty and low income”. Traditionally poverty has been defined in two ways, absolute and relative poverty. In the early sixties “Social scientist Peter Townsend” (Lansley and Mack, 2015, p.15) influenced the perception

of one's understanding of relative poverty. Townsend's study compiled an inventory of "sixty indicators of living standards ranging from diet and clothes to home amenities and recreation" (Ibid). A "deprivation index" (Ibid) was then created with a limited range of items which were then used to establish a "poverty line governed by the point at which people's risk of lacking these items sharply increased" (Ibid). Townsend claimed groups of people could still be in deprivation even when they are deficient of the items that many parts of society would think as conventional, (Lansley and Mack, 2015). Absolute poverty is described by "a fixed standard below which individuals and families experience complete destitution" (Pierson, 2010, p.14). Establishments such as the "United Nations" (Ibid) use this as a measurement of deprivation for third world countries "which they have fixed at two dollars a day" (Ibid). Under this amount families face the real possibility of malnourishment and severe health deficiencies. One's belief of deprivation is thus wildly static at the "level of income necessary for basic subsistence" (Ibid). Below the level people can live on the minimum requirements. Above, they may famish.

The UK measure relative poverty by viewing the average earnings of people, then sixty percent is deducted from the mid-range. A person whose income is smaller than this is regarded as "living in relative poverty" (BBC News, 2019, p.1). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggest this would translate to an income of "297.00 per week for a single parent with two children" (Ibid). Although the measure of relative poverty does not consider for the rise of inflation or austerity measures imposed by the Government (BBC News, 2019). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests "there is no single best measure of poverty" (JRF, 2020, p.1). Thus, suggests a new method is needed which involves looking beyond "contemporary political change, aiming for a major shift in attitudes, society and the economy" (Ibid).

According to the UNCRC "every child has the right to develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development" (Save the children, 2014, p.5). One of the factors which links poverty to health and well-being of

children and adults is “through the toxic effects of stress on the brain” (Blair and Raver, 2018, p.1). Furthermore, research suggests that deprivation on “physiologic and neurobiologic development” (Ibid) play a key role in “poverty-related gaps” (Ibid) in educational achievement. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological “Model of individual development” (Gray and Macblain, 2012, p.100) helps one’s understanding of how the child’s progression is determined by relationships within “microsystems” (Ibid). Thus, helping one to comprehend the importance of the different systems and the impact they may have regarding a child’s development (Blair and Rover, 2001). An example being, the microsystems between close family members and peers can either “facilitate or impede on a child’s development” (Blair and Rover, 2001, p.257). For example (CPAG, 2020) state, 45 percent of lone parents live in poverty. Studies suggest a child growing up in a single parent household have dissimilar “socioeconomic circumstances” which can be related to decreased pay, difficulties in parenting or poor mental health.

A mother with poor mental health or a young mother for example who may have poor parental skills may not be as receptive to her infant’s needs, impacting greatly on the development of one’s child. (Gross, 2013, p.16) states, “the sheer amount of language children hear is an important factor in their language development”. Furthermore, studies suggest, a child with “advanced language skills” (Ibid) are often those whose families speak more to their children. Whilst, the variety of “word types” (Ibid) and the intricacy and extended use of language has found to further aid in the progression of language as young as three and “their literacy development later on” (Ibid). Vygotsky described language as “power tool” (Gray and Macblain, 2012, p.74) in a child’s connections. Stating that a child’s progression arises through “socially mediated instruction under the guidance of more knowledgeable and experienced others” (Ezell and Justice, 2002, p.15). Shared reading with a parent/carer is an example of how scaffolding in the “zone of proximity” (Ezell and Justice, 2002, p.16) can facilitate the experience for a child, allowing them to develop the complex skills needed before beginning school (Ezell and Justice, 2002). A

survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust found “that only one in eight disadvantaged children in the UK own a book” (Peat, 2018, p.1). Whilst a further “three in ten parents never read stories to their children” (Ibid). “Difficulties in speech, language and communication are a very significant predictor of later literacy difficulties” Snowling (2006, quoted in Gross, 2013, p.3). Often preventing the child reaching the desired outcomes in school. Children who are read to in the first years of school do significantly better than those whose parents do not read to their children (The Welsh Government, 2016).

“Enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of the rights of the child” (School A, 2020, p.1) School A is a “gold standard respecting school where the UNCRC is at the heart of the schools planning, policies and practice” (Ibid). Core aims include, “to ensure that all children are supported and nurtured from the moment that they enter school. Geographically placed in an area of multiple deprivation (Western Telegraph, 2020) School A has approximately “25 percent” (Estyn, 2016, p.1) as having an additional learning need and “33 percent” (Ibid) are eligible for free school meals (eFSM). From a personnel perspective School A has many interventions with the aim of promoting inclusion at one’s school.

The “Welsh Government’s Child Poverty Strategy” aims to “make sure no child is living in poverty by the year 2020” (Welsh Government, 2015, p.7). Stating ways in which can decrease child poverty include Flying Start, “which supports children, so they have the best start in life” (Ibid). Furthermore, with the first “1000 days of life proving a critical phase of which the foundations are laid out for child development” (House of Commons, 2019, p.5). “Prevention and early intervention” (Ibid) prove critical for the outcomes of many children who live in deprivation. For a child who has endured “four or more adverse childhood experiences” (Ibid) within this period, may leave them vulnerable to many conditions such as “anxiety, depression, aggressive behaviour and substance abuse” (McLaughlin, 2017, p.1).

Flying Start is a “Welsh Government programme” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.4), designed specifically for “families and children under 4” (Ibid) from socio-economic deprived areas. Drawn on research-based evidence that has proven to have “positive outcomes for families and their children” (Ibid). Core aims include, access to “health visiting services” (Ibid), speech and language programmes, parenting courses and “part-time childcare for 2-3-year olds” (Ibid). The three elements that prove imperative for the success of Flying Start including, “a high-quality environment, high-quality people and a high-quality experience for the child” (Ibid). Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan further endorses the ethos of “high-quality education and childcare” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.5). Whilst, “supporting families and parents and further raising the standards of the health and well-being in children” (Ibid). The policy is designed to outline what the “Welsh Government defines as early years” (Pacey, 2013, p.1). Thus, “bringing unity to many different guidelines and interventions which impact and effect the early years” (Ibid).

Flying Start works in close conjunction with the Foundation Phase. “Introduced in 2010” (Welsh Government, 2015, p.4), the Curriculum for Wales seven core aims are closely linked to the UNCRC which states “children should be able to have a flying start in life. Furthermore, they should not be disadvantaged by poverty” (Ibid). To accelerate language development Flying Start provides a “play based” approach, which aims to “facilitate learning” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.6) as opposed to directing it. Piaget very much believed in a child-centred approach to learning, viewing children as “active and powerful participants in the learning process” (Gray and Macblain, 2012, p.87). Furthermore, Piaget believed that “intelligence comes from actions” (Ibid). With play-based activities playing a crucial part in a child’s learning process, Flying Start sets out a vast array of multi-sensory activities for a child to develop these skills. An example being play dough, water play and activities such as painting. Role play corners are particularly beneficial for helping children comprehend the varied cultures, whilst further helping them to develop empathy for their peers and others. A book corner is set up with a diverse

range of books for children to explore. Therefore, this allows for a shared reading experience between teacher and pupil.

Each child attending Flying Start has their own “individual Child Development Plan” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.1) enabling practitioners to monitor the pupil and track the progress. This will enable one to establish if further interventions are needed to promote the development of the child. An example being a teaching assistant may raise concerns regarding the pupil’s ability to communicate. This will be relayed back to the health visitor and teacher, with recommended interventions put in place. This could be an intervention between teaching assistant or a deeper level of intervention between a child and a speech and language specialist. Furthermore, a Flying Start health visitor will assess each individual child with a “Welsh Government approved assessment tool” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.11). This assessment allows a “snapshot of a child’s development across nine key areas. Including, physical skills and social interaction” (Ibid). Feedback will then be relayed back to the setting and parents/carers. Parental involvement of shared information is imperative “in order to gain maximum benefits” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.15).

Another crucial element of Flying Start is the participation of parents/carers in their child’s learning. Therefore, it is imperative to develop close relationships with parents. Research has found a connection “between parents’ social class and levels of education and children’s outcomes” (Ibid). Thus, “what parents do with their children is more important than who they are” (Ibid). Building bonds with parents allows for the sharing of information, for example a teacher could relay back information to the parent/carer about activities or learning experiences the child has participated in at school. The teacher could then advise the parent/carer on activities they could further engage with at home. Helping the child to build on what they have previously learnt at school.

Flying Start is a “key intervention programme, helping to improve the life chances of children in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Wales”

(BBC News, 2018). Although research suggests many children and families are being excluded from the service due to them not living within the catchment area. A report states “a flagship policy to tackle child poverty in Wales is failing to reach nearly two-thirds of the poorest children” (Ibid).

Social exclusion is a “multi-dimensional process” (The World Health Organization, 2020, p.1) which shows poverty to be a predominant factor. The different systems in a child’s environment can often impact the child’s life chances within a positive or negative way. For instance, the macro system which includes relationships between “political culture” (Gray and Macblain, 2012, p.99) saw the impact austerity measures had on families and children imposed by Conservative discourses. Whereas, the Welsh Government’s strategy to reduce poverty aims to implement policies such as “flying start and free school meals” (Welsh Government, 2015, p.7). Thus, impacting the child in a positive way. Maslow states, “if a child’s basic needs are not met, the child will be unable to progress to the next level” (McLeod, 2010, p.1). Although schools are not solely responsible for the effect’s poverty has on a child, they play an imperative role in the adoption of policies to promote inclusion. School A has several interventions that cater for a variety of needs including, breakfast clubs, Elsa and nurture groups, to Flying Start. Thus, enabling the child to develop the skills needed for the participation in school and future successes.

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