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Critically analyse the strategies for promoting inclusivity in a given UK curriculum.

The aim of this paper is to critically analyse strategies that are used to promote inclusivity in the primary curriculum in Wales, this includes both the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2. This paper will examine the theories, policies and strategies behind inclusion and how these are promoted in the curriculum with links to practice. The term 'Inclusivity' defined in the English Cambridge dictionary (2020) is "The quality of trying to include many different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally." This paper will consider the promotion of inclusivity in the Welsh curriculum with the focus being on children with additional needs and children living in poverty.

There are, according to Al-Shammari, Faulkner and Forlin (2019) three learning theories that are important to the theory and practice of inclusive education, these are behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. They believe that practices related to inclusion can be taken from each of the three perspectives. (Al- Shammari, Faulkner and Forlin, 2019) although, there is no further evidence that these learning theories are important to theories of inclusion.

It can be argued that the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusivity' often refers to children with additional or special education needs but over the years it has come to mean more than special education with much broader social and political dimensions. (Armstrong, 2009) Armstrong (2009) suggests that in order to address any issues related to inclusion the wider, interconnected issues of health, debt relief and poverty should first be explored.

In Wales, during the three-year period that ended in 2018/19, there were 29% of children living in poverty. (W.G. 2019) Ridge (2006) thinks that poverty can have an impact on a child's participation and social inclusion and living in poverty means that some children may not have the same social experiences as other children and this can then impact on a child's ability to maintain and develop social relationships. It is not just the social experiences that children living in poverty may not be included in, it is now evident that poverty is having an impact on children's educational attainment. (Enwefa, Enwefa, Jennings, 2006)

The Welsh Government want all children and young people to have the same opportunities and chances and for nobody to be held back because of poverty. (W.G. 2019) They have produced some policies and strategies to attempt to help children living in poverty and their aim is to have no children living in poverty by 2020. (W.G. 2019) although this is seen by some as an unrealistic ambition because the UK government would also need to commit to this ambition. (Evans, 2019)

The 'Child Poverty Strategy for Wales' produced by the Welsh Government in 2019 has outlined the key things they will do to reduce child poverty in Wales.

One of the key things that they have provided is a grant to schools named the pupil deprivation grant, this grant is intended to improve the outcomes for children who receive free school meals, and for these children from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome any barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential (W.G. 2018), including children who are exceptionally able, but because of their family background are not achieving their full potential. (W.G. 2018) This is because research has shown that there is “a strong link between achievement and the level of entitlement to free school meals: as the level of free school meals entitlement increases, the level of achievement decreases (W.G. 2019)

Another key thing that the Welsh Government has introduced is The Flying Start programme for children in the early years (W.G. 2019), this programme, aimed at children aged 2 and 3 years old was introduced to some of the most disadvantaged parts of Wales, however The Children, Young people and Education Committee (2018) believe that “the geographical targeting of the programme was creating a ‘post-code lottery’ that could potentially create further inequality because it was not reaching a significant number of children living in poverty.”

In Wales, there are around 22% of learners in maintained schools who have special educational needs (SEN) (W.G. 2020)

Inclusion requires active involvement from all involved and is a process through which all children can access common opportunities in ways that are relevant to their own needs. (W.G, 2015) The charity, Save the Children (2006) believes that the education system should be adapted to suit the child, rather than the child having to adapt to the system. Any adaptations or modifications that need to be made are not viewed as a luxury for which individuals should be grateful but should be seen as what is required for schools to meet needs of all pupils. (Loremann, Deppeler, Harvey, 2010) Inclusion in education requires an inclusive curriculum and improving the awareness of teachers and other staff of equality and inclusive learning issues. (W.G, 2015)

The national curriculum for Wales has been produced to allow schools and settings to design their own curriculum and assessments arrangements. (HWP, 2020) The framework itself is not considered an off the shelf programme of delivery but that “schools and practitioners are best placed to make decisions about the needs of their specific learners, including choosing topics and activities which will best support their learning.” (HWP, 2020) Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2010) also have similar views on how a curriculum should be produced, they state that “one activity of a professional teacher is to take the curriculum they are mandated to teach and translate that curriculum into meaningful learning activities that are relevant and accessible to all students in a class.”

In order to design a curriculum that is inclusive and appropriate for all, the ‘educational environment’ must be adjusted and accounted for in the planning phase, there are five main areas of the environment that can be adjusted, these are, the physical

environment, the resources environment, instructional strategies, the materials environment and learning outcomes. (Loreman, Deppeler, Harvey, 2010) Darrow (2007) also agrees with this and states that for children with disabilities to be successful in any setting, some sort of adaption is needed in their educational programme, these adaptations can be any adjustment that allows for at least partial participation and enhances performance, these can include adaptations to the environment, materials for learning or instructions. The adaptations made should cater for specific needs and based on not just their weaknesses but also strengths. (Darrow, 2007) The areas of the environment that can be adjusted will be explained in more detail.

Inclusive classrooms are classrooms that are reasonable and somewhere that pupils are accepted for who they are, and their individual needs are met. (Yamani, 2014) Schwartz and Pollishuke (2013), cited in Yamani, (2014) believe that, in an inclusive classroom, “students are not treated in an identical way but rather the needs and interests of each and every individual student are met, providing the necessary tools, conditions and assistance to achieve success and reach their potential.” The physical layout of the classroom must also be considered when thinking in terms of inclusion, Loremann, Deppeler and Harvey (2010) state that physical access into a classroom must be gained by all students in order to be involved in learning activities with other students. It is the responsibility of teachers and other staff to ensure that every pupil has access to a classroom, however, “schools do not have to make physical alterations to improve accessibility e.g. adding ramps. Instead they must publish a plan to improve accessibility for disabled pupils and include the steps they are going to take to implement it.” (Godfrey, 2019)

When developing inclusive policies and practices it is important to understand difference and how children think about difference. (Nutbrown, Clough, 2006) Nutbrown and Clough (2006) state that children can develop political, social and cultural preferences from a very young age, although, Neundorf and Smets (2017) argue that young children are more easily influenced by external factors. Children will come across a wide variety of differences including abilities, languages, cultures and backgrounds and they will express curiosity, it is the responsibility of the adults around these children to frame these differences as a strength and to model the acceptance of diversity. (Brookes, 2017)

It seems that Inclusion in schools has improved over the years and more and more children are able to access mainstream schools with the settings doing everything they can to ensure that all children can access the same education and curriculum.

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