

Having written an Evidence Based Project entitled, 'Educational Outcomes of Children Living in Poverty' it appears there are some correlations between this body of work and the Review, specifically around the 'quality, equity and sustainability of the system' and 'barriers within the education system which inhibit positive outcomes...'

To improve our understanding of children's experiences in education we must address the systemic issues through the lens of children, parents, carers, colleagues, and Social Work practice, providing approaches for improvement such as Restorative Practice and Co-Production.

Focusing in on barriers to education, the Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland (2018) noted, children living in poverty are six times more likely to be on the child protection register, liable to experience mental health problems and, by the age of three years could be cognitively nine months behind children from more wealthy backgrounds. Theory & research indicates children living in poverty will experience entrenched and enduring poor educational outcomes and by the time the most disadvantaged young people reach GCSE level, the attainment gap will be substantial.

The link between child poverty and attainment is obvious and underpins efforts by successive governments to robustly address poverty but here we sit in 2022 with continued attainment gaps and archaic behavior and attendance policies and procedures driving outcomes and, having teachers tell me, 'I am not teaching, I am parenting by default'..

Address the policy and procedures through the lens of Restorative Practice, Co-production and wrapround care and you may find significant gains.

For the individual, education is assumed to afford opportunities for personal advance and maturity, opportunity to achieve potential, and the starting point of work and careers. On a Social level, education is considered as a humanising force, with the prospective to decrease social inequality and influence social unity. A traditional liberal perspective of education has leant towards the notion of education having value in its own right, disputing the concept that education should act as an unequivocal introductory function for employment. Nonetheless, arguments remain that education should provide an unambiguous role in preparing each generation for citizenship, by instilling behaviours of timekeeping and discipline and inculcating abilities and skills pertinent for the world of work. However, think about education through the lens of Restorative Practice and Co-Production.

Paul Dix in his book, 'When the Adults Change, Everything Changes', talks about a philosophy change in adult behaviour such as Visible Kindness, Visible Consistency and Deliberate Botherdness where relationship Policies are promoted over and above behavioural Policies.

This speaks to children; it is a language they understand and an example of how they could take a role in the community. When we are kind, consistent and bothered about others it feeds into Maslow before Bloom's Theory of Human Nature. When defining human nature, good health, and wellbeing the World Health Organisation refer to it as, 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. So, for those tasked with reviewing the policies and procedures barriers within the education

system, they could consider the values and skills of those already providing successful approaches.

Through the Lens

The Child Poverty Alliance in their 2014 report suggest children are the authorities of their own lived experiences.

The report draws attention to the preoccupation children have with living in poverty from an early age reported to feeling poor and alone and not being able to participate in school activities, instilling within them a negative view of school life. At the same time, parents reported feeling schools were unapproachable and did nothing to help.

Additionally, the report indicated that most of the young people surveyed from disadvantaged areas of (NI) complained teachers were disrespectful and pupils were 'picked on' for struggling with their work. Many children stated that a number of teachers did little to alleviate the pressure of learning; boys were significantly more likely than girls to complain about how teachers interacted and spoke to them; and the children were unanimous in their opinions that the best teachers were more personable and treated all pupils equally.

To address the issues raised by the children in the Child Poverty Alliance (2014) report, the children themselves recommended teachers become more creative, ensuring learning and the school experience was enjoyable. Young people experiencing literacy issues at age 15-16 reflected on the teachers who left them to flounder assuming their educational need was wilful non-compliance and purposeful disrespect. Children highlighted the need for more understanding of their educational challenges and and empathy for their social disadvantage.

Following on from the 2014 report, the Education Endowment Foundation in 2017 made fifteen recommendations to reduce the attainment gap however, I want to focus on the key recommendation which was the targeting of individual interventions. While collective interventions have their merits, working individually with children was shown to be the most effective way of increasing attainment, self-esteem, and engagement.

Therefore, it is incumbent on those tasked with identifying and removing barriers to create a child-centred approach where children 'feel' seen and heard.

Social Work practice is founded on establishing and maintaining relationships through the skills and values of communication, understanding, care and concern and the capacity to explain events, allay fears, contain anxiety, and provide practical help and support in ways that help to build trust and confidence. These are the reasons why I found the natural and authentic connection between my role as an EWO and Restorative Practice Student.

Restorative Practice aims to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships comparable to the outcomes being sought in this review. Locally we know that restorative practice raises school attendance, lowers the need for, and use of, sanctions and helps create healthier school communities.

As a an EWO I have the privilege to influence change and improve outcomes for children.

I use my professional social work skills to make an holistic assessment of a child's unmet needs, and restorative approaches to best meet those needs in a way that will keep them connected to school and learning. Replicate this in schools and you have the potential for child-centred equality, excellence, and inclusion.

The Education Authority has been developing restorative practices in its services and in a number of pilot schools over the past year. It might serve this review to hear from those who are involved in this work to enhance your understanding of restorative practices and the impact that this approach has on whole school communities.