

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).

This assignment will explore how I aim to support Daniel* during his transition to a new school. My key objectives will be to identify specific barriers to learning and suggest a number of support strategies to aid Daniel.

Daniel is a 7-year-old male who lives with his mother and younger sister. He has a number of adverse childhood experiences [hereafter ACEs]. Daniel is currently undergoing a vertical transition and has been moved to a new school after being excluded from his previous school. Daniel has a number of needs within the classroom, however, due to the nature of the class sizes and resources available within the school, it is not always possible to meet his needs fully, and as a result, Daniel can struggle with a number of barriers. I have chosen this transition as I believe by introducing support strategies, such as a trauma-informed approach, better support measures and improved opportunities can be implemented to help Daniel overcome these barriers and obstacles to learning, and help him to succeed and thrive during his transition to a new school.

It is important to have a clear understanding of learner's needs and barriers within educational settings, as this allows educators to implement appropriate support measures to help learners progress and succeed within school to the best of their ability.

Daniel has a number of specific needs within the classroom which include a quiet working environment, clear instructions and guidance from staff, and the opportunity to work at his own pace alongside very few of his peers. It is vital that all learner's needs are met within educational settings in order for them to have the opportunity "to thrive and engage successfully with their education, society and the opportunities that life presents" (Welsh Government, 2024a). For example, Daniel demonstrates much more effective emotional regulation within the classroom when he is able to work within a quiet environment, which highlights the importance of supporting the needs of learners.

As well as having a number of specific needs, Daniel also faces several barriers within school. Daniel finds it difficult when adults and other children raise their voices in any kind of scenario, and can become overwhelmed, anxious and struggle to regulate his emotions. This can result in Daniel expressing these emotions physically in the form of anger, which can often result in conflicts between Daniel and his peers, making it difficult for Daniel to form trusting relationships during his transition to a new school. An explanation for these behaviours is likely explained by Daniel's ACEs, as research has found that "learners who have been exposed to 4 or more ACEs are 33 times more likely to report a learning or behavioural problem in comparison to children without ACE exposure" (Burke *et al.*, 2011, quoted in Hunt *et al.* 2018, p.g 392).

Daniel's needs and barriers are closely interlinked, as it is often the case that barriers arise when Daniel's needs are not being successfully met within the school environment. This can result in Daniel's progress being hindered within a number of aspects of Curriculum for Wales which again, is likely explained by Daniel's ACEs, as "children experiencing ACEs tend to rely on their 'reactionary' coping skills rather than their 'thinking' skills" (Frederiksen, 2018), meaning that instead of being in the mindset to learn, Daniel is often impacted by his fight-or-flight stress response and therefore is unable to take on new information, as his brain is instead prioritising survival.

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Overall, by identifying both Daniel's needs and barriers to learning and taking into account his background, educators supporting Daniel can begin to build up an image of how his progress is being affected and begin to implement support strategies. This highlights the importance of addressing learner's needs and barriers, especially in the case of children such as Daniel, who have experienced ACEs or trauma. Without doing so, appropriate support strategies or interventions, such as a trauma informed approach or use of an Individual Development Plan [hereafter IDP], cannot be implemented. This can result in learners facing drastic consequences to their progress and development, due to lack of support.

There are a number of different theories which explore the ways in which children develop and learn, due to the influence and exploration of the environments they live in. It is important to understand these theoretical perspectives, as they allow educators to understand and support children's progress within the school environment.

Piaget's cognitive development theory is based upon the idea of constructivism, and that "children move through four stages of intellectual development which reflect the increasing sophistication of children's thought" (McLeod, 2024). These stages are the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stages. Daniel is currently at the age where he would be considered to be entering the concrete operational stage, meaning that he may be developing the ability to "work things out internally in his head, rather than physically trying things out in the real world" (McLeod, 2024). Piaget's theory also explores the idea that learners "build upon existing knowledge in order to learn new concepts" (National University, 2024) using schemas. Schemas are "categories of knowledge that help learners to interpret and understand the world, and as experiences happen, this new information is used to modify, add to, or change previously existing schemas" (Lefa, 2014, p.g 2). This theory could be applied to Daniel and may explain his responses to when he is feeling overwhelmed. For example, Daniel may have learnt as a young child, through the use of one of his schemas, that expressing emotions such as fear resulted in negative reactions from caregivers, so instead may have learnt to mask his emotions with anger. Although Piaget's cognitive development theory can be applied to Daniel, as well as explore the way in which other children develop, the theory has also received criticism. For example, it can be argued that the theory does not fully consider "the effect that the social setting and culture may have on cognitive development" (Alahmad, 2020), which are two hugely influential aspects within a child's development. There are however, a number of other theories which do explore the impact of social settings and relationships as well as culture. An example of one of these theories is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory presents the idea that "an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings such as family to broad societal structures like culture" (Guy-Evans, 2024). These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the environment closest to the child, involving relationships with family, school and other caregivers, and "have the greatest impact on the child" (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This is significant for children such as Daniel, as this theory supports the idea that experiencing a number of ACEs within the microsystem does have a direct impact, as well as "providing an insight into all the factors that play a role in the growth and development of individuals" (Christensen, 2016). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory however, is considered by some to contain "several aspects, such as the mesosystem and the chronosystem, which are vaguely defined and understood" (Drew, 2024), which could make it difficult to fully

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pinpoint how different relationships within the systems “interact with each other to affect a child’s development” (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, quoted in Drew, 2024).

Whilst both theories can be applied to Daniel’s childhood development and growth, I believe that Brofenbrenner’s theory can provide a much stronger explanation into the aspects of Daniel’s development that have both caused challenges, and created barriers during his school transition. This is because Brofenbrenner’s theory presents a holistic approach to child development, by considering a much broader range of factors that may influence a learner, whereas Piaget’s cognitive development theory places a much higher emphasis on children developing intellectually, by utilising their own learned experiences. However, it is important to integrate a number of theoretical perspectives to gain a better understanding of how Daniel has developed. This can help to support him through his transition process.

The transition process I have chosen to help support Daniel and aid his progress is his transition to a new school, after he was excluded from his previous one. It is important to understand this transition from Daniel’s perspective to provide the appropriate support measures.

Daniel has been moved from one primary school to a different local primary school after behaviour in his previous school resulted in him being permanently excluded. As a result of remaining within the same area and his continued participation within the local football club, Daniel knows a small number of other children who also attend his new school. However, this does not take away from the fact that Daniel is still having to adjust to a new environment, different members of staff and new peers, and perhaps a completely different routine to what he was previously used to.

These adjustments have resulted in a number of academic, social and emotional challenges for Daniel. For example, Daniel is having to adapt to being taught by different members of staff, who may have different standards and work expectations in comparison to what he has previously experienced. Daniel also faces prejudice amongst his peers due to both classmates and parents having preconceived conceptions of Daniel, on account of them knowing him before his transfer to a new school. This has caused a number of emotional challenges for Daniel in terms of forming new relationships, especially due to him already facing barriers when regulating his emotions due to his ACEs.

Although Daniel is having to overcome a number of his own challenges during this transition, it is not uncommon for there to be a notable impact on the majority of learners who have moved schools. One study found that “70% of children who had moved schools had experienced significant social and school adjustment problems, and that peer acceptance ratings of these students were significantly lower than their other peers” (Sorin & Iloste, 2006). This suggests how vital it is for educators to support learners to help them transition more effectively into their new schools as well as form strong, stable relationships as quickly as possible.

In summary, Daniel is currently facing a number of challenges and barriers as a result of his transition to a new school. However, understanding and addressing these concerns can help to ensure a much smoother school transition for Daniel, and establish the appropriate support strategies in order for his progress to flourish.

In order to implement the most appropriate support strategies for Daniel, it is important to compare the strengths and limitations that each strategy may have. By considering each, this will allow educators to help support Daniel’s development in line with progression within the Curriculum for Wales, and ensure that his school transition runs as smoothly as possible.

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Due to Daniel's history of ACEs, a trauma informed approach may help to ensure that Daniel's needs are met within school, as well as help to develop his progress. Part of the working definition of a trauma-informed approach, according to the Welsh Government, is "an approach which takes account of the widespread impact of adversity and trauma and understands potential ways of preventing, healing and overcoming this" (2022). Within the trauma-informed approach, there are a number of support strategies which can be implemented. This can include an approach called PACE, developed by Dr Dan Hughes, which stands for playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. PACE is "a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe" (Welsh Government, 2024b). A trauma-informed approach using PACE could be helpful to Daniel, as this may allow him to feel safer in the classroom environment, as the strategies used within PACE "focus on building trusting relationships, emotional connections, containment of emotions and a sense of security" (Welsh Government, 2024b). This focus could help to address Daniel's barriers of emotional regulation within the classroom environment, by helping Daniel to develop more effective ways to manage his feelings. By developing these skills, this will ensure that Daniel's emotional regulation strategies are in line with progression step 2 of the health and wellbeing area of learning and experience within Curriculum for Wales. This states that learners at this progression step should be able to "notice and communicate their feelings, as well as begin to notice when they need help to manage their feelings" (Welsh Government, 2020).

Another strategy that could help to support Daniel and aid his progress within school is creating and utilising an IDP. IDPs are a "legal document which describes a child or young person's additional learning needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve" (Snap Cymru, 2024a). The majority of IDPs are "developed by the school in collaboration with the family and appropriate professionals" (Snap Cymru, 2024b), and are personal to individuals, which is important, as this ensures that the learner's needs, and what they feel is important, has been directly communicated and understood by all stakeholders involved in supporting the learner. By implementing an IDP for Daniel, his needs and intended outcomes can be clearly set out, with specific support guidance put into place as to how these outcomes will be achieved. This will ensure that Daniel receives effective, personalised support to aid his development, in line with progression within the Curriculum for Wales.

Both of these support strategies, which can be used to help aid Daniel's progression, can offer a huge range of strengths and positive outcomes. For example, a trauma-informed approach is considered by many to be "effective, and can benefit trauma survivors as well as bring hope, empowerment and support" (Scottish Government, 2021). However, by incorporating a second approach, such as the use of an IDP, a "more personalised reflection of pupils' strengths and support needs, and how the school will address those needs" (Estyn, 2023) can be provided. This could help Daniel to overcome the impact that his ACEs have had on his progress and development, as well as provide support to eliminate the barriers and challenges that he faces within school.

Although use of a trauma-informed approach and IDPs are used within a wide range of educational settings, it is important to be aware of some of the potential weaknesses and limitations that some of these support strategies may have. To give an example, one study found that "adopting a trauma-informed approach is a time consuming and potentially costly endeavour" (Maynard *et al.*, 2019, pg.1). Likewise, the same can be said for IDPs, which according to a report by Estyn, "can be time consuming to write and review, and place additional workload on Additional Needs Learning Coordinators" (2023). Therefore, whilst

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incorporating these support strategies within school can result in a huge number of positive benefits for pupils such as Daniel, it is of paramount importance that any limitations are taken into account. This ensures that these factors can be accommodated for, and minimise the risk of any limitations outweighing the benefits of implemented support strategies.

Another vital aspect of implementing support strategies is the importance of stakeholder collaboration, which is considered by many to be a key part of the support system that surrounds a learner throughout their education journey. These stakeholders can include parents and caregivers, school staff, and outside agencies.

A child's parents or caregivers can play a vital role in supporting a learner's educational journey. For example, the Welsh Government's family and community engagement toolkit states that "families can support learning by helping their child feel that they belong in the school as well as work with the school to support their child with any particular issues" (2015). This collaboration between caregivers and school staff has huge potential to positively influence a child's growth and development within school, as support strategies put into place are able to remain consistent, both within educational settings and the learner's home environment. However, this is not always possible for some learners within school for several reasons, or additionally, a learner may require further support, which is where collaboration between the school and outside agencies can be implemented.

Outside agencies can "provide support to teachers to help learners, or work directly with a child. They are professionals who have specialist understanding in particular areas" (████████ Primary School, 2024). Outside agencies can include people or organisations such as educational psychologists, emotional literacy support assistants, speech and language therapists, as well as the child and adolescent mental health service, amongst others. By working in collaboration with schools as well as parents, outside agencies' specialist knowledge can provide vital strategies and assist in helping learners requiring additional support to thrive and develop.

By incorporating a number of specific support strategies during Daniel's transition to a new school, as well as implementing collaboration between stakeholders, Daniel's personal challenges and barriers can be overcome, and his development supported in line with progression within the Curriculum for Wales. However, it will be important for practitioners to collaborate with the relevant stakeholders, and consider the effect that these support strategies are having on Daniel's progression. Following these considerations, adaptations can be made accordingly throughout Daniel's development within his new school both during and after his transition to further aid progression.

Reflecting on this assignment has allowed me to consider in detail the impact that transitions, ACEs, and trauma can have on learners within the classroom. It has also allowed me to further investigate the development theories and support strategies that can be used to help children like Daniel progress and develop within school. Going forward, I would like to further incorporate my findings within my own professional practice. This will ensure that I am fully taking into account all pupils and their backgrounds, and the impact this may have on their outwards behaviour when I am teaching. I believe that this will help me to better incorporate the QTS standards within my professional practice. By continuing to reflect and adapt my teaching, I feel that this will allow me to make learning in my classroom a positive experience, where all children feel safe and able to thrive.

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