

The relationship between the learner, school and community

Language

My placement school is under the ‘English with significant Welsh’ category as shown by My Local School (2019). Welsh is shown to play a significant role in my placement school with the school’s efforts with their ‘Criw Cymraeg’ as mentioned in the school’s newsletter (2019). In this, they discuss their ‘Cwtsh Cymraeg’, representation on the school on Shwmae Day at Yr Egin, and working towards the Silver Award in the ‘Siarter Iaith’ (Language Charter). This shows the importance that the Welsh language has within my placement school, even if, as their Estyn Report (2019) states, “very few pupils speak Welsh at home”. My placement school is therefore making great efforts to try and improve the amount of Welsh being used at the school even if the language is not then used at home.

In terms of the amount of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) at my placement school, in both 2017 and 2018, the school was shown to be much higher than both the Local Authority and Wales, but the percentage of children with EAL in the school has greatly dropped with the school now having 5.2% of children with EAL compared to Wales’ 6% and the Local Authority’s 3.1% (see Appendix 1). The school does however show a desire to involve those who do have a different language as their first, have a ‘welcome’ display, as seen Appendix 2 at the school’s Reception area. Sullivan (1988) states how important first impressions are in a school, and so would also agree that this inclusion of different languages would greatly help to include the parents and the rest of the community to the school that may not have English as their first language through this welcome display.

Faith and the Community

The school also has frequent visits to and from the community itself such as visits both to and from the church such a visit to the school to teach Early Years children about the different colours of the Church, and a visit to the church from the Nursery to learn about the features of a Church. These visits to and from the church not only help to establish a stronger connection between the school and the community, but also strengthens the religious faith of the school. This is vital for the school to do as it is a Church in Wales school and so upholding this part of the school is crucial. It is also important that the school show that they are upholding their faith as the school is also a Voluntary Aided School, as stated on their website, and so the school is likely to be partially run by the Church in Wales, with the land and buildings being owned by the Church. It could then be seen to be highly important for the school to uphold their faith and show not only the religious community around them, but also the parents of the children at the school that they are upholding their faith. This can also be seen in their displays as seen in Appendix 3, which also includes the Welsh language, and by the prayers that the children speak before lunch and the end of the day in which they thank God for the food they eat, their friends and their teachers.

Religion also plays a part in Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1977) as part of the macrosystem through the wider social and cultural views of the community that in turn affect the child. This again shows the wider impact that views such as those that are religious, have on the child and the importance of carrying on those beliefs.

Socio-economic context of the Community

The placement school, from its appearance, seems to be average. In terms of the level of pupils who have Free School Meals (FSM), the school is below average at 13%, compared to the average 18% (Estyn, 2019). The school is also below average for Carmarthenshire, with there being about 17% on FSM in the county (Welsh Government, 2019). This shows a positive socio-economic context of the community as, although it is still close to the percentage of pupils who do have FSM, it is positive that it is below the average and not above.

The school does however have a higher percentage of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) than the average school, with 24% of the children in the school having SEN, compared to the average 21% according to Estyn (2019). The school does however certainly include all learners in the lessons, with a regular lesson I observed having included all members of the class and encouraged participation from all. In this weekly lesson, the learners all say how they feel, along with another question for that particular day, examples being of their favourite colour or favourite toy. All learners felt comfortable to talk and reply, some giving more detail than others, others needing a small amount of encouragement to answer, but all replying nonetheless. There also seemed to be careful supervision of all children even if the child wasn’t in the group that the staff were working with. This helped reconnect the learners with the task so that they didn’t become unfocused again.

The Learner and the Community

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1977) highlights the importance of a close connection between the learner and their community. This is due to the importance that each layer of the micro, meso, exo and macrosystem diagram has, with them gradually showing the impact that the wider societal views has on the individual. Whilst the learner is significantly impacted by their immediate environment in terms of their close family and friends, they are also greatly affected by their teachers in school, and even to their indirect environment in terms of the school location and the community within it. It is vital that a school tries to ensure a close connection between the learner and their community as by doing this, they ensure a form of stability for the child without any direct influence.



The School and the Community

There is a very close connection between my placement school and the surrounding community, with this being shown in several aspects around the school. An example of the connections the school has is shown in Appendix 4: a mural named ‘Ddoe a Heddiw’ (Yesterday and Today) that is a result of the partnership between my placement school and a local college. This is a strong visual representation of this partnership that used a physical involvement of the pupils itself in the project with the pupils’ own drawings being a central part to the mural.

The school also has an expanding community link through its bee project as shown in their Newsletter (2019); run by a local organisation and supported by a wider organisation. This project manages to involve all pupils of the school already in the naming of the Queen Bee, participation in activities learning about the bees and will eventually taste the honey. This includes the pupils of the school and the community in an important project to strengthen the partnership between the two.

The school also has a strong connection to their PTFA who have donated a sign for the school, along with organising workshops to help parents teach their children the time or a specific story. This again helps to include the parents as part of the close community surrounding the school as if the parents of the children at the school were not involved greatly in the school, the school would greatly struggle to make a close community.

References

Books:

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Online Websites/Reports:

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- Law Wales. *Schools maintained by local authorities Types of Schools*. Available at: <https://law.gov.wales/publicservices/education/school-and-other-education-for-children/Schools-maintained-by-local-authorities/?lang=en#/publicservices/education/school-and-other-education-for-children/Schools-maintained-by-local-authorities/?tab=overview&lang=en> (Accessed: 8th February 2020)
- My Local School (2019) *Model Church in Wales School*. Available at: <http://mylocalschool.gov.wales/School/6693322?lang=en> (Accessed: 5th February 2020)
- Model Church in Wales Primary School (2019) '*Model News... Spring 2020*' Available at: <http://www.modelprimaryschool.com/media/86716/Model-News-Newsletter-Spring-2020.pdf> (Accessed: 5th February 2020)
- Sullivan, M. (1988) *Parents and schools*. Leamington Spa: Scholastic publications
- Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Welsh Government (2019) *Pupils aged 5-15 eligible for free school meals by local authority, region and year*. Available at: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Provision-of-Meals-and-Milk/pupilsaged5to15eligibleforfreeschoolmeals-by-localauthorityregion-year> (Accessed 10th February 2020)
- Voluntary aided school – Model Church in Wales website. Available at: <http://www.modelprimaryschool.com/home/> (Accessed: 8th February 2020)

Appendixes:

- Appendix 1: EAL children at Model compared to local authority and Wales. Available at: <http://mylocalschool.gov.wales/School/6693322?lang=en> (Accessed: 5th February 2020)
- Appendix 2: Image belongs to: Kathryn Riches
- Appendix 3: Image belongs to: Kathryn Riches
- Appendix 4: Faith display board. Available at: <http://www.modelprimaryschool.com/home/our-school/class-pages/year-5/> (Accessed: 8th February 2020)