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Critically discuss the factors which put groups and individuals at risk of being excluded in an educational setting. Use the literature and theory to analyse whether policy translates into good/best practice

The purpose of this essay will be to identify the meaning of social exclusion and critically discuss the factors which can put groups and individuals at risk of being excluded in an educational setting. It will evaluate the impact of the concept of inclusion within education and link it to the implementation of policy and whether these policies are successful in practice.

It will firstly look at the different definitions of social exclusion, give comparison definitions of absolute and relative poverty with examples. It will then go on to look at the Department for International Development's definition of social exclusion and how reducing poverty should aid in this. Thirdly to study Burchardt's explanation of social exclusion in the terms of RED, SID and MUD. How the term social exclusion transitioned from France to the United Kingdom, the purpose of the Labour party's Social Exclusion Unit. It will go on to assess how Childhood Adverse Experiences lead to Social Exclusion in adults and the impact of children living in poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, it will describe Bronfenbrenner's holistic view on how an individual's environment can help or hinder them later in life. It will give figures on the cost of child poverty to the United Kingdom, examine the "Every Child Matters" government paper followed by the change in tactic by the Conservative/ Liberal Democrats coalition government. Lastly the 2019 Welsh Government's results as given in their Child Poverty Progress report then finally a conclusion of findings.

The term social exclusion has been used in many contexts over recent years but the concept itself began in France in the 1970's. It was used to describe groups in society that didn't have access to regular employment and ready access to the benefits of the welfare state. This lack of access usually arose from discrimination against people with disabilities or asylum seekers. "Nor did they have access to or connections with those powerful institutions that might have helped them gain voice such as the trade unions or residents' associations" (Pierson, 2010, p.8). There are a multitude of different definitions of social exclusion. The European Union defines social exclusion as

"the multiple and changing factors resulting in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society. Poverty is one of the most obvious factors, but social exclusion also refers inadequate rights in housing, education, health and access to services. It affects individuals and groups, particularly in urban and rural areas, who are in the same way subject to discrimination or segregation, and it emphasises the weaknesses in the social infrastructure and the risk of allowing a two-tier society to become established by default" (Omtzigt, Oxford University, 2009).

Poverty may be defined as relative or absolute. Absolute poverty refers to "when a person or household does not have the minimum amount of income needed over an extended period of time". It is the severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water,

sanitation, health care, shelter and access to education. Whereas relative poverty is the level “that changes based on context and is relative to the economic climate”. A household in relative poverty will have money however, not enough to afford anything above the basics or similar items to their peers. Relative poverty “is a social exclusion rather than a definitive monetary exclusion. Relative poverty changes over time. As the wealth of a society increases, so does the amount of resources and income that deems necessary for proper living conditions” (endpoverty, 2019).

Whereas the Department for International Development (DFID) in their policy paper “Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion” defined social exclusion as “certain groups in society are systematically excluded from opportunities that are open to others, because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household”. (DFID, 2005) Although actual definitions of social exclusion vary the most important points to understand is that it is a “process that deprives individuals, families, groups and neighbourhoods from obtaining the resources for participation in social, economic and political activity that the great majority of society enjoys. These resources are not just material but have to do with the quality of social interaction. Social exclusion undermines or destroys channels of access for support and opportunity”. (Pierson, 2010, p.23)

Burchardt et al (1999 pp.227-244) concede that social exclusion is a highly “contested term” and while a great deal of time and research has been dedicated to the “elements of social exclusion and factors contributing to it, such as growth of inequality and poverty...there seems to be very little work that tries to analyse...the concept directly”. Burchardt et al go on to say that while the original concept in France referred to those in society who slipped through the social benefits system, in America they use more divisive terminology such as “ghettoization, marginalization and the underclass, rather than social exclusion”.

As used in the U.K. the concept of social exclusion is extremely broad, but Ruth Levitas uses three different interpretations or ‘discourses’ to identify and narrow down the concept. ‘RED’ a redistributionist discourse “developed in British critical social policy, whose prime concern is poverty; a moral underclass discourse (MUD) which centres on the moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded and a social integrationist discourse (SID) whose focus is on paid work”. (Levitas, 2005, p.7)

RED (the redistributionist discourse) argues that only through the redistribution of wealth, because of the extent of the inequality in Britain, “through taxation, benefits and services, will poverty and inequality be eradicated in Britain”. MUD (the moral underclass discourse) concentrates on “individual delinquency and lapses in attitudes and morality” this view is extended to whole neighbourhoods or social groups. MUD also highlights “moral weaknesses” in which gender plays an important role. For example, absentee fathers who refuse to pay child support maintenance or young teenage women who have children outside of a relationship. The MUD position is found frequently “among those who argue there is an “underclass in society that has become detached from mainstream social institutions, adopts

anti-social behaviour and has valves that seem to justify this behaviour". SID (the social integrationist discourse) focuses on achieving paid work and entering the labour market and thus achieving a "cohesive society". (Pierson, 2010, pp.9-10)

It was in the transition from France to the United Kingdom, the concept of social exclusion became more flexible amalgamating with earlier welfare policies, especially when the Labour Party came into power in 1997. This labour administration set up the Social Exclusion Unit to ensure all governmental departments co-ordinated their efforts. "Social exclusion is a shorthand label from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdowns". The purpose of the Social Exclusion Unit was to help "break this vicious circle and co-ordinate and improve government action to reduce social exclusion, and the impact on it of government policies; and secondly, by promoting best practice and, where necessary, making recommendations for changes in policies and machinery or delivery mechanisms". (Bruce, 1997, p.20) The social problems that this government unit associated with social exclusion are "lack of opportunities for work, to acquire education and work-related skills; childhood deprivation; families disconnected through high levels of conflict, separation or divorce; barriers to older people living active lives; poor housing and poor neighbourhoods; fear of crime and groups disadvantaged through poverty and discrimination". (Pierson, 2010, p.10) The purpose of this task force was to initially concentrate on truancy and school exclusion, the homeless and the UK's worst estates. This Social Exclusion Unit was abolished in November 2010 and all its functions absorbed into the Office for Civil Society.

Tony Blair in 1997 as the then UK's prime minister wrote in The Independent newspaper on the day the Social Exclusion Unit was launched "Social exclusion is more than just financial deprivation. It is about the damage done by poor housing, ill-health. Poor education, lack of decent transport not above all the lack of work...poor education means a poor job. A poor job often leads to poor housing. Poor housing and poor jobs make it harder to bring up a family". (Blair, 1997)

"...the average child in our society generally prefers a safe, orderly, predictable, organized world, which he can count on and in which unexpected, unmanageable or other dangerous things do not happen...he has all powerful parents who protect and shield him from harm" (Maslow, 2013). It is when a child does not have these securities educational attainment may start to suffer. Adverse childhood experiences or ACEs are extremely stressful events or situations that can happen during childhood and/or adolescence. ACEs may include physical, verbal or sexual abuse, physical and/or emotional neglect or dysfunctionality in a child's household such as parental substance abuse, witnessing domestic violence, mental illness in the family, incarceration of a parent or sibling, parental separation/divorce or alcohol abuse (Riley et al., Public Health Wales, 2019).

The consequences and impact on children living in poverty and social exclusion are immense and social exclusion experienced in childhood can have a long-lasting effect into adulthood. Children brought up in poverty tend to go on to become socially excluded as adults and remain on a low income throughout their lives. They are more likely to have health problems including a low birth weight, respiratory diseases, heart disease, diabetes as well as having

mental health issues. Parents who are from an economically disadvantaged background may engage less in their child's education and schooling, use more “erratic forms of discipline” and very often have to cope with social stress” such as “social isolation, over-crowded households, children’s difficult behaviours, drug abuse and psychiatric disorders”. (Bruce, 1997, p.4)

It was looking at this ‘big picture’ with a very holistic view that Bronfenbrenner (1979) based his framework. How an individual's environment can help or hinder that individual in life. Bronfenbrenner described his framework as having four systems. The micro-system, that of family and friends, the meso-system, which is made up school, neighbourhood, churches etc., the exo-system through which more distant but powerful institution which may impact on a child’s life. This could be for example the parent's job - the conditions in which they work, their level of pay, their feeling of job satisfaction, all of these will have bearing on a child’s upbringing and lifestyle. This will also reflect on how they may see the job market and decisions they make as adults. Then there is the macro-system – this is the largest outside influence made up of cultural, political, economic, legal and religious institutions. All of these institutions influence and thus define who we are and how we think. Finally, later in his career Bronfenbrenner added the chronosystem. This system “refers to the stage of life that the person is in regarding the situations they are going through.” For example, the death of a loved one has a very different level of impact on a young child as opposed to an elderly person”. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system is one of the best explanations regarding the influence of social environment and how exclusion may affect an individual (Exploring your Mind, 2019).

In 2008, research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that child poverty cost the United Kingdom about £25 billion a year. This figure was recalculated in 2013 based on more current revised levels of out-of-work benefits claimed, additional spending on services, healthcare etc. and rose to £29 billion a year (Hirsch, Centre of Research in Social Policy, 2013). It is because of this extremely high level of spending that each government implements policies and practices to try and eradicate or at least lessen child poverty and social exclusion.

The “Every Child Matters” paper published by the UK government in 2003 set out guidelines of a series of commitments they wanted to achieve in the forthcoming years. These included many of the afore mentioned childhood ACEs such as tackling child poverty, building strong communities, raising primary and secondary school standards and ensuring all children are safe (Every Child Matters, 2003). This is a fundamental approach to social work and has been an ongoing aim with every government since the introduction of The Children Act 1989. Both use approaches that target children who are socially excluded and draw attention to the wider environment in which a child is raised such as material poverty, the quality of housing and the child’s relationship outside the home.

In 2010 the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition moved away from the ‘Every Child Matters’ policy. This government put the emphasis more on health visitors and social workers to carry out health checks, child welfare and safeguarding visits. In 2014 the government released a revised version of its child poverty strategy. The goal of this administration was to focus “on breaking the cycle of the disadvantaged – where you start in life should not

determine where you end up” and “break the cycle of poor children going on to be poor adults”. They pledged to create jobs, support families to get back into work, making going to work more worthwhile financially than claiming benefits and introducing Universal Credit. Their mission also included ensuring parents of larger families know they would be better off working, helping poor parents with disabilities or health problems back into work with support as set out in their Disability and Health Employment Strategy and “supporting schools in different methods they chose to develop and built character” (U.K. Government, 2014).

In July 2015 Iain Duncan Smith in his role as Secretary of State for Works and Pension for the Conservative Party announced he was going to abandon the target to eradicate child poverty as set out in the Child Poverty act. In 2019 the Welsh Government published a Child Poverty Progress Report, their results showed an increase in the numbers of children in poverty between 2016/17 and 2017/18 from 28% to 29% but a decrease of 4300 children living in workless households. They also found that in the period 2015-2017 healthy life expectancy continues to worsen for people living in the most deprived areas (Welsh Government, 2019). In July 2020 Plaid Cymru vowed to “lift every child in Wales out of absolute poverty by 2026” if it wins the next Senedd election (BBC News, 2020).

Through studying what defines social exclusion in today's society the author learnt that poverty is an over-riding factor, and it is poverty in the young followed by poverty in adults that make children more likely to suffer from social exclusion in education. Governments from all sides have tried to tackle the problem of poverty and thus social exclusion with varying degrees of success but none have come anywhere near close to solving the problem. Hopeful incoming governments continue to do the same and at some stage we must hope that they succeed. Until then though this means that children will continue to experience social exclusion in schools whilst poverty and social exclusion exist in society at large.

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