

Module code - ECIE4001

Name and Student Number - Darren Lee Evans 2416764

Element 1 – PowerPoint slides: What challenges do learners face in Welsh educational settings?

Element 2 – Recording of PowerPoint

Element 3 – Essay on Carl Rogers' person-centred therapeutic approach and other humanist theories support the work of Teaching Assistants (TA's) in schools.

What challenges do learners face in Welsh educational settings?

BY DARREN LEE EVANS

(The Creativity Post, n.d.)



Personal barriers that Welsh educational learners face are:

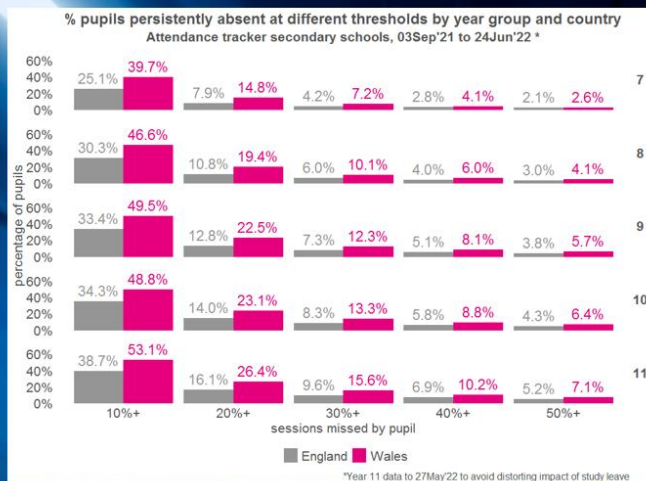
-  Language barriers
-  Low self-esteem and confidence
-  Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
-  Anxiety and mental health
-  Emotional regulation needs



Systemic barriers in Welsh educational setting



- • Poverty and deprivation
- • Attendance and transport issues
- • Staffing and funding pressures
- • Access to specialist support



(Ffteducationdatalab.org.uk, 2025)

This graph shows the percentage of secondary school pupils who are persistently absent in England and Wales.

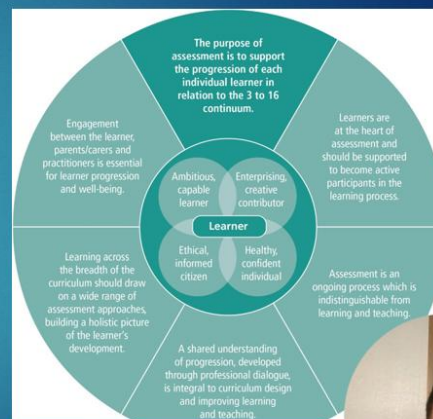
What stands out immediately is that Wales has higher absence rates than England across every year group and at every threshold. For example, in Year 11, over half of pupils in Wales missed at least 10% of school, compared to just under 40% in England.

We can also see that absence increases as pupils get older, particularly in Years 10 and 11. This suggests that as academic pressure increases, some learners disengage or struggle to attend.



Curriculum policy in Wales

- ▶ Curriculum for Wales (2022)
- ▶ ALN Code for Wales (2021)
- ▶ Pupil Development Grant (PDG)
- ▶ Wellbeing and inclusion focus



(Welsh Government, 2020)



Vygotsky – Social Development Theory



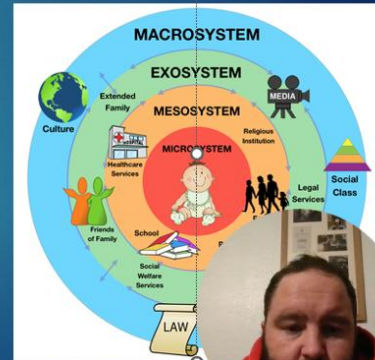
(Autismmet click, 2021)

- ▶ Learning is socially constructed through interaction
- ▶ Development occurs through guided support
- ▶ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
- ▶ Adult guidance and peer collaboration are essential
- ▶ Strong links to inclusive, learner-centred practice



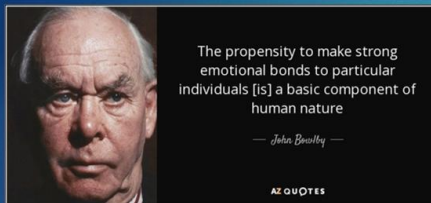
Bronfenbrenner – Ecological Systems Theory

- ▶ Learners are influenced by multiple systems, not just school
- ▶ The systems include -
- ▶ **Microsystem:** family, school, peers
- ▶ **Mesosystem:** links between home and school
- ▶ **Exosystem:** parents' work, services
- ▶ **Macrosystem:** culture, poverty, education policy
- ▶ (Bronfenbrenner 1977)



(Study of the Mind, n.d.)

Bowlby and Ainsworth – Attachment theory



(Thinking Feeling Being, 2023)

- ▶ Secure relationships support emotional regulation
- ▶ Early experiences affect trust, behaviour, and learning
- ▶ **Types of attachment**
- ▶ Secure attachment → confidence and resilience
- ▶ Insecure attachment → anxiety, avoidance, behaviour challenges



Role of Teaching Assistants

- ▶ Build trusting relationships to help pupils feel emotionally safe
- ▶ Support learners with ALN/SEND and low self-esteem through consistency and care
- ▶ Reduce anxiety by using empathy and positive reassurance
- ▶ Scaffold learning and celebrate small successes to build confidence
- ▶ Model calm behaviour and emotional regulation in daily interactions



(Doherty, 2020)



Conclusion

- ▶ Learners face complex challenges
- ▶ Barriers are personal and systemic
- ▶ Strong relationships and expertise are key
- ▶ Holistic support helps learners thrive



(rbarks, 2025)



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Element 2 – Script and recording of PowerPoint

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Slide 1

Hello my name is Darren Evans and today I will be presenting a presentation on what challenges learners face in Welsh educational settings. Learners in Wales experience a wide range of personal, social, and systemic barriers that can affect their wellbeing, engagement, and ability to thrive in school. These challenges may include emotional regulation difficulties, additional learning needs, mental health pressures, and wider factors such as poverty, attendance, and access to support. By linking theory, policy, and my own classroom experience, this presentation will highlight why understanding the whole learner is essential to supporting inclusion and success in Welsh education.

Slide 2

In Welsh educational settings, pupils face a range of personal barriers that can affect learning and wellbeing. Emotional regulation difficulties and anxiety often present as poor behaviour or disengagement. Low self-esteem can reduce confidence and participation, particularly for vulnerable learners. Many pupils also have Additional Learning Needs, which require consistent, tailored support to prevent gaps in progress. Language barriers, including for pupils learning through Welsh or English as an additional language, can further impact understanding and a sense of belonging. These barriers frequently overlap and must be addressed holistically.

Slide 3

Alongside personal challenges, there are significant systemic barriers within Welsh education. Poverty and deprivation can affect pupils' readiness to learn, access to resources, and overall wellbeing. Attendance and transport issues—particularly in rural areas—can limit consistent engagement with school. Staffing and funding pressures place strain on schools' ability to provide timely, individualised support. In addition, limited access to specialist services, such as educational psychology or CAMHS, often leads to long waiting times, delaying early intervention for pupils who need it most

Slide 4

This graph shows persistent absence rates among secondary school pupils in England and Wales. Absence is consistently higher in Wales across all year groups, with a sharp increase in Years 10 and 11. This suggests that as academic pressure and wider life challenges increase, some learners struggle to attend consistently.

From a TA or ELSA perspective, this highlights the importance of building trusting relationships, offering emotional support, and working closely with families and external agencies to reduce barriers to attendance and help pupils feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

Slide 5

Education policy in Wales places a strong emphasis on inclusion and wellbeing. The Curriculum for Wales (2022) focuses on developing the whole child, not just academic outcomes, through its four purposes. The ALN Code for Wales (2021) strengthens learners' rights by promoting early identification, person-centred planning, and shared responsibility across education and health services. The Pupil Development Grant supports schools in reducing the impact of poverty on learning. Together, these policies reflect Wales's commitment to equity, wellbeing, and inclusive practice.

Slide 6

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development explains how learners progress best when tasks are appropriately scaffolded. If work is too difficult, learners become anxious or disengaged. If it's too easy, they lose motivation. Effective support means meeting learners where they are and gradually reducing help as confidence grows.

Slide 7

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps us understand systemic barriers. Learners are influenced not only by school, but also by family, community, and wider social factors such as poverty, housing, and access to services. These external pressures can significantly affect attendance, behaviour, and attainment, even when schools are doing their best.

Slide 8

In Welsh educational settings, one key challenge learners face is emotional security. Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory helps explain why some pupils struggle with emotional regulation, trust, and behaviour in school. Early attachment experiences shape how children respond to relationships, authority, and learning environments.

Learners with secure attachment are more likely to show confidence, resilience, and engagement, whereas those with insecure attachment may experience anxiety, withdrawal, or challenging behaviour, particularly during transitions or periods of pressure. In classrooms across Wales, this can impact attendance, wellbeing, and access to learning, highlighting the importance of emotionally supportive relationships alongside academic support.

Slide 9

Together, these theories show that learning does not happen in isolation.

A pupil's ability to learn is shaped by their relationships, emotional security, developmental readiness, and the wider social and environmental factors in their lives. Learning is therefore not just about cognitive ability, but about how safe, supported, and understood a learner feels within their environment. Bowlby and Ainsworth highlight that secure, trusting relationships are the foundation for learning — pupils need to feel safe before they can engage.

Vygotsky reminds us that support must be matched to the learner's developmental stage, with adults scaffolding learning so pupils can progress with guidance.

Bronfenbrenner shows that wider influences such as family, poverty, school systems, and community all shape a pupil's ability to learn.

The implication for practice is that TAs must balance emotional support with skilled intervention, while also remaining aware of the wider systems affecting each child.

Slide 10

As a TA my role is rooted in building trusting relationships, so pupils feel emotionally safe in school. Consistency and care are especially important for learners with ALN or low self-esteem, as they help create a sense of security. By using empathy and positive reassurance, I can reduce anxiety and support pupils to stay regulated. Scaffolding learning and celebrating small successes helps build confidence over time. Modelling calm behaviour and emotional regulation in everyday interactions also supports pupils in developing their own coping strategies. This approach directly supports the Curriculum for Wales, which places wellbeing, inclusion, and the development of confident, resilient learners at the centre of education.

Slide 11

In conclusion, learners in Wales face complex challenges that are shaped by both personal experiences and wider systemic factors such as poverty, attendance, and access to support. These barriers do not exist in isolation and can significantly impact a learner's wellbeing, engagement, and progress. Strong, trusting relationships, alongside skilled and informed practice, are central to supporting Welsh learners effectively. By taking a holistic approach that reflects the values of the Curriculum for Wales — focusing on wellbeing, inclusion, and developing confident, capable learners — schools, TAs, and all other significant other adults

can help ensure that learners feel supported, valued, and able to thrive both academically and emotionally. Thank you for listening.

Element 3 – Essay on Carl Rogers’ person-centred therapeutic approach and other humanist theories support the work of Teaching Assistants (TA’s) in schools.

This assignment discusses how Carl Rogers’ person-centred therapeutic approach and other humanist theories support the work of Teaching Assistants (TA’s) in schools.

Carl Rogers is one of the most influential figures in humanistic psychology. His work on Person-Centred Therapy (PCT), developed in the 1940s, has shaped practices across health, social care, and education (Rogers, 1951; 2003). PCT places the individual at the centre of all decision-making, emphasising that each person is the expert of their own experience. This philosophy strongly aligns with the ethos of child-centred education, where pupils are seen not as passive recipients of information but as active individuals in their own development. As a TA who has years of experience with pupils displaying a wide range of emotional and learning needs, I have often found that Rogers’ person-centred principles guide my day-to-day interactions with pupils.

Rogers (1951) proposed that all individuals have an innate drive towards self-actualisation, a lifelong process of striving toward one’s ideal self. However, this growth only occurs in environments that provide psychological safety and acceptance. For TAs understanding this theory is fundamental; children cannot learn or develop effectively if they feel unsafe, judged, or undervalued. Rogers identified three core conditions that practitioners must embody to promote positive development: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence.

Empathy refers to the practitioner’s ability to understand the child’s perspective and experience as closely as possible. This is essential for TA’s, who frequently support pupils with behavioural, social, or emotional difficulties. Empathy allows the adult to interpret behaviour as communication, recognising the emotional needs driving a child’s actions. For example, a pupil displaying anger or avoidance may be expressing anxiety, frustration, or low confidence. An empathetic response helps the child feel understood, reducing defensiveness and supporting co-regulation.

Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) involves valuing the child regardless of their actions, background, or difficulties. Rogers argued the capacity for growth comes from within each person and that practitioners must believe in and support this potential (Rogers, 2003). In practice, TA’s use UPR when they separate the child from their behaviour, offering acceptance and encouragement even in challenging moments. This approach is particularly impactful for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) or social, emotional, and mental

health needs who may have historically experienced negative or punitive responses from adults.

Congruence, meaning authenticity or honesty, requires practitioners to act consistently and transparently. In schools, congruence builds trust; pupils are more likely to engage with adults they perceive as reliable, genuine, and predictable. Consistency is especially important for vulnerable learners who may struggle with attachment, regulation, or trust. Rogers also emphasised the importance of psychological contact, meaning a genuine connection between practitioner and learner. This is crucial for TA's, who often serve as a stable, supportive figure pupils can turn to throughout the school day. The core conditions align strongly with holistic interventions such as Social Therapeutic Horticulture (STH), where practitioners support individuals on a continuous journey of moving from their current self toward their ideal self (Thrive, n.d.). This is also reflective of the school context, where TA's play a role not only in academic progress but in broader personal development.

Another person-centred theorist is Abraham Maslow (1943). Maslow's theory, shown as a pyramid- the Hierarchy of Needs, provides an important framework for understanding children's development, motivation, wellbeing, and behaviour. Maslow argued children must progress through a series of layered needs, where lower-level needs must be met before higher-level growth can occur. At the pyramid base are physiological needs, of food, water, warmth, rest, and overall physical health. For children, this means that hunger, tiredness, or physical discomfort can significantly affect their ability to learn, focus, or regulate emotions. (Maslow, 1943)

The next layer is safety needs, which involve emotional and physical security, stable routines, and consistent caregiving. Children who feel safe trust adults more easily, explore their environment with confidence, and are less likely to display signs of anxiety or distress. The third level of needs, love and belonging, is particularly crucial during childhood, as this stage includes forming secure relationships with parents, carers, teachers, and peers. When children feel accepted, valued, and emotionally supported, they build stronger attachments and develop social skills essential for later life. Above this is esteem, which includes both self-esteem and recognition from others. For children, this involves receiving praise, encouragement, opportunities to succeed, and experiences that help them feel capable and respected. When esteem needs are met, children become more confident, motivated, and willing to take on challenges. (Maslow, 1943)

At the top of the pyramid is self-actualisation, reflecting a child's ability to express creativity, curiosity, independence, and the desire to reach their full potential. In this stage, children engage deeply in learning, explore interests, solve problems, and develop a sense of purpose and identity. Maslow believed children are holistic learners whose needs cannot be separated into academic, emotional, and physical categories; instead, these layers work together to shape all areas of development. When lower levels of the pyramid are unmet—such as a lack of safety, hunger, or insecure relationships—children may show behavioural difficulties or

disengagement, not because they are unwilling to learn but because their foundational needs are unmet (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's pyramid encourages parents, educators, and practitioners to view behaviour through a compassionate, holistic lens, focusing not just on what a child does but on what they might need. By supporting each level of the hierarchy, adults help create nurturing environments where children can thrive and progress confidently toward achieving their full potential. (Maslow, 1943)

Working as an Emotional Learning Support Assistant (ELSA), I have often seen children with low self-esteem lacking trust in adults. The initial sessions are building trust between myself and pupil for them to fully engage with the sessions. One example when I started a session with a child, the first thing they said was "Am I in trouble?" It was obvious that the child associated talking with an adult as negative. Building rapport is essential before trying to get pupils engaged with what needs to be worked on.

Albert Bandura's (1986) theory, while sharing some similarities with Maslow and Rogers, is grounded in a different theoretical tradition. Bandura developed Social Cognitive Theory, originally known as Social Learning Theory, which is sometimes discussed alongside humanistic ideas but is not part of humanistic psychology. Unlike Maslow and Rogers, who emphasise free will, conscious experience, and self-actualisation, Bandura's work focuses on learning, cognition, and the interaction between individuals and their environments (Bandura, 1986).

However, contemporary scholars have identified points of connection between Bandura's concepts—particularly self-efficacy and human agency—and humanistic principles, contributing to integrative perspectives sometimes referred to as Humanistic Cognitive Behavioural Theory (HCBT) (Bandura, 1997). Despite these overlaps, Social Cognitive Theory remains fundamentally cognitive-behavioural. It proposes that learning occurs through the dynamic interaction of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors, with individuals actively interpreting and influencing their surroundings. A key mechanism of learning is observational learning, or modelling, where behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses are acquired through observing others (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy is a central concept in Bandura's work and refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks. It strongly influences motivation, resilience, and performance, playing a vital role in self-directed learning and behaviour change. Human agency, another key concept, reflects the capacity to make choices and regulate actions, highlighting an area of overlap with humanistic ideas about autonomy and personal growth (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's principle of reciprocal determinism further explains how personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences continuously interact. This model moves beyond

simple cause-and-effect explanations of behaviour. Overall, while Bandura's theory is not humanistic in the traditional sense, its emphasis on self-efficacy, agency, and active engagement has enabled meaningful dialogue with humanistic perspectives in contemporary psychology (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997).

Concluding, Rogers, Maslow, and Bandura offer distinctive yet complementary insights that shape how TAs understand and support pupils in modern educational settings. Although their theoretical roots differ—Rogers and Maslow drawing from humanistic psychology and Bandura from cognitive-behavioural traditions—their ideas collectively emphasise understanding the whole pupil, valuing individual potential, and recognising the role of relationships and environment in learning. Rogers' person-centred approach provides a relational foundation for effective support work. His core conditions highlight that pupils flourish when they feel understood, valued, and emotionally safe. These principles are especially relevant for TAs working with vulnerable pupils, including those with ALN/SEND, low self-esteem, or social and emotional needs. By building trusting, non-judgemental relationships, TAs create the psychological safety needed for pupils to regulate emotions, take risks in learning, and move towards self-actualisation.

Maslow reinforces this by offering a structured framework of needs required before meaningful learning can occur. His model highlights how unmet basic needs directly affect behaviour, engagement, and academic progress, reminding TAs that challenging behaviour often reflects unmet needs rather than defiance. This supports a compassionate, needs-led approach that views pupils holistically and recognises wellbeing as foundational to achievement. Maslow and Rogers align closely in their emphasis on safety, belonging, and self-worth as prerequisites for growth.

Bandura adds an important cognitive dimension through concepts such as observational learning, reciprocal determinism, and self-efficacy, explaining how pupils develop confidence, motivation, and problem-solving skills. For TAs, this highlights the importance of modelling calm behaviour, demonstrating strategies, and reinforcing small successes to strengthen pupils' self-belief. Bandura's emphasis on agency also aligns with Rogers and Maslow by recognising pupils' capacity for intentional growth within supportive environments.

Together, these theorists provide a comprehensive framework: Rogers emphasises relationships, Maslow emphasises need, and Bandura emphasises learning and agency. Applied collectively, they enable TAs to create nurturing, structured, and motivating environments where all pupils—particularly the most vulnerable—can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

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