

ECAD4013 – Learners, Schools and Communities: Where am I Learning?**Start At My Feet**

		How I Have Met These Targets Within This Assignment
Target 1	Read even more relevant books and journal articles as well as websites when researching.	Within this assignment I have aimed to use a wider range of resources to find information.
Target 2	Endeavour to synthesise research into your writing to aid the support of your key points.	Within this assignment I have aimed to use relevant information from my chosen sources to validate the points I have made and provide support to my arguments.
Target 3	Continue to ensure a greater critical approach throughout, offering the opposing view whenever possible.	I have been unable to reach this target to my full ability throughout this assignment as instructions given advised me not to criticize our points or the actions of School X.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems can be used to highlight the importance of healthy interactions between community and family life to aid child development. According to his theory, the "microsystem" involves the child's "close family and friends." the "mesosystem" refers to "the extended family, friends, neighbours, and teachers in school." The "exosystem" refers to the "cultural system outside the family" and the "macrosystem" involves the "larger society in which the family exists" (Doherty and Hughes, 2013, p. 13-14). Bronfenbrenner highlights that these groups "are in constant interaction and influence each other" (Doherty and Hughes, 2013, p. 14). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's theory argues that challenges and opportunities within a particular community can directly influence and determine a family and child's experience at school within that community. This can be supported by Estyn who states that "Parental and community engagement is recognised as one of the most important school improvement strategies and is seen as integral to improving the wellbeing and achievement of pupils" (Estyn, 2020). Based on this concept, throughout this commentary I aim to

explore and evaluate the challenges and opportunities within the community of School X. I will explain how these challenges and opportunities influence the teaching and learning strategies, policies and approaches used across all aspects of School X, including pupil wellbeing, that I have been able to observe and investigate during my Bridging experiences at the school. I also aim to assess ways in which School X utilise community challenges and opportunities to support their children develop the Four Purposes within the Curriculum For Wales in order to become;

- “ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.”

(Welsh Government, 2017)

Firstly, one of the largest and most detrimental challenges within School X’s community is the widespread poverty within the area. Approximately 33% of learners in School X are eligible for Free School Meals over a three-year average (Estyn, 2016). This percentage is above the national average, showing that the community experiences a higher amount of poverty than most others. It is vital that children are provided with adequate standards of living. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child states that every child should “have the right to life and to grow up to be healthy” (Article 6) and “have the right to good food and water” (Article 24) (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Unknown). This means that each child in Wales must have access to these provisions. This can be supported using Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which shows that “physiological” needs such as “food, warmth, water and rest” must be met for an individual to feel safety, belongingness, love, self-esteem, and self-actualization (McLeod, 2018). Therefore, if a family is experiencing poverty, a lack of physiological needs can have detrimental impacts on the child’s emotional wellbeing, learning and ability to reach their

potential. According to UNICEF (Unknown), “For children who suffer it, malnutrition has lifelong consequences, affecting their performance in school and hence future career prospects. This has an impact on entire populations, contributing to a cycle of poverty.” Furthermore, “research demonstrates that there is a major association between poverty and deprivation and attainment” (McKinney et al., 2012).

To reduce this attainment gap and provide each child with the education to which they have the right, School X uses several initiatives to combat the challenge of poverty within its community. This includes the use of their “Soup Kitchen.” This takes place daily within the school and involves welcoming any members of the community who wish to receive a hot meal into the school hall where they will be provided with fresh soup and bread at no cost. This gives members of the community access to food, water, warmth, and shelter that they may not have access to otherwise. As well as this, it allows members of the community to socialise and interact with others who may share similar experiences with them. Additionally, School X has a “Take What You Need” trolley situated within each classroom. This is a resource for any family or members of the community to access where they can take any items they may require. Resources on the trolleys include toiletries, sanitary products, cleaning products, school uniforms, coats, shoes, and toys. As well as this, children have access to healthy snacks including fruit, toast and cereal bars, milk, water, juice, stationery, PE kit, and swimming kit at any point in the school day where these items may be required. This is beneficial for the students as they feel prepared for learning both in terms of nutrition and materialistically. Contrary to this, some may argue that this service could be abused and is therefore flawed, causing an additional challenge for the school. This is because there is a risk that individuals may unnecessarily take items from the trolley and therefore waste resources that others genuinely need. School X believes that the benefits of this initiative are more significant than this risk of abuse, and therefore continues to provide this service.

The help and support of School X extends to issues such as the employment of the community in order to develop the local economy. They have incorporated the “Dock Leaf Project” as a mutually advantageous approach to address these issues. The scheme involves an accreditation program in partnership with a local college in which parents and carers who are out of employment can gain recognised qualifications, through volunteering for two days a week at School X, that can be used to aid future employment within schools or other vocations. This has had a significant impact on the local economy by generating over £5 million. This presents an excellent method and opportunity to alleviate the challenge of poverty in the community and the programme has allowed over 100 parents and carers to return to work following periods of unemployment.

An additional challenge within the community of School X is the general negative opinion of school life held by parents and carers. This is often due to their own past experiences and relationships with schools and teachers in their personal life. This can make it difficult for a parent to take an active role within their child’s education as they may be reluctant to enter school grounds, engage with teachers and at home learning tasks. It is known that “Parents who have a negative attitude toward school may demonstrate that by their lack of interest in their child's activities at school or their academic progress” (TFD Supplies, Unknown). To overcome this challenge, School X host weekly “parent and toddler groups” within their “flying start” setting. This is to welcome new families to the school before their child begins the Foundation Phase. This allows parents and carers to form healthy relationships with teachers to make them feel more comfortable in raising any queries or concerns they may have about their child’s education. As well as this, School X offers “Stay and Play” sessions in their reception classes on a Friday morning. Here, parents are shown how best to engage with their child at home to encourage learning and development. These are referred to as “Parental Engagement” sessions and are relaxed opportunities provided by School X, which enable parents to be welcomed into the school environment

and to become comfortable within the setting and involved in the teaching of their child at the beginning of their school career.

Furthermore, School X has two designated “Family Support Officers”. These staff members provide invaluable services and opportunities for parents and carers within the community. They serve as a welcoming face and break down barriers for parents. They are able to carry out services such as help in contacting third parties for families; for example, regarding housing and benefits, help in transport and healthcare. They are also able to provide an “ELSA family program” where families can attend, giving them the opportunity to discuss difficulties regarding their children engaging in learning or attending school. These officers act as a lifeline for families, and parents are grateful for all aspects of their help.

Finally, School X works with pupils from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. This includes EAL (English as an Additional Language) children, students that practice a wide range of faiths and religions, learners from ethnic minority backgrounds and several children from refugee and asylum-seeking families. This poses a challenge for School X as these groups of children may struggle to communicate with teachers, learning assistants and other children within the classroom. Additionally, parents and carers will also find difficulty communicating with these groups, meaning that information regarding the child may be miscommunicated or not communicated at all. This can result in the child feeling isolated within school. Success 4 All state “language barriers and cultural differences often resulted in the young people being bullied and harassed” (2023). This highlights the challenge and demand for support for these groups of children within schools and the community. School X has recently become recognised as a “School of Sanctuary” which means they are “committed to creating a culture of welcome and inclusion for refugees and people seeking asylum.” (Schools of Sanctuary, 2023). Providing valuable opportunities for these children and their families, School X host weekly sessions where they will provide English language

support, activities for the children to take part in and an opportunity to meet other children in similar circumstances. The children are encouraged to celebrate their cultures within these sessions, for example cooking foods from their countries of origin or dressing in traditional clothing. Families of these children can also attend the sessions and learn with their child. This is a great opportunity for parents and carers as they can receive advice from the teachers and meet other refugee and asylum seeker families from within the community, allowing them to feel united. As well as this, School X has been able to take this group on trips within the community called “special days” where they can enjoy the local environment and outdoor activities together. This allows all to feel welcome, valued and celebrated within School X.

“We’re really proud to be a community school. The community is at the heart of everything we do. We want our parents to be successful, we want our community to be successful, as well as the children, staff and all stakeholders.” (Headteacher, School X, 2023)

Undoubtedly, School X works tirelessly with parents, carers and the wider community in order to provide valuable opportunities for all and to overcome any challenges that may arise where possible. This includes but is not limited to; providing resources to families who may not have access to them, providing community services such as “Find out Friday” sessions, offering family support using their Family Support Officers and offering Parental Engagement sessions for those struggling to aid their child’s development from home. School X makes wider improvements to the local community through their “Dock Leaf Project” and “Soup Kitchen” enterprise.

Reflecting on the excellent practice at School X that I was able to experience and investigate, I believe it will be beneficial for myself and my future students to use some of the initiatives seen within my own future teaching practice. To conclude this commentary, I have established two personal targets that I

aim to fulfil during my teaching career. These targets link to the “Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership” set out by the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2017).

1. I am committed to ensuring that each student in my class and their families have the rightful access to their basic physiological needs. This will involve providing healthy snacks throughout the school day, as well as providing access to resources such as toiletries, stationery, cleaning products, clothing and toys. This links to the “Values and Dispositions” element of the Professional Standards as within this, it is essential to consider and meet the “Rights of the Learner” (Welsh Government, 2017).
2. I am committed to ensuring that parents and carers are enabled to be involved with their child’s educational learning and development. I will do this by providing sessions where caregivers can see what their child is being taught and how to support this learning at home. I will also use resources to post evidence of learning from the classroom for parents and carers to access at home. This links to the “collaboration” and “innovation” values within the Professional Standard (Welsh Government, 2017).

Reference List

- Children's Commissioner for Wales. (Unknown), *UNCRC*. Available at: <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uncrc-childrens-rights/uncrc/> (Accessed 13th January 2024).
- Doherty, J. and Hughes, M. (2013), *Child Development: Theory and Practice 0-11*. Unknown: Pearson Education, Limited.
- Estyn. (2020), *Community Schools: families and communities at the heart of school life*. Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-08/Community%2520Schools%2520en.pdf> (Accessed: 12th January 2024).
- Estyn. (2016), *School Inspection Report*. School Name and URL removed for confidentiality. (Accessed: 12th January 2024).
- McKinney, S. Hall, S. Lowden, K. McClung, M. and Cameron, L. (2012), *The relationship between poverty and deprivation, educational attainment and positive school leaver destinations in Glasgow secondary schools*, *Scottish Educational Review* 44 (1), 33-45. Available at: https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar_url?url=https://brill.com/downloadpdf/journals/ser/44/1/article-p33_4.pdf&hl=en&sa=X&ei=HnKiZe3elrSx6rQP-4Of0A4&scisig=AFWwaeYPmriMh-c2hgfosrbgSh&oi=scholar (Accessed: 13th January 2024).
- McLeod, S. (2018), *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Simply Psychology. Available at: <https://canadacollege.edu/dreamers/docs/Maslows-Hierarchy-of-Needs.pdf> (Accessed: 13th January 2024).
- Schools of Sanctuary. (2023), *We all have a part to play in building a welcoming and inclusive society*. Available at: <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/> (Accessed: 14th January 2024).
- School X Website. (2023), (Website Name and URL removed for confidentiality).
- Success 4 All. (2023), *7 Challenges Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers Face in Education*. Available at: <https://www.s4a.org.uk/7-challenges-young-refugees-asylum-seekers-face-education/#:~:text=For%20young%20people%2C%20it%20can,children%20and%20young%20people%20face>. (Accessed: 14th January 2024).
- TFD Supplies. (Unknown) *The Problem Of Negative Parental Attitudes Toward School*. Available at: <https://www.tfdsupplies.com/blogs/blog/the-problem-of-negative-parental-attitudes-toward-school#:~:text=Parents%20who%20have%20a%20negative,teacher%20conferences%20or%20school%20activities>. (Accessed: 14th January 2024).
- UNICEF. (Unknown), *Nutrition and Life-Saving Therapeutic Food*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/life-saving-food/#:~:text=For%20children%20who%20suffer%20it,to%20a%20cycle%20of%20poverty>. (Accessed: 13th January 2024).
- Welsh Government, (2017), *Curriculum for Wales: Overview*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/curriculum-wales-overview> (Accessed: 12th January 2024).
- Welsh Government, (2017), *Professional Standards*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/identifying-professional-learning-needs/professional-standards> (Accessed: 14th January 2024).