

	Target	What I have done this assignment
Target 1	Ensure more key theorists are included in both discussion and referencing.	Expand reading and research to support referencing
Target 2	Try to support your key messages with research, who agrees? Who disagrees?	Found theorists who's research and ideas aligned/agrees with my points
Target 3	Provide counter arguments for recommendations made or critically evaluate aspects to be cautious with.	Pose critical and rhetorical questions to get my points across

Start at my feet commentary / (ECAD 4013-C)

School A is a large english-medium primary school in Wales, close to its town centre. There are 646 pupils on roll across 23 classes, which includes two classes in an on-site learning resource base for students with a diagnosed autistic spectrum condition (Estyn 2016). Within this resource base there is also a sensory room, immersive environment room and soft play to help support students. The catchment area of the school is predominantly English speaking, with only 17.2% of the county being Welsh speakers (Census 2021). There are multiple local heritage sights, including castles, which the school uses to help educate students of Welsh culture and history. Poverty and socio-economic deprivation is a recognised community struggle within the schools catchment area, with 33% of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is above the national average (Estyn 2016). A big priority of the school is community engagement, which is used to help support teaching and learning. Examples of this include working with the local church at Easter, and visits from the fire service to discuss fire safety with the children. The school has excellent community links and the needs and context of the community is strongly reflected in School A's curriculum, which has been achieved through the assistance of parents, stakeholders and pupil voice (Education Wales 2022).

An example of a challenge within School A's community that influences aspects of the school, such as teaching and learning, is the high levels of poverty within the catchment area. Around 33% of pupils within School A are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average (Estyn 2016). According to the Child Poverty Action Group (2022), family financial difficulties can generate significant challenges on children's home life, relationships and educational achievements which can lead to educational inequalities. These inequalities can stem from factors including families being unable to afford toys that correlate with their child's progression as they grow, to having improper conditions to complete homework. There is a strong correlation between children that experience disadvantages in their early years and being less likely to obtain qualifications and have devalued long term educational and economic success, this is called the attainment gap which can be observed as young as primary school (Welsh Government 2021). School A's interventions to combat this include home visits, which are conducted prior to a child starting at the school by the class teacher. This creates an opportunity for the school to gain an understanding of what resources are available at home, and what support the school can

provide both the child and family. Levels of support can vary from the Family Support Officers assisting with housing or accessing benefits by putting families in contact with the relevant agencies, and also providing children with electronic devices to complete homework on a loaning basis. It can also be argued that these home visits are an opportunity to combat social injustices within the community, as this aligns with the principles of social justice as a pursuit of education equality (Smith 2018). School A is striving to make sure that all children have equal opportunities to succeed in both life and education, regardless of their socio-economic status. Developing their knowledge of the home life of students can allow the school to see what experiences they may be able to provide pupils to help them develop and grow, as well as making sure that they are being provided with equal opportunities to be successful members of society when they leave school, and not just making sure they receive equal treatment within the school (Smith 2018). For example, how can a child that cares for family at home, without the time let alone resources, be expected to complete homework to a similar standard of that of a child who has appropriate home learning conditions and access to the internet? Beginning the construction of this bridge between home and school so early in a child's educational journey within the school creates the foundations for excellent communication between families and the school (Rogers 2023). Family engagement outside of the school environment helps convey to families that the school cares about them and their child, which may encourage families to be more engaged in their child's learning, leading to improved attendance, behaviours and overall learning (Terziev 2018). Urie Bronfenbrenner agrees that there is great importance in having a strong relationship between families and the environments that their child interacts with, including school, as these areas all have an impact on how a child develops (Bronfenbrenner 1986). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development suggests that all different aspects of a child's life, including family, school and community collectively impact on how they learn (Hayes, O'toole and Halpenny, 2017, pp. 1-12). These environments are categorised as the microsystem, macrosystem, exosystem and chronosystem, and Bronfenbrenner has previously likened them to Russian nesting dolls to illustrate how each of the systems is nested within the other and are all interconnected (Bronfenbrenner and Cole 1986).

In addition, another challenge School A is facing is promoting Welsh culture and use of the Welsh language, particularly since the announcement of the Welsh Government's goal for a million Welsh speakers by 2050 (Welsh Government 2017). The vast majority of pupils at School A are of white British ethnicity, and very few speak Welsh at home (Estyn 2016). While this can be recognised as a challenge, it has also been an opportunity for the whole school to engage with the Welsh language, and has inspired pupils to take pride in where they come from. This approach falls in line with one of the four purposes that drive the curriculum for Wales, focusing on encouraging pupils to be ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world (Welsh Government 2017). Throughout the school there is a constant effort being made by educators to push pupils to use the Welsh language, including whole class check-ins in Welsh every morning in the, creating an opportunity for pupils to become more familiar with the language through familiar and meaningful concepts, according to the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2008). The lack of Welsh speaking in pupils' homes has also been taken into consideration in School A's curriculum to the context and needs of the local community, whereby they worked with parent governors who performed research into the local area and highlighted gaps in experiences that could be addressed in school (Education Wales 2022). Ways in which the school has utilised the

opportunities within its community, particularly in the promotion of Welsh culture, is through visiting local heritage sights like castles (Estyn 2016). This is an excellent opportunity to utilise what is available within the community to influence teaching and learning, as pupils are likely to be more positively engaged with the history of what's on their own doorstep. Engaging with the community in these ways aligns with the Welsh Government's call for 'Community Focused Schools', putting great emphasis on how utilising the experiences available for children locally can provide a holistic and unique learning experiences to the school (Welsh Government 2022). Additionally, there are currently plans within the school for the upcoming St.Davids Day to be a parental engagement day within the lower school, this will mean that families will be invited to take part in Welsh language activities alongside their children. This could be an opportunity to increase engagement and confidence with Welsh at home, if family members learn any words or phrases that they then feel confident using casually in conversation. It could be argued that these approaches the school is taking towards promoting use of the Welsh language is not only focused on the school, but also branching out into the wider community in its engagement with parents and carers. This approach of creating opportunities for engagement between the school, community, families and learners is supported by Joyce Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein suggests that these areas are where the three major contexts where learning takes place, and that these spheres of influence can be pushed apart or pulled together (Kaminski 2011). In creating meaningful links between the spheres of influence, School A is providing its pupils with the building blocks for academic success. According to Epstein, when children feel cared for and are encouraged to work hard they are more likely to do so and also have an improved education climate (Epstein 1995). It can also be argued that the schools effort to consult stakeholders, specifically parent governors, is one example of how the spheres of influence at School A are being brought together to support learning (Myende 2018).

To conclude, from my findings in my research and experiences on bridging days, it is clear that community engagement is a priority within the school, to ensure that pupils have a unique and holistic learning experience (Myende 2018). The introduction of home visits prior to a child starting at the school is an example of the schools awareness for the struggles within the community, such as poverty. By making the effort to gain extensive knowledge in the learning requirements, and home environments of the pupils the school is able to work with families and communities to offer the necessary support. In supporting families in areas such as acquiring benefits or providing resources to improve the at home learning environment, which is a step to closing the attainment gap in the school community (Welsh Government 2016). In the future when I am practising as a teacher I will make a conscious effort to be aware of the social issues like poverty within my school community and classroom. I believe that in having this awareness I will be able to challenge injustice, and therefore provide an improved learning environment that accelerates the potential of learners (Arshad 2019). Having an understanding of the potential social injustices and striving for equity in my classroom links to the QTS Standards, whereby as the teacher I will demonstrate professional attitudes in my personal commitment to equity and maximising the potential of learners (Welsh Government 2017). In order to achieve this, I will aim to have excellent communication with families and concentrate on building positive relationships to promote transparency in that communication. My research and experiences has also demonstrated School A's passion for working with the community, and building this into the school ethos on both a local and national scale. The school's engagement with community on a local scale is demonstrated through both its partnerships with local entities like the

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church, and its aspirations for equal opportunities for success for all. But arguably School A is contributing towards building the national community in its efforts to promote the use of Welsh language, and its encouragement in instilling a sense of pride in students regarding their local history, culture and ultimately their national identity (Williams 2021). Using incidental Welsh will play a key role in my classroom when I am a practising teacher, to encourage the use and familiarity of words and phrases with my students. In doing so I will also be creating meaningful links to the four purposes that drive the curriculum for Wales in my use of the Welsh language across topics, thereby encouraging pupils to engage with the Welsh language and be informed citizens of Wales and the world (Welsh Government 2017). This can be linked to the QTS standards, as I will be committed to the development of my own personal Welsh language skills (Welsh Government 2017). One way I could achieve this may include participating in training programs that can help mature my pre-existing knowledge of the Welsh language, and how this can be applied in my classroom to influence the teaching and learning of students. Overall, my bridging experiences and research has highlighted how challenges and opportunities within a community can influence teaching and learning, and the role of the school and teacher in making sure that all pupils have the equal opportunities and conditions to succeed both academically and as a person.

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