**L5 – View or commentary on a contemporary issue –
What could influence a child's ability to thrive in a diverse society?**

Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect (Patrick and Kumar, 2012), recognising that 'every child is a unique child' (Department for Education, 2017, p.6) with their own distinctive qualities (Rogers and Wilmot, 2011) which should be celebrated (Alegria *et al.,* 2010) within an inclusive environment (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009). Children are fascinated by difference (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009) and form early preferences (Martin and Ruble, 2010), potentially leading to exclusionary conducts (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009). Inclusion is fundamental in recognizing these unique qualities, valuing all individuals (Rogers and Wilmot, 2011) and diminishing the barriers to partaking (Early Childhood Forum, 2003). Two factors which can potentially influence a child's ability to thrive in such a society are poverty (Evans and Kim, 2013) and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Castro and Palikara, 2016).

Although definitions of poverty vary (Akindola, 2010), it can be theorized as the lack of means needed for an individual to function adequately in society (Reitsma-Street and Townsend, 1996). Increasing levels of child poverty have emerged over the last 20-30 years (Brewer and Gregg, 2013), with 30% of children living in poverty in the UK between 2017-2018 (Department for Work & Pensions, 2019). The UK is one of the most imbalanced societies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010), negatively impacting upon crime levels (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000), community cohesion and equal opportunities (Dorling, 2012). Experiencing poverty at a young age has a negative effect on school performance (Duncan, Ziol-Guest and Kahil, 2010), with children lagging behind their richer counterparts at all stages of education (Flores and Halsall, 2017). Poverty is correlated with physical changes in zones of brain development (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe and Pollak, 2015), particularly those critical for language development, executive functions and memory, which can explain differences in academic achievements (Noble *et al.,* 2015). Such changes in neural architecture can result in emotional disorders and cognitive deficits (Shonkoff and Garner, 2012). Children are at higher risk of a shorter life expectancy (Office for National Statistics, 2015), with impaired growth, poorer lung function (Taylor-Robinson, Smyth and Diggle, 2013), higher chance of obesity and tooth decay (Roberts, 2012).

Allen (2011) emphasizes that the earliest years are the key ones for intervention to break this cycle of deprivation, with the majority of brain development occurring before the age of 6 (Lenroot and Giedd, 2006). Thus, we must strive to give each child the opportunity to 'reach their potential in life' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006, p.3). Parenting type is fundamental (Turner and Juntune, 2018) and it is argued to have the biggest bearing on the progression of a child's character (Lexmond and Reeves, 2009). Research suggests that families with low incomes may lack stimulating home environments (Hart and Risley, 1995), affecting children's education and emotional wellbeing (Shelter, 2008). Linking to cultural capital (Silva, 2017), young child whose parents hold professional vocations may observe three times the amount of words than those from a lower socio-economic background (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007), leading to increased cognitive and academic performance (Lara and Saracostti, 2019). This reinforces the idea that disparate educational results stem from multi-faceted social inequalities (Dyson *et al.,* 2010), highlighting need for early intervention (Munro, 2011).

Child poverty costs £29 billion each year within the UK (Hirsch, 2013), highlighting the impact on broader society (Child Poverty Action Group, 2016), explaining the need to stamp out child poverty (Child Poverty Act, 2010). The Plowden Report (1967) argued for early education settings to address disadvantage and promote equal opportunities (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), showing that schools must work together with parents (Home Office, 1988), to improve children's outcomes (Sylva *et al.,* 2004). However, a significant gap still remains with disadvantaged children experiencing a type of 'double disadvantage' due to attending settings with children who are more affluent, (Odgers, 2015). In trying to diminish this gap, Sure Start (1998), delivering services to the poorest young children and families (Eisdenstadt, 2011) teamed with the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (HM Treasury, 2003) has resulted in many accessible children's centres across the UK, helping to minimise the achievement gap for children living within poverty (Lewis, 2011) and promote positive social behaviour (Anning and Ball, 2008). Parents displayed more confident parenting techniques and sought to provide more encouraging environments at home (Melhuish *et al.,* 2010). This is reinforced by 'The Pen Green Loop', highlighting the need for ongoing communication between practitioners and parents to help track the child's progress (Whalley and Dennison, 2007). Providing free childcare for children aged 2-

4 (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017) and access to the Early Years Foundation Stage, provides essential foundations for achievement through school (Tickell, 2011), improving children's life chances by supporting their educational progress (DCSF, 2008)

'Every child has the right to an education' (United Nations International Child Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2010) and settings are vehicles for social change, promoting a pedagogy for liberation' (Goodley, 2011, p.154) where 'differences are appreciated' and 'everyone feels included' (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007, para 2.1). However, although issues of inclusion are at the forefront of UK government agenda (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009), social attitudes have shifted from locating poverty as a 'communal' responsibility' to one which labels it as an 'individual's responsibility' (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017), with the emergence of 'povertyism' (Lister, 2008) and the poor being labelled as inferior (Killeen, 2008). Such a flawed view fails to account for the aspects which contribute to individual fiscal positions in society (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017), however for those in poverty, being regularly exposed to higher status individuals leads to problems relating to negative psychological wellbeing (Adler and Stewart, 2010). Such individual attitudes to poverty are shaped from an early age (Wrigley, 2012), thus settings must seek to understand children's thoughts about difference (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009), listening to each voice through observations, storyboards and persona dolls (Brown, 2008).

For those living in poverty, attending a high-quality pre-school improves academic, social and behavioural outcomes by 11 (Sylva *et al.,* 2004), with the prevalence of free school meals, for those on benefits, making schools more accessible (Kounali, Robinson and Goldstein, 2008). Providing such child-care also supports the parents in their employment aspirations (Garbers *et al.*, 2006), through tax free childcare (Government Equalities Office, 2018) and free early education places for 3 and 4-year-olds (Government Equalities Office, 2015). However, curriculum can be biased, favouring the middle class (Bourne, 2015), who have supplies to extend educational chances (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007). Those from poorer backgrounds have aspirations, but they are often beyond their reach (Kempson, 1996). Thus, practitioners must strive to promote inclusion and challenge discrimination (Cronin,

Argent and Collett, 2017). They should understand the children's experiences at home (DfE, 2017), providing relevant learning opportunities (Cole, 2012). For example, many children do not have access to books at home (Whitehead, 2010), thus practitioners should support campaigns including 'Reach out and Read', providing books to low-income families, encourage parent-child reading and promote children's literacy (Needleman and Silverstein, 2004). Through the use of books, practitioners can help children to learn about inequality and social injustice (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017), to develop different ways of seeing (Berger, 1972). Furthermore, those from poorer households often lack toys, activities, (Save the Children, 2014), clothing and transport (Child Poverty Action Group, 2012). Practitioners must be wary of institutional discriminators, e.g. World Book Day or school trips (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017). They should always seek to follow the child's interests, celebrating and embracing their cultures (Cole, 2012).

Practitioners must build relationships with parents (Nutbrown, 2012), ensuring a 'regular two-way flow of information' (DfE, 2017, p.32), gaining understanding of the diversity of lifestyles of the children (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017). However, parents may feel anxious (Crowley and Wheeler, 2014) or disempowered by schools, potentially due to own unhappy childhood memories (Wrigley, 2012). Thus, practitioners can suggest parenting courses, to help gain confidence (Barlow and Coren, 2017). Practitioners are in the position to advocate for policy action to support parents' capabilty to care for their children (Lynch, Law and Brinkman, 2010), protecting children as the most susceptible individuals in society (Taylor-Robinson *et al.,* 2013). They must be willing to work in partnerships with agencies (Collett, 2017), to ensure justice of the child and family is honoured (Cronin, Argent and Collett, 2017).

Moving forward on to explore SEND and its effect on a child's ability to thrive in a diverse society, we consider those with learning, physical and developmental disabilities/deficiencies (Bryant, Bryant and Smith, 2017). In January 2019, 14.9% of all pupils had SEND (DfE, 2019)., with the highest need identified as moderate learning difficulties, closely followed by speech, communication and language needs (DfE, 2018). Such learning disabilities result in individuals requiring special health and education support (NHS, 2019), and 'governments must do all they can to support' this

(UNICEF, 2010), promoting inclusion within the highest quality provision (Maciver *et al.,* 2017), to 'enable them to fulfil their potential' (DfE, 2017, p.5).

Children with SEND are twice as likely to not be in education or employment than those without impairments (EHRC, 2017). However, education serves a fundamental purpose in gaining knowledge and experience (HMSO, 1978) and those with SEND have recently become positively considered in the development of education provision in the UK (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape and Norwich, 2011). This is a view mirrored in society, with individuals with SEND occasionally not being viewed as active participants within communities (Mathieson, 2015). Such views are accentuated throughout the media, which paints a picture of disability (Orbe, 2013), labelling impairments as 'personal misfortunes' (Shakespeare, 2007). Similarly, disabled individuals have been underrepresented in British television and film (Contact, 1991), some concluding this as social oppression (Barnes and Mercer, 2010). However, an increasing number of films relating to disability are beginning to emerge into the public domain (Dawn, 2013). Social media continues to reflect these societal views of disability (Karppi, 2013), resulting in such impaired individuals becoming frequent targets for cyber bullying (Subramanian, 2014). Practitioners should take care when using fairy tales to support the curriculum (Hodkinson, 2019), as some use villians to demonstrate disability linking it to an embodiment of evil or mockery (Park and Hodkinson, 2017). Having said this, charities have shifted their campaigns to concentrate more on ability, instead of disability (Barnes and Mercer, 2010), but they fail to empower those with impairments, instead often being superficial and misleading (Houston, 2017).

The Warnock Report (HMSO, 1978), highlighted the need for integration of those with impairments to broaden knowledge, experience and encourage imagination. The Education Act (HMSO, 1981), prioritised educational needs, instead of such emphasis being solely on the disability (Hodkinson, 2019). In support, The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), made disability discrimination in education unlawful and for settings to make reasonable adjustments (Brodie and Savage, 2015), to guarantee 'equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring every child is included and supported' (DfE, 2017, p.5), to 'achieve the best possible education' and 'become confident young children' (DfE and DfH, 2017, p.79) Support

to implement such support in settings should be overseen by a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (Mathieson, 2015), and progress monitored with an 'assess, plan, review' cycle (DfE, 2014, p.78). This is fundamental as the first five years of a child's life are a predictor of their future development and achievement (Field, 2010). 'Every child has the right to an identity' (United Nations, 2010) and as such, The Children Act 2004 advocates the involvement of children in research, especially when it concerns their welfare (Greig, Taylor and MacKay, 2013), making connections between inclusion, democracy and children as agents in their own experience (Moss, 2006). Listening to children's voices to inform policy leads to positive outcomes for parents, practitioners and local authorities (Clark and Moss, 2011).

Within settings, practitioners must strive towards 'maximal participation' and 'minimal exclusion' (Nutbrown and Clough, 2006, p.3). Practitioners have a responsibility to 'consider the individual needs, interests and stages of development of each child in their care' (DfE, 2017, p.8), making 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that individuals with SEND are not at a 'substantial disadvantage compared with their peers' (DfE and DfH, 2015, p.17). The Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) provides guidance for teachers to encourage inclusion, which is fundamental considering children can form negative conceptualisations of disability from the age of 4 (Weinberg, 1978). Children with impairments are at risk of being socially ostracised (McLaughlin, Byers and Peppin Vaughn, 2010). Approximately 15-18% of 11-15 year olds report being bullied (Due *et al.,* 2005), however children with disabilities have an increased risk of being bullied (Mencap, 2006) or victims of social distancing (Guralnick, 2002). Practitioners should strive to encourage inclusion within their settings, as education is a means of overcoming such societal prejudice towards disabled people (Hodkinson, 2017.) Children generally hold a more positive view of disabled individuals than adults (Hodkinson, 2007) and can reference disability in terms of basic rights, justice and equality (Beckett, 2014). Children, especially girls, do display optimistic attitudes towards disabled people (Hodkinson, 2007), however they display this to only certain disabilities (Laat *et al.*, 2013). Generally, such open-minded views only exist for those children whose impairments mostly closely conform to the 'norms set by society' (Deal, 2003, p.899).

In 1997 (Department for Education and Employment, 1997), inclusion was promoted in local mainstream provision, supported by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, requiring that a disabled person should not be treated less favourably than a person without a disability. The biggest factor in the educational and social outcomes of SEND students is the behavior and routines of the teacher (Efthymiou and Kington, 2017). Ironically, the Code (Children and Families Act, 2014) employs SEND to categorise pupils into four main areas of need, however the purpose of this is to identify action for the school to take, rather than segregate a child into a certain category (Allan and Youdell, 2017). Such segregation may lead to the impaired individual developing lower self-esteem (Myklebust, 2007), loss of social participation (Booth *et al.,* 2000) and less friendships with peers (Wiener and Tardif, 2004). Instead, in line with the rights-based model, segregated institutions for those with impairments should be replaced with integration into main-stream classrooms (Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000), with all pupils, regardless of any impairments, being able to participate in the school community (Judge, 2003). 'Effective schools were educationally inclusive schools' (Ofsted, 2000, p.7), providing positive outcomes for children with SEND, including better grades (Cole, Waldron and Majd, 2004), opportunities for social engagement (Foreman *et al.*, 2003) with more competent peers (Cumming and Wong, 2010) and enhanced development of life skills (Rea, McLaughlin and Walter-Thomas, 2002). Such integration also results in non-disabled attitudes of disability becoming more positive (Hodkinson, 2007).

In conclusion, living in poverty and having SEND both contribute to a child's ability to thrive in a diverse society, with both factors contributing to individual difficulties and battles to overcome in childhood. With inclusion at the forefront of current UK agenda (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009), education is evolving to make all schooling inclusive (Norwich, 2014), and each voice equally heard (Hallet and Prout, 2003).

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