

This essay will describe what schools and local authorities should do to ensure the well-being of their pupils by exploring children's mental health and the importance of well-being whilst considering children's rights in the 21st century. This essay will explore two theories, both of which are designed to increase well-being within primary schools, and how these theories follow legislation that has been implemented in Wales. This essay will focus on Carmarthenshire County Council as a Local Authority and using school A as an example to demonstrate the practice that the collaboration of the two theories described can create a 'new' discipline structure within schools.

Howard *et al* (2017) explains that mental ill health, is a 'disease of the young at what should be an optimum time of life', where children make friends, learn from their teachers and learn to interact socially. However, it is at this time in a child's life that professionals, mainly their teachers, spend a lot of time with them, and are best placed to observe them for any changes, in their behaviour for example, as this may indicate poor mental health. Murphy and Fanagy (2012) describe that 'mental health is the foundation of health development', for every person has mental health, as with physical health, people can have good or bad, however, having mental health problems at a young age can have long term effects. Burrell and Riley (2005) state that 'Children should have a whole series of entitlements, known as basic human rights'. Alderson (2005) explains that there are many reasons why children's rights should be respected, as children are a part of the human family, and therefore children are entitled to human rights, for example, the right to life, and a protection from abuse. Adults, parents, professionals and guardians have a duty and responsibility to ensure that children's human rights are respected. These rights are enshrined within 54 articles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) and provides a clear plan to educate people to respect and care for one another. By respecting the worth of all members of the human race, individuals can promote social progress and a better quality of life, and also lays the foundations for justice and peace in the world. Historically children have been perceived to not be able to reason, however, Alderson (2005) argues that children are reasonable and should be involved in matters that affect them and that children are wrongly often labelled as inadequate. Rights are often seen as a 'responsibility', where it would usually be the adult's responsibility to ensure that a child's rights are upheld, however, a child has equal responsibility as the participation rights of a child show that children would in fact like to have more of a say in their day to day lives.

Park (2005 p.46) introduces a theory of 'Emotional Literacy' which he believes can transform schools. Emotional Literacy is a strategy for creating a school environment, where

teachers can use their existing skills in order to promote the natural curiosity of children and their motivation to learn. Emotional literacy can be defined by Sharp (2001) as being the ability to 'recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions' which can be understood by using an individual's emotions to 'help yourself and help others succeed'. Sharp (2001) believes that Emotional literacy matters the most because it will 'enable children to achieve their best and to make a greater contribution to society'. A second theory is suggested by Webster (2005 p.100) who promotes a theory of well-being, entitled 'Talking Out' which is designed to promote well-being within primary schools. This theory involves teaching children to listen to each other, to express how they are feeling and to collaboratively agree a solution. Webster believes that well-being in schools can be increased by building a child's vocabulary and their ability to empathise with others. Webster also believes that physical aggression should not be tolerated within schools regardless of the provocation, and coupled with giving children choice and responsibility, for instance, deciding where to spend their play time and when to go to the toilet, and also eliminating institutionalised behaviours such as lining up, bells and whistles, and most importantly, shouting by adults and children for attention. Webster believes that raising hands is adequate enough to get attention. Within Webster's theory, she believes that what is actually being said is not usually the problem, it is in fact the tone of how words are spoken that can cause hurt to children, which in turn negatively effects their well-being and their confidence. Being aware of your voice while talking out is extremely important within this theory.

It is outlined within the Welsh Government's report on the Well-Being of Wales (2018) that there are seven goals that have been put into place, with the aim of improving the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales' (Welsh Government, 2018). These goals are contained under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and include: 'A prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and a globally responsible Wales'. As the title of this Act suggests, the well-being of Wales is the focus of this legislation and instructs all public bodies to carry out sustainable development, which must include setting and publishing their objectives, which should be aimed at contributing to the achievement of the seven well-being goals. The Act also ensures that all public bodies must take action whilst ensuring that the well-being needs are met without 'compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs' (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015).

In 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government released a document entitled *Thinking Positively: emotional health and well-being in schools and early years setting* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010) which focusses on the well-being of primary aged children enforcing that well-being is at the heart of the school effectiveness framework', and is considered a critical element within the 'common framework' which was introduced by Estyn (the education and training inspectorate for Wales). This document offers a proposal and practical examples, aimed at primary schools and local authorities to reflect on what the Welsh Assembly deem to be best practice when considering what should be promoted to improve pupil's mental health and well-being. This document also offers support for Webster's (2005) theory of 'talking out', as it focusses its guidance to the educational staff, who are already in a position whereby any pre-existing mental health problems can be recognised early, assistance can be provided promptly, and preventative measures can be taken. Welsh Policy for health, education, social and youth justice services recognise the importance that taking opportunities to encourage the positive mental health and well-being of children, and also professionals within education, by working in collaboration with parents, extended families and voluntary sector services, it can achieve positive results. Fundamentally the Welsh Assembly recognises that positive or negative experiences during a child's education can have vast effects on children's outcomes later on in life. This is strengthened within page 5 of the document, entitled *Policy issues for schools* ensuring that local authorities and schools amend their existing policies and initiatives to ensure that they comprehensively include effective promotion of emotional health and well-being for all pupils (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, p.5).

Looking closer at Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC), their *Well-being objectives 2017/18* report incorporates the local authorities core values, by building a better Carmarthenshire while focussing on four objectives, the first two of which consider children within primary schools (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017). Objective one: *Start well, live well and age well in a healthy and safe environment*. This objective implies that the CCC believes within this era of severe budgetary restrictions, and where communities have a growing demand and increasing expectations, they must be clear about their action plan for the future, to have, and share their vision and express their values which govern their decision making (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017). CCC enforce the importance of children's well-being within their first objective, by aiming to give children the best start in life by improving their experiences at an early age. The council considers that what happens in children's lives during the early years, can have lasting effects on many parts of a child's health, this includes their mental health, weight, heart disease, educational accomplishments and also

their economic status. CCC propose many ways in which they will enforce this objective, by looking closer at the parent-child relationship, providing parents help with parenting skills in order to avoid adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017, p.7). Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) are described by ACES (n,d) as 'traumatic events that affect children while growing up'. Public Health Wales (2016) report that 47% of adults in Wales suffered at least one ACE during their childhood and 14% suffered four or more and suggest that chronic exposure to ACE's can 'effect neurological, immunological and hormonal system development' (Public Health Wales, 2016) which can result in children developing issues regulating their emotions, their cognitive response and also develop problems with attachment, learning and memory. Public Health Wales (2016) suggest that ACE's can have a direct effect on the child's mental health going forth into adulthood and the rest of their adult lives and therefore ACE's should be addressed within the primary school years, with prevention techniques in place to increase the mental well-being of children prior to adulthood. Objective two: *Start well: help children live healthy lifestyles* indicates that CCC believe that by ensuring children have a healthy start in life it can increase their well-being, however, CCC expresses concern that during engagements with primary schools, they found a strong link between physical exercise and opportunities to play outdoors in a safe environment, which had a positive impact on the pupils well-being. CCC indicate that they need to measure current activity within the primary schools, as they believe not enough is being done, and wish to improve outdoor activities and playground environments (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017). In addition, CCC disclose that in order to improve physical activity, CCC will increase sporting activities within schools, by introducing free school swimming lessons, and extra-curriculum physical activity and play schemes. The council will also address mental health, with a plan to reduce exposure to adverse childhood experiences. The council suggests that school meals will become healthier and will adopt new schemes to promote healthy eating.

An example of the changes in legislation and policy can be seen by school A, who follow CCC objectives. School A is situated within the local authority of Carmarthenshire County Council and has a number of positive attributes credited to creating the best environment for children to learn, some of these include, the schools initiative program, the school is considered a lead within the global learning program Wales, is considered an eco-school and also highlights sporting activities and healthy eating throughout the school years. The school's moto is 'Be All You Can Be' (School A, n,d) which is integral to the ethos of the school and is proudly demonstrated within their school logo and documentation. School A prides its self on the well-being of their pupils by stating that it 'promotes an environment

which enables the pupils to be confident, happy 21st century citizens of Wales, who are equipped for life-long learning in an ever changing world' (School A, n,d). This school also explains that as a school they are very proud of the achievements of their pupils and with their school moto in mind 'Be All You Can Be', they come together to celebrate the individual achievement's no matter how big or small, for every achievement is a milestone in individual children's lives (School A, n,d). School A (n,d) considers the well-being of their pupils central to all of the decisions regarding the children's education, for they believe that children should learn in a happy, healthy environment. This can be demonstrated by the number of well-being projects that the school take part in, however, the most prominent two are 'pupil voice' by using a school council system, and the schools 'restorative practice' both of which not only promote well-being within the school, they allow for the children to be integral to the decision making and allow for conflict to be resolves in a restorative way (School A, n,d). The school council is made up of elected children from year three to year six, who meet with the well-being and inclusion committee of the governing body and is an excellent opportunity for the children to share experiences, ideas, concerns and information. School A believes that it is an important link, for the children to have a view when it concerns their own education, and also believe that the children have the right to participate in the pathway for their own future (School A, n,d). Within school A, the council meet up two to three times per half term, to make decisions and discuss various issues which can range from organising charity events and formal duties to revising the school and classroom rules. However, one key discussion the council have is in regard to bullying, especially during playtime where monitors are appointed by the council to report bullying, and to be a 'friend' if needed. School A prides itself on promoting positive behaviour within their pupils, set out in the *Positive Behaviour Policy (2017)*. In which school A focus on their 'restorative practice' as a tool for promoting positive behaviour within their pupils, in-turn, promoting children's well-being as they believe that 'for children to be ready to learn, they must firstly feel happy and secure' (School A, 2017). Restorative practice is a whole school approach and can be identified as similar to Webster's (2005) theory of 'Talking Out'. School A's *Positive behaviour policy* (School A,2017) explains that restorative practice is used every day and has become integral within school life, by offering a different approach to punishment of negative behaviour and also applauding positive behaviour, giving it more attention, in order to promote happy children. An important aspect of restorative practice focusses on the language used to positively impact everyone within the school, and can teach the children social skills, and emotional literacy, which as Park (2005) describes, 'can change school's'.

To conclude, it appears that School A's ethos is significantly designed with the well-being of their pupils in mind, and the intentions of the school do conclusively follow local and national government legislation, best-practice and policy by enforcing 'restorative practice'. However, restorative practice has been criticized and authorities and schools have been challenged on this approach to child discipline. It can be argued that the success of restorative practice is a person-centred perspective, as no matter what the provocation, an imbalance of support and control during the restorative practice can affect an individual's sense of well-being, as it is an empathy-based philosophy. Schiff and Boremore (2015, p.309) describe that restorative practice is simply an effort made by institutions to modernise prevention and change their response to negative behaviour. Lyubansky (2019), an American Psychologist argues that there are multiple criticisms to restorative practice and explains that it can place an unfair expectation on the victims of negative behaviour to face, and then forgive the instigator, without their being a 'real' outcome. It must be argued that using restorative practice when children are displaying negative behaviour means very little consequence, and may even cause embarrassment to the victim, and despite restorative practice being perceived as a 'community – owned' approach, it is difficult to implement it within a school, as often schools have a top-down approach, a hierarchy system, where adults have the power and children are dictated to. Restorative practice is designed to share the power, to be a safe space to voice your opinions (Lyubansky, 2019). It can be argued that Restorative practice needs to be implemented by the children, and not the teachers, and should it be forced upon the children, it could create resistance and resentment, in which no evidence has been recorded to prove that it has positive outcomes for children's well-being and their mental health going forth into their adult lives.

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