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Chloe Evans

I am a passionate and highly motivated level 5 Education Studies (BA) student with a range of professional working experience, who thrives working with people of all ages, in adaptable environments, and has a keen eye for detail while possessing excellent communication and leadership skillsets.

I have demonstrated high levels of understanding, capability, and competence throughout my studies at the University of Wales Trinity St David, through my participation in a variety of modules and completion of assignments of a high standard, in which I have received respectable grades. Competency and capability are imperative to my professional identity and contribute to a richer picture of my knowledge and understanding (Alexander, 2013). I have shown that I can work collaboratively with a team, and efficiently lead whilst providing support and encouragement. Team leadership sets out to inspire others to perform to the highest level, both individually and as a team (Griffith and Dunham, 2014). This is a valuable skill to have as it highlights my honesty, competency, optimism, and inspiration (Kouzes and Posner, 2017). I am confident in my communication skills in English and Welsh which allow me to write sophisticatedly, present ideas and work professionally (verbal and written) and read instructions, documentation, and research. Not only is written communication an essential contributor to employability (Holmes, 2017) but being bilingual in Wales means I have access to varied social networks which increase my educational and employment opportunities (Callahan and Gandara, 2014).

Areas of Interest

To have areas of education that particularly interest me is important for many reasons. Firstly, I would be able to use my professional expertise to encourage transformative change, which is essential if I want to become a teacher or work at schools. Not only would I become an advocate and inspire change, but it could also set me apart from other teachers/ education professionals when applying for jobs as I will have knowledge and expertise in focused areas which could be valuable for roles I apply to. Becoming a specialist/advocate in specific areas of education is an employable skill as future colleagues will be able to seek advice and guidance from me when teaching or needing advice around topics that I am interested in (Bradley-Levine, 2018). There are two specific areas of education which interest me:

Mental Wellbeing

74% of adults (between the ages of 18-24) have experienced stress to such an extreme that they have felt overwhelmed and unable to cope (Mental Health Foundation, 2018 and Barden & Caleb, 2019). This is interesting as this age range is the age at which the average UK (United Kingdom) undergraduate partakes in education. Around 20% of children suffer from mental health conditions of some sort (Schulte-Körne, 2016). Mental health affects students of all ages whether the person is in primary school, secondary school, or further education institutions. The impact that mental health problems have on learners can manifest in a lack of motivation, negative moods, behavioral issues, and attention deficits. Thus, being an advocate for mental health will benefit me and my employability opportunities greatly as I will be a specialist in a prevalent, incredibly important subject.

It is widely acknowledged that student mental health and emotional well-being is important, making supportive learning environments essential in contributing to the wellness of children and young people in education settings. The power of mental health advocacy has a pervasive impact on people's lives and futures and has consequently become a focus for activism in many countries, highlighting the importance of having specialists in this field (Russo, 2014). In Wales, there is specific guidance available to practitioners to support the emotional health and wellbeing of their learners, recognizing the benefits for a school's improved atmosphere (Welsh Government, 2012). Studies find that mental health advocates in schools can be mentors, enthusiastic teachers, welfare officers or students (Shute & Slee, 2016). The study goes on to discuss the challenges of promoting mental health in schools because of the complexity of the subject but concludes that any effort, big or small, will make a remarkable difference and that through teamwork, creativity and empowerment, all learners with mental health problems can be supported (Shute & Slee, 2016; Beinecke, 2009).

Wales is pioneering in its approach to mental health amongst children and young people, with it being the only nation in the UK that requires all local authorities to provide counselling services in their area. With this, a pilot scheme was set up which dedicated CAMHS (Child and Adolescent mental Health Services) Practitioners to train teachers in best practice when they can see pupils showing early signs of anxiety, depression, or self-harm. This is to ensure that children experiencing mental health issues are supported and receive appropriate care through advanced training at the earliest signs of struggle (Haag Granello, Granello and Juhnke, 2022).

Pop-in safe rooms are excellent ways of encouraging students to seek help for themselves which develops self-awareness skills, getting them to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses through resources available to them. These rooms provide a safe space for any learner who is struggling emotionally to be listened to by a non-judgmental peer or teacher who can also provide moral support (Erasmus, 2019). This approach encourages relationships and trust to be built so that those who are vulnerable feel comfortable which allows them to reflect on their thoughts and/or behaviors safely (Eppler-Wolff and Martin, 2021). It is also important to teach learners about mental health as it reinforces the importance of speaking up about feelings and creates open discussion, building on mental resilience which is an invaluable

skill for employability and wellbeing, especially when referring to stress (Harkness and Hayden, 2018).

As a mental wellbeing specialist and advocate, I will have a duty to promote healthy social-emotional development and address any mental health issues that the learners I work alongside may experience. My communication skills will let me listen carefully and offer sound advice and support clearly and professionally. My experiences and knowledge will benefit me as I can relate to others, which is important to build relationships and trust for people to be honest about their feelings.

Creative play

One of the most important types of creative activity for young children is creative play. This type of play is expressed when learners use familiar materials, but in a new and unfamiliar way, engaging in an imaginative role-play sense (Barbot & Eff, 2019). Creative play utilises children's creativity skills, to define and change the rules of normality to create an environment without limitations, where their imaginations can run wild. Education systems across the world are searching for ways to develop and foster creativity amongst learners of all ages. According to multiple definitions, creativity is the invention of innovative ideas using the imagination (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2017). One of the four purposes of the Welsh curriculum is to create "enterprising, creative contributors" which places an emphasis on creativity and illustrates the importance of encouraging children's imagination (Welsh Government, 2020).

There are several theorists who believe that creative play is an imperative contributor to the development of a child. Lev Vygotsky theorised that the development of cognitive abilities is "socially guided and constructed" (Yousef and Mahaneed, 2022). Vygotsky's theory of play suggests that children learn through play and that it is a type of sociocultural learning. Vygotsky's theory suggests that children are born inquisitive and are eager to learn through exploration, not only in school but also within their day-to-day activities. A second theorist who believes creative play has significant importance in the development of a child is Jean Piaget. Their "Theory of Play" expressed that as children mature, their environments and play should enhance their cognitive and language development (O Alharb, 2022). It is evident that play develops a variety of skills including fine motor skills, social skills, concentration, confidence and develops a child's senses.

I find creative play to be versatile and can be carried out through different activities and achieve very different results. This is beneficial in a rapidly changing technological 21st century as play teaches resilience, adaptability and innovation. Some argue that this is an essential survival skill as learners are taught to stay alert and to continually learn something new (Smithner, 2011; Ahuja and Saha, 2016). Ultimately, creative play can be encouraged through technology, for example, projects like 'Wazaam!' which is a video mediated communication

system designed for users to interact in virtual environments. Its purpose is to support creative play through activities which embody the imagination of the child (Hunter *et al.*, 2014). With technology advancing, it is crucial to include devices such as tablets, computers, apps, virtual reality headsets and interactive whiteboards into lessons to expose children to multisensory experiences. Multisensory technologies allow for accurate and real-time mapping of motor behaviour onto multiple facets of sound, music, tangible, and visual media, based on various strategies that the teacher can choose with great flexibility (Volpe and Gori, 2019).

Playing with toys, like Lego, can enhance a child's fine motor skills as they must grasp, pull apart and build with the blocks. Multiple studies find that children who play with Lego have enhanced cognitive development, social interaction and developed logical thinking (Elfira, 2021). This is because children must convey ideas and learn to share when using the Lego bricks, sometimes working as a team, or interacting in a collaborative learning environment (Jensen *et al.*, 2018). Further research on toys and play equipment finds that Lego can facilitate the development of most children and are not limited to just able-bodied children (Poon, 2018). It is vital that educators allow children to experiment as research analysis shows how teachers play a key role in developing students' creative ideas (Fredagsvik, 2021). As a creative play specialist, it is important to remain self-aware and acknowledge the effects of my reaction to students' creative ideas as this can determine if an idea is explored or not.

Creative play within education can stretch beyond the boundaries of the classroom; as forest schools prove. Forest Schools are based on an inspirational learning process centered on the child that creates opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is argued these schools encourage flexibility, creativity, and discovery (Knight, 2016). The Foundation Phase, revised by the Department for Education and Skills, (Welsh Government, 2015) promotes independent learning and discovery, which suggests that the outdoor environment of forest schools is a suitable resource for children's learning. For this reason, it appears that the advantages of outdoor learning and the way it encourages creative play, cannot be underestimated.

Most educators would agree that play is a necessary condition for learning, mental health, and growth. There are strong links between the two areas of education that I am interested in, which I have the skills to combine and highlight. Play therapy is a fantastic example of how creative play can be implemented in mental health help as children are allowed to explore and express their thoughts and feelings in other ways than just speaking about the issues they may face (Laver-Bradbury, 2021). Creative outlets such as art can act as a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its main mode of expression and communication when used in art therapy. Art therapy helps children and adolescents better understand their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Children and young people can begin to see the thoughts and feelings they have

inside by creating images and objects, and then be supported by the art therapist to better understand themselves and find solutions. (Edwards, 2016). Further studies find that playful interactions can manifest into coping skills when someone finds themselves feeling anxious (Nijhof, *et al.* 2018). Therefore, there is a crossover between these two areas, and I believe that this will benefit me in the future as I have further knowledge in key areas of education, concluding that I am highly employable.

1974 words

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