An Exploration of the Adequacy of Support for EAL and ALN Learners in Curriculum for Wales

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed **Date: 31st January 2025**

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, expect where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

Signed **Date 31st January 2025**

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Preface

Having been a senior leader in two large secondary schools who was accountable for teaching and learning for almost a decade, responsibility for all aspects of translating the *Successful Futures* vision of Professor Graham Donaldson, the education guru who had been charged with bringing Wales' curriculum into the twenty-first century, rested with me. This included supporting Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) such as Humanities and Expressive Arts with developing resources, to the assessment and monitoring of students' progress. During this time, I led numerous In Service Training (INSET) sessions both in my own schools and in collaboration with other secondary schools in the areas in which I worked. From 2020, I worked closely with Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) with the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP) and the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE). I was also seconded to work as an advisor in the county, where I provided bespoke support linking CfW with literacy. I created numerous documents to support schools with aspects such as tracking, as well as developing outline schemes of work linking experiential learning, 'big questions' and John Hattie's approach to visible learning (Main, 2021).

Following a great deal of work at the curriculum's outset, it soon became apparent that a specific group of students' needs had not been considered as there is no mention of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners by Professor Donaldson in his 2015 *Successful Futures* document. Additionally, with the curriculum being purpose driven, it is important that all students are able to access those 4 Purposes (4Ps) that provide a foundation for its structure. It is these 4Ps which are at the heart of CfW as they are the principles which demonstrate whether a student has acquired a level of proficiency within a particular purpose. With adjectives such as 'ethical' and 'enterprising' or 'informed' and 'creative'

used in the 4Ps, expecting students who have additional learning needs to be able to access these as concepts would prove difficult. Thus as this research shows, a whole group of disadvantaged students appears to have been marginalised.

Abstract

Providing students with the skills and knowledge to become 21st century citizens as part of Wales' new purpose-driven curriculum: CfW should be uppermost and pervasive across its blueprint. Alongside embracing the 4Ps, enabling students to become,

1) ambitious, capable learners;
2) enterprising, creative contributors;
3) healthy, confident individuals;
4) ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world (Welsh Government, 2015)

forms the curriculum's core. The concept behind CfW is for inclusivity and equity, however, this appears more opaque when considering students who may be disadvantaged.

As CfW is in its relative infancy, very little research has been conducted into its rollout and there is currently no literature which combines the curriculum's implementation and learning, and the provision for EAL learners. Whilst much has been written about CfW's offering initially proposed by Professor Donaldson, including its content, no consideration has yet been afforded to those EAL and ALN students who may not be part of the mainstream. When greater demands are placed on disadvantaged learners to become more independent, they could potentially become more ostracised as they may not be able to access learning without adequate support. Moreover, far from becoming ambitious, capable learners who are confident and informed (Welsh Government, 2015), most compellingly the research suggests these students will be marginalised and disadvantaged and therefore fail to learn.

This research thesis considers CfW's inception and early introduction, looking at how learners could be supported to realise the 4Ps. Using student questionnaires, it focuses on

those learners across two large secondary schools who may have ALN, or follow a curriculum through EAL. The data considers how their needs are catered for and whether they are able to access this new curriculum. Those who work directly with these ALN and EAL students: Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs) and teaching assistants (TAs) also took part using semi-structured interviews. New evidence through data acquisition as part of this research demonstrates how ALN and EAL learners have not been considered and may therefore not be adequately supported as learners by CfW as they will not be able to access the language required to embrace the 4Ps.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the ALNCos, teaching assistants and students who participated in this study, providing honest responses about their experiences. I was mindful that the curriculum had been newly introduced and that there was a continuing consideration of a need to be open-minded in the face of such newness. The responses which formed part of the research were invaluable.

I am also grateful for the tremendous academic support I have received from my supervisors Professor Howard Riley and Dr Steve Keen. Sage advice was meted out throughout the writing process, and their constant encouragement and gentle steering provided thoughtful reflection from which I learned so much. Despite being in very different time zones for the majority of our meetings, the astute counsel and much needed humour was greatly appreciated. Thank you both.

Glossary

ADEW – Association of Directors of Education in Wales

ALN – Additional Learning Needs

ALNCo - Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator

AoLE – Area of Learning and Experience

CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CfE – Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)

CfW – Curriculum for Wales

Es and Os – Experiences and Outcomes

EAL – English as an Additional Language

EEF – Education Endowment Foundation

ESL - English as a Second Language

ILE – Innovative Learning Environment

INSET – In Service Training

ITE – Initial Teacher Education

KS4 – Key Stage 4 (learning taking place between the ages 14-16)

LEA – Local Education Authority

LTS – Learning and Teaching Scotland

Nfer – National Foundation for Educational Research

NPEP – National Professional Enquiry Project

NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher

NSERE – National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry

NZC – New Zealand Curriculum

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PIE – Proficiency in English

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment Tests

PLC – Professional Learning Community

SAS – Standard Age Score

SATs – Standard Assessment Tasks

TAs – Teaching Assistants

WAG – Welsh Assembly Government

WLGA – Welsh Local Government Association

WM – What Matters (statements)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Curriculum for Wales': Donaldson's Vision

If a little learning is a dangerous thing, why in Wales are we placing our disadvantaged learners in harm's way?

As WB Yeats once stated, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire" (Strong, *Irish Times*, 2013, p.2). In eliciting the Promethean myth, Yeats reminds us of the power of the desire to learn rather than the long-vaunted acceptance amongst schools for the importance of the acquisition of knowledge. His oxymoronic idiom could have been prophetic in terms of considering the introduction of Wales' newly presented curriculum, developed and honed by Professor Donaldson. Indeed as Donaldson states when considering others' views when faced with the need for change,

> this approach to the curriculum involves defining the inputs that all children … should experience … generally based on a belief that subject knowledge has stood the test of time and remains the best path to a sound and relevant education (Donaldson, 2015, p. 5).

The wish therefore to update an antiquated teacher-led curriculum and to develop a spark desirous for learning in each child would, it was felt, undoubtedly be welcomed by all educational professionals.

When Donaldson proposed his radical curriculum which focused on greater student autonomy and less on the filling of 'pails' with knowledge, many teachers did indeed raise concerns over the changes. Classroom practitioners expressed apprehension over the lack of focus on providing students with essential information, with 47% of respondents questioned stating they were "unsure whether pupils would learn the same amount of knowledge … [leaving them] disadvantaged by the reforms as a result" (Newton, *Western Mail*, 2019, p.34). The main concern amongst teachers it would seem was not that the new

curriculum was to be more skills-based and purpose driven, but that the link between promulgating ambitious and capable twenty-first century learners and ensuring the same students had been provided with knowledge enough to be successful in GCSE, A Level and beyond, appeared tenuous. Whilst many practitioners approved of the removal of the stringency of what many viewed as an outmoded national curriculum, showing a willingness to embrace the excitement that experiential learning offered, there was also a palpable unease about the lack of forethought for terminal, knowledge-driven examinations. Furthermore, there was consternation about the damage potentially caused to subjects whose reliance is greater on information retention as well as for those students who come from less privileged backgrounds (Kelly, 2009, Donaldson, 2015).

Devolution of the home nations came in the 1990s, and Wales formed its own parliament: the Senedd, enabling the then Labour government to develop education policies bringing in a new curriculum in what they saw as one fit for 21st century learners (Reynolds, 2008). One of the drivers for overhauling Wales' curriculum was the poor performance of its students in the Programme for International Student Assessment tests (PISA) where the country was seen to languish near the bottom of the league tables across all three disciplines (OECD, 2017). Donaldson's ideological vision of a curriculum no longer based upon knowledge retention but which placed the child at the centre of their own learning journey was one which many educationalists saw as both timely and necessary. As Huw Lewis, the Education Minister who was involved in the final discussions surrounding the implementation of the curriculum remarked, Wales' new curriculum was set to provide, "the foundation for an ambitious, engaging 21st century curriculum shaped by the very latest international thinking". (Welsh Government, 2015, p.2)

Following what was seen as his successful overhaul as the educational consultant behind Scotland's curriculum, and with all 68 of Professor Graham Donaldson's review recommendations readily agreed upon by the Welsh Assembly Government in February 2015, there was an assumption following the wide-ranging review that all learners' needs would have been considered. Despite over 700 individuals being involved, it would seem that a core group may have been overlooked: those disadvantaged by language or an additional learning need. Underpinning the new 21st century Curriculum for Wales (CfW) are the 4 core purposes which embody the potential for development of each child to become a twenty-first century citizen. In line with Donaldson's recommendations to deconstruct and remodel a totally new Welsh curriculum, the reinforcing philosophy idealises the intention for every child to become:

1. ambitious, capable learners;
2. enterprising, creative contributors;
3. healthy, confident individuals;
4. ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world. (Welsh Government, 2015)

The philosophical ideal behind CfW is for students to become individuals able to play an "active role in their communities and wider society" (Welsh Government, 2017, p.2). With so much autonomy and so little definitive guidance offered to teachers and practitioners, it could be argued that the need to create a new curriculum with so many different aspects would lead to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners being side-lined rather than supported to embrace a new way of learning. As critics of child-centred education such as that advocated by CfW have claimed, no longer considering the more traditional teaching approaches "may further disadvantage the already disadvantaged" (Power et al., 2019, p.571).There was therefore the opportunity to hypothesise that disadvantaged learners could struggle to access the new curriculum in enough depth to be able to develop the 4Ps sufficiently to become the 21st century learners

proposed at the very core of CfW. Additionally, it could be considered that the teaching assistants (TAs) who support ALN and EAL students would feel ill-equipped to support individuals with the more discovery-based (child-centred) learning necessary to embrace the 4Ps, as a lack of training and support may lead to a deficiency in understanding of what provision may be needed for their charges.

The impressive assertion made by the purposes underpinning CfW would appear tautological: few would disagree with their sentiment. However, whilst the idealistic notion of the 4Ps may be embraced by politicians and those eager to seek a solution to what's seen by some as Wales' inadequate support for socially disadvantaged students, it is difficult to see how the new curriculum can provide the necessary infrastructure to support all learners (Wightwick, *WalesOnline,* 2022, p.16). Without the language to be able to articulate their views, emotions or lack of understanding, EAL students would be left seemingly unsupported. Having been part of a large secondary school where at least 12% of learners would have been classed as having EAL on an annual basis, now more than ever we need to ensure we listen and act, putting strategies in place to support these students to access their new curriculum. Without the fundamentals of language, or indeed a basic level of speech to articulate themselves, it is difficult to see how EAL learners could become confident, much less enterprising and ambitious. Therefore, along with considering how ALN learners would have the cognitive tools to access the new curriculum, I explored why I believed English as a second language students would struggle to embrace the 4Ps due to the complexity of linguistic subtlety required to develop a level of understanding necessary to access the new curriculum's more autonomous learning approach.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research undertaken was to consider how and why disadvantaged students such as those who may be ALN or EAL would be marginalised by a new curriculum which has not considered their needs. As a teaching professional with almost twenty years' experience, many policy changes have taken place during this time. Barring Jane Davidson's introduction of Foundation Phase education set out in 'The Learning Country' (2001), the most potentially impactful pedagogical change to Wales' classrooms would invariably be Donaldson's CfW. Having been involved with teaching and learning at a senior level across two schools at the time of implementation, the excitement surrounding such a radical introduction was palpable. Attending conferences with fellow professionals in the early days after *Successful Futures*' publication in 2015, especially those from across the Severn bridge often led to discussions about the need for change at a fundamental level, putting learners at the centre.

With the introduction of CfW into Year 7 drawing closer, practitioners' concerns over a lack of structure, especially one which failed to consider students with additional needs began to surface. Meetings in government-led strategic groups in which I was a participant would be peppered with practitioners raising concerns about ALN students not being able to access the 4Ps. Charged with supporting and encouraging heads of department to embrace the new curriculum was a challenge, especially without the content expectations included in previous national curriculum introductions. Added to this challenge was the lack of training and support available for TAs to gain an understanding of CfW and the changes from traditional teaching within the classroom to child-centred practices.

Following two years of planning, and a year in which classroom trials took place, it became evident that the EAL learners at the school in which I taught were going to struggle with the expectations to address the 4Ps in order to become successful learners due to a lack of linguistic understanding. Working closely with the TAs who were part of an inclusion base set up to support both ALN and EAL learners, there were a number of instances where email communication took place or meetings were scheduled to discuss the concerns of those professionals who knew their charges best. The concerns raised, which were evident in the research data later collected were clear. Having seen EAL students who would be classed as having an additional learning need due to the support they require to access the curriculum experiencing difficulty accessing lessons where adaptation was in place, it became clear that expecting these students to access learning where there was less support offered and a greater expectation to show more autonomy would make learning more difficult. Thus, the seeds of the idea for research into the curriculum considerations for ALN and EAL learners as part of CfW, as well as a lack of research into the role of TAs in supporting their charges within the classroom were sown.

By drafting the 4Ps which underpin CfW in such a way as to make them potentially difficult to access for such students before any access to learning takes place, suggests that inadequate thought went into considering the array of learners requiring access. Whilst CfW is evidently courageous and exciting in its approach, with education professionals with whom I attended courses from across the border being envious of our opportunity to overhaul staid syllabi, it could perhaps be viewed as naïve in its optimism. The prospect of enabling students to embrace independence and to make autonomous links rather than being vessels to be filled full of knowledge sounds like a step in the right direction towards becoming 21st century learners. However, whilst some students who can demonstrate a

linguistic competence in English or Welsh may thrive with less stricture, students whose language ability is not as developed may be at a disadvantage in lessons. The focus on EAL students considers those who have arrived in Wales from another country who are unable to access the curriculum in English. There could be an argument for first language Welsh speakers being at a disadvantage due to potentially being second language English speakers. However, as there would be an expectation for all students to sit an English Language GCSE, every student, regardless of the school's categorisation, would have studied English for a number of years and would therefore be able to adequately access the curriculum. Whilst the potential impact of being a first language Welsh speaker would be an interesting consideration, it was not an area of consideration for this research.

Through considering the content and delivery of lessons in Year 7, as well as gathering information about the experiences of ALN and EAL students, I aimed to uncover the inability of EAL and ALN students to be able to embrace the 4Ps and become 21st century citizens. Having worked closely with the WAG with the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP) and the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE) over a number of years prior to its introduction, I felt my research was invaluable in providing evidence for a need to consider different avenues of support for disadvantaged learners within Wales' new curriculum.

As stated, the aim of the study was to explore how the 4Ps proposed for CfW could inadvertently hinder rather than support EAL and ALN learners' education. With little research currently carried out into Donaldson's curriculum in terms of its implementation and application, I focused on how current provision supports EAL and ALN learners in secondary school classrooms in rural Wales. One of the main issues with provision for such

students, especially in rural areas, is the lack of effective training and support for staff (Murakami, 2008). Rather than seeking to upskill staff, Murakami found that EAL student underachievement was affected by their lack of "language proficiency [or] cognitive ability" (ibid, p.265). Part of the reason for this is because EAL is considered a 'general' rather than a 'specific' issue with regard teaching and learning (Leung, 2007), with almost all students regardless of their linguistic ability placed into mainstream English classes (Murakami, 2008). Therefore, despite the numbers of EAL students who are fluent in English dropping from 44% to 27% (Welsh Government, 2015), the provision remains unequal.

The belief that EAL and ALN students can somehow grasp English and develop understanding simply by being present is a belief held by many. As Destino (1996) states, many assume that "pupils will incidentally and simultaneously learn English through the learning of subject knowledge": they will absorb it through a kind of linguistic osmosis (Murakami, 2008, p.267). With the greater emphasis on discovery or autonomous learning and the ability to make connections between subjects within and across Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) in the new curriculum, a lack of linguistic support could have a detrimental effect on all vulnerable students.

Whilst in the UK many EAL students are placed into mainstream classes in a bid develop their English language skills, in Australia, this is not necessarily the case. In Australia, EAL students may be paired with a native speaker to support their language acquisition, as well as being presented with scaffolded differentiation within the classroom (Taplin, 2017). As Gibbons states, scaffolding is "…the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner to know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone" (Gibbons, 2015, p. 16). This would be essential to supporting EAL and ALN

students with CfW in the classroom as much will be predicated on that initial understanding of concepts and making links with skills already practised. Indeed, as Taplin (2017) suggests, providing EAL and ALN students with strategies to support their understanding not only nurtures a desire to "pursue their ambitions and dreams" but additionally, makes 'learning outcomes more equitable" (Taplin, 2017, p. 48). Thus demonstrating a clear link with CfW's 4Ps, and a goal of creating ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives, CfW has stated its intention to

> support education professionals and practitioners to enjoy the autonomy to make school-level decisions within a common framework, and to design and develop curricula relevant to the context and specific needs of learners (Welsh Government, 2019, p. 6).

With greater flexibility, a decrease in defined content and the opportunity to allow for greater autonomy amongst teachers, all students, including those with specific needs, should be central to local curriculum design. However, the ability to utilise the most fundamental skill: knowledge recall, would be the very skill least likely to be developed with less emphasis on covering subject content. With EAL learners having little connection with the local context in Wales, it would be difficult to see how the specific needs of these learners could be met. This in turn would impact upon the development of EAL learners' language skills as their comprehension levels would need to be greater from the outset to be able to *understand* the knowledge, rather than initially improving their skills of recall. Therefore, two of the purposes of becoming a 'confident individual' and an 'informed citizen' would be immediately truncated.

The impact of a less knowledge-based curriculum can be seen in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) - in which Donaldson, Wales' curriculum guru also played a part -, where a desire to deliver 'sexy' themes and to ensure coverage of Key Stage 4 (KS4) content has led

to the delivery of a "patchwork of topics" (Smith, 2019, p. 457). Additionally, other similarly developed global curricula, in places such as the Netherlands and New Zealand have been criticised for side-lining knowledge, whilst placing too much emphasis on skills (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020). These nations have been scorned for their learner-centred approach, which "overemphasizes the 'how' over the 'what' of education" (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p. 182). With Wales taking a similar approach, the concern with focusing on the skills of 'how' over the knowledge or recall of 'what' will inevitably have an impact on EAL and ALN learners' access to the curriculum.

In what Bernstein (1971) refers to as a move away from a 'visible' pedagogy to an 'invisible' pedagogy, the CfW may embrace discovery learning in a bid to distance itself from traditional rote delivery. Whilst this doesn't involve learner-led lessons where the teacher is merely a passive onlooker, it does provide greater autonomy for students to embrace a constructivist approach whereby inquiry is facilitated by tools provided to unlock potential self-discovery. One clear issue with this approach for EAL and ALN learners would be the inability to utilise the skill of application as the lower-level skill of recall would not have been activated. As Power *et al.* state,

> the process of curriculum reform that is currently underway is in danger of underestimating the extent to which current social and economic inequalities in Wales may not only be perpetuated but possibly even magnified under the new arrangements (2020, p. 331).

With numbers of students being classed as EAL growing, alongside the current special educational needs (SEND) and ALN debate suggesting that provision is lacking, the recently announced inquiry into 'solving the SEND crisis' (UK Parliament, December, 2024) suggests that there is a long way to go before equity and inclusion in CfW is achieved. As UK parliament's recent white paper acknowledges (UK Parliament, December, 2024), so much

of what is considered in this study is recognised: the need for inclusivity, changes to curricular and improving training amongst education practitioners. What this study highlights is that consideration of students disadvantaged in their learning is so long overdue that it has now been deemed an emergency in the hope that the Welsh government takes notice.

1.3 Research Objectives

The concept of no longer 'spoon feeding' students to ensure they can pass the relevant exams and ensure a school doesn't slip down the league tables may be admirable for those students who can become ambitious, capable and informed citizens. However, to expect students who are unable to access the basic skills to be able to partake in discovery learning may well invariably be a step too far. When considering the effect of curriculum access, I took the decision to focus on the views of TAs and ALNCos rather than teaching staff. The reason for this was because they have far more close contact with students with additional needs and who may speak English as an additional language. They would therefore understand the challenges which these students face on a daily basis prior to considering the introduction of CfW. They would be in the best position to provide valid responses as they would know the students well. The ALNCos would know both the ALN and EAL students well as there would be a need to complete individual development plans in line with Welsh Government guidelines, which would be shared with the student and parents. Additionally, as the ALNCo in a school would line manage all of the TAs, they would also know them well and would be able to recommend those most experienced to be able to take part in the research. With this in mind, I proposed the following considerations:

To consider the impact of discovery learning upon supporting disadvantaged learners' to access the 4 Purposes.

To evaluate whether EAL learners have the language skills to be able to develop discovery learning approaches.

To ascertain whether support staff feel well-equipped to assist disadvantaged learners to embrace the 4 Purposes.

To assess how able support staff feel to assist disadvantaged learners with accessing the new curriculum.

Theoretically, students able to embrace experiential learning would gain a deeper understanding of the work covered in lessons due to more autonomous involvement. With ALN and EAL learners already disadvantaged due to their lesser linguistic capacity, accessing learning through self-discovery would seem a step too far. Furthermore, with TAs requiring training and development themselves in order to be able to understand the new curriculum's philosophy and expectations, the belief is they would not have the understanding in order to adequately support their charges.

1.4 Research Questions

- ✓ What impact will the introduction of discovery learning have on supporting disadvantaged learners' ability to access the 4 Purposes?
- ✓ In what way will EAL learners be supported with language skills to be able to develop discovery learning?
- ✓ How equipped do support staff feel to assist disadvantaged learners to embrace the 4 Purposes?

- ✓ How able do support staff feel to assist disadvantaged learners to access the new curriculum?

Taking into account Murakami's (2008) study which highlights the distinct lack of training for classroom practitioners supporting EAL students in England, as well as Conn and Hutt's (2020) view that the new curriculum will necessitate the need for support for all ALN students to continue in its present form, I wanted to focus specifically on what - if any - changes would be needed within the new curriculum to ensure that the support available to mainstream students to embrace the 4Ps would be as accessible to EAL learners. Hence, key questions such as, *Do you believe EAL students will be able to grasp the 4 Purposes? What does it mean to support students to become ethically informed citizens? In what ways do you think you will be able to support learners to become 21st century citizens?* were asked of practitioners. Students' views of current provision were also sought, with questions such as, *Are you aware of what the 4 Purposes are? Do you work as part of a group in lessons to find answers/solutions? Are you able to complete work in lessons without the teacher guiding you?*

1.5 Methodology and Methods

As several different stakeholders were involved in the research process alongside myself, my proposed paradigm of evaluation was constructivist. This paradigm can be viewed as positive with regard to, "being more attentive to the views of others, being more prepared to engage in dialogue and becoming more reflexive" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 877), features which I felt were vital in gaining participants' trust. Initially, due to the naturalistic environment, I believed that I would be using an interpretivist approach. However, as a disadvantage with using this approach is researcher bias, and I wanted to ensure my

research could be generalised, I believe that a constructivist approach was more fitting. This enabled a less constrictive approach, which it was hoped would provide more detailed responses and richer data. In considering the choice of approach, I needed to consider access to both students and practitioners who worked with Year 7 EAL and ALN students. Within the school at which I worked, I approached those support staff who worked as part of our nurture base, who supported EAL and ALN students on a daily basis. There were four TAs who worked with and supported vulnerable students across all year groups. Initially, I contacted the participants via email to explain the purpose of the study, ensuring everyone received the same information. Using a focus group setting, I requested an hour-long on-line meeting during planning time to ensure the staff did not feel under pressure due to missing valuable time with the students.

To ensure greater credibility, I used the same questions during semi-structured interviews with staff and students from another school. These were contacted via the headteacher, with meetings coordinated and all permissions sought. Additionally, I spoke with the ALNCos who supported the TAs to explore what training was provided to support EAL and ALN students, and to establish how involved TAs had been in training for the new curriculum. Regarding the ALNCos, I interviewed them on-line on a one-to-one basis as the interview questions were specific to their particular role. Being part of leadership teams, finding time was straightforward as they had little/no teaching allocation.

Regarding the EAL and ALN students across both schools, I sourced participants from the ALN register as a sampling frame: those who had been identified as having EAL and/or had an additional learning need in Year 7. Questionnaires were distributed to learners in Year 7 who had a Standard Age Score (SAS) of lower than 85 in their National Foundation for

Educational Research (Nfer) reading tests. This suggested they would have an additional learning need and would require support within CfW's teaching. I was guided by both schools who scrutinised the data and gathered the students into small groups to carry out the questionnaires. The students were ultimately chosen by the ALNCos as most suitable for the study due to their knowledge of their students. As the Year 7 participants were under eighteen, I needed to gain permission from the parents of those chosen, providing a clear explanation of the study and its aims.

I ensured the sample was purposive, though needed to be mindful that there would be limited time to carry out the interviews due to the need for students to attend lessons. As such, the students' TAs used registration time (30 minutes each morning) over three days, ensuring that the students felt comfortable responding to the questionnaires and that they understood the questions. I was mindful of the need for the surroundings to appear familiar to the students: using their nurture base and available support staff to accompany them. It was important to establish that all responses must have come directly from the students to ensure the study remained valid. As such, all of the TAs involved were provided with a disclaimer where they agreed that all responses would be the students' own. I established the level of English understanding students had prior to carrying out interviews. As such, I used an Nfer reading test (rather than the less diagnostic Proficiency in English [PIE] test) with EAL students, comparing the results to mainstream students in Year 7 to identify the disparity in linguistic understanding, collating qualitative data.

The data collection was mainly qualitative, having used methods including semi-structured interviews, as well as focus groups for staff participants. The only quantitative data used was secondary data: that collected as part of the SAS scores for identification. Whilst

interview data may be seen as "valid as a source of information and suspect as a complete source of understanding" (Greene and Hill, 2005, p. 7), this method provided greater detail than a questionnaire and allowed for clarity of explanation amongst the ALNCos and TAs. Regarding findings, I hypothesised that disadvantaged learners including those who are EAL would struggle to access the new curriculum in enough depth to be able to develop the 4Ps adequately enough to become 21st century learners. Additionally, I believed the TAs who supported the EAL students would feel ill-equipped to support individuals with the more discovery-based learning necessary to embrace the 4Ps due to a lack of adequate training. Without the language skills to be able to develop deeper understanding of concepts, it would prove difficult for EAL students to move beyond the ability to recall information, or to understand those concepts and apply them to new situations. Becoming an ambitious, capable learner or one who is confident in their learning would seemingly be a step too far for our EAL and ALN learners.

1.6 Framework of the Thesis

As the basis of this thesis is the fundamental educational change which has taken place across Wales to its curriculum, much of the writing considers its virtues and philosophy. The introduction presents an outline of Donaldson's vision, reflecting on the reasons behind its inception and presenting the 4Ps which underpin it. The opening continues with the aims and objectives, proposing the focus of my research: whether ALN and EAL learners will be able to access CfW, specifically the 4Ps. Here, consideration of the impact an expectation of greater autonomy would have on these learners and how they would be disadvantaged as a result. The research objectives and questions provide greater detail of the focus of the research, including how confident the TAs supporting the ALN and EAL learners on a daily

basis feel about delivering CfW's expectations. The introduction concludes with a summary of the thesis, including the hypothesis which will later be delineated.

Chapter 2 looks at Wales' curriculum changes over the years as well as the background leading up to CfW's introduction. Changes to the assessment and expected outcomes are reflected upon, focusing on how the essence of classroom learning is expected to change from being teacher-led to experiential learning and student discovery. Other countries' curricula and the influence of global curriculum design are considered as a way of reflecting on the changes happening to education in general. An important comparison is made between Scotland's CfE, introduced in 2010, and CfW, as Donaldson was involved in the re-working of both.

The third chapter presents a literature review which looks at further influences which led to the introduction of CfW, such as governmental changes and Wales' placing in the PISA results. Focus here is placed upon TAs and the way in which their role may change following expectations of the learners within the classroom. The learners at the centre of the research: those who are marginalised due to their language skills or cognitive ability are considered in detail. The review includes definitions and how these have changed over decades, along with how these learners are identified and supported with their learning. Crucially, the review establishes how important it is for learners with educational requirements not to be marginalised and how CfW has failed to consider their needs.

Chapter 4 provides greater detail about the research execution using action research, including the main data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The methodology is also explored, covering the paradigm, design and sampling approach

and how the respondents were chosen. Detail is provided regarding the execution of the methods themselves, including how the ethical considerations were carefully considered due to the sensitivity of the data collected and the age of the participants.

Findings and a discussion of the study are provided in Chapter 5. A reminder of the context is shared, along with the background to the study. As the data is qualitative and detailed, it is important to provide in depth consideration of the responses provided and to demonstrate how the questions for the semi-structured interviews evolved. Splitting the respondents' answers up in order to analyse them in more detail gave for a more nuanced understanding of the different views of the ALNCos and the TAs with regard to their roles.

Chapter 6 summarises the study's outcomes and considers both the limitations and the contributions towards new knowledge, as well as considerations for future research. With the curriculum's rollout being delayed until 2023, and therefore still being in its relative infancy, this chapter clearly demonstrates that there is much more to consider with regard to CfW's future and its impact on the future generation of learners.

Chapter 2: Curriculum Considerations

"Upon the education of the people of this country, the fate of this country depends"

Benjamin Disraeli (Disraeli, House of Commons, 1874)

2.1 Overview

This chapter considers the very beginnings of CfW, considering its roots and its development. There were a number of Welsh Education Ministers instrumental in the new curriculum's implementation instigated by Leighton Andrews. The resultant *Successful Futures* document (Welsh Government, 2015) set out the 68 recommendations, all of which were accepted by successive governments. This chapter explains the reasoning behind the need for change, such as Wales' disappointing PISA league table appearance, as well as the shifting curricula being seen across the globe. This change involved a substantial movement from teacher-led lessons to considering greater student autonomy and discovery learning. Educational and philosophical writers such as John Locke and John Dewey help demonstrate the contrast between different curriculum expectations, where knowledge and skills are placed alongside one another.

Influences from curricula across the globe are considered here, such as the changes that took place in New Zealand, as well as closer to home in Scotland, which also involved Donaldson. This chapter demonstrates the similarities between the Celtic cousins' curricula, delineating links between the two. CfE is already showing signs of being unfit for purpose, with no improvement in student outcomes and results. Importantly, the chapter's close makes an argument as to why, looking to both CfE and CfW, students may fail to improve under its guidance.

2.1.1 Background to CfW: its Philosophy

As Disraeli's (1874) grandiose, yet irrefutable statement made in the House of Commons demonstrates, education could be seen by many as vital to the establishment of young people's futures. Such proclamations, whilst seemingly hyperbolic would doubtless be embraced by all whatever their political persuasion. Whether this would be considering Balfour's Act of 1902 which introduced local education authorities to replace school boards (Balfour, 1902), or R A Butler's 1944 promise to provide secondary education for all (Butler, 1944), the common aim would be clear: to improve the provision and educational outcomes to support our next generation of scholars. The prescriptive, knowledge-based curriculum of the 1980s first proposed following Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan's commons' address in 1976 was no exception to the desire for an educational ideal. With its introduction of league tables, parental choice and standardisation of subjects on offer between the ages of 7-16, Thatcher's government believed that schools would be forced to improve results as no caring parent would want to send their child to a failing establishment. This in turn fed into to the New Right's 1988 Education Reform Act with its radical proposals and marketplace philosophy. As Hedge and Mackenzie point out,

> the content of our beliefs, values or principles need not be static or resistant to reflection. We are involved in the construction of our own life by the choices we select, the decisions we make, the plans of actions we follow (2016, p. 9).

It would therefore have been seen as counter-intuitive for 'caring parents' to send their child to a school which wasn't seen to top the results tables. Whilst many may advocate the transparency of league tables and parentocracy as worthy developments, what followed was the narrowing of subjects on offer, schools teaching to examinations, oversubscription and annual disappointment for many who failed to get into their 'first choice' school.

Following Leighton Andrews' departure in 2013, Huw Lewis replaced him as Minister for Education and Skills. In a clear drive to maintain a sense of stability within education, Lewis sought to build on Andrews' legacy: focusing on literacy, numeracy, teacher training and continuing professional development and breaking the cycle of deprivation's impact on student attainment. Attempts to heal the rift between poor achievement and poverty is hardly a revolutionary concept, as curriculum change has been seen as a "natural evolution…to overcome privilege and inequality and to move towards a truly egalitarian system" (Kelly, 2009, p.6) with the roots of CfW wishing to "defeat the circumstances that condemn so many to educational underachievement" (Donaldson, 2015, p.10). The literacy and numeracy testing began in the summer of 2013 (Welsh Government, 2013), to provide measures whereby pupil achievement could be demonstrated, as this was clearly a cause for concern. In an audit of adult skills carried out by the Welsh Government in 2010, 20% demonstrated literacy skills of entry level or below, whilst 60% showed the same lack of proficiency in numeracy (Welsh Government Statistics, 2011).

On the back of disgruntled murmurings about PISA's perceived impact (perhaps prompted by the open letter to Schleicher), the OECD produced a report entitled *Improving Schools in Wales* (2014). Whilst there were strengths within Wales' education system acknowledged, such as a recognition of positive relationships between students and teachers and classrooms which provided positive learning environments, there were also areas of concern, suggesting "the pace of reform has been high and lacks a long-term vision, an adequate school improvement infrastructure and a clear implementation strategy all stakeholders share" (OECD, 2014, p. 7). In response to the OECD's report, the Welsh Government launched its five year education plan for 3-19 year olds entitled *Qualified for Life* (2014). Overseen by Huw Lewis, the plan focused on four considered objectives, one of

which was a “curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skill” (Welsh Government, Qualified for Life, 2014), a clear herald trumpeting Curriculum for Wales’ inception in the next few years.

Upon launching *Qualified for Life*, Lewis approached Professor Donaldson, requesting his expert oversight for a review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements which were then in place in Wales from the foundation phase up to key stage 4. Donaldson certainly demonstrated educational gravitas, having been an advisor to the OECD as well as a chief inspector of schools in Scotland. It was however the work which the professor had carried out with Scotland’s newly-formed CfE (2015) that had piqued Lewis’ interest, echoes of which can clearly be seen in CfW.

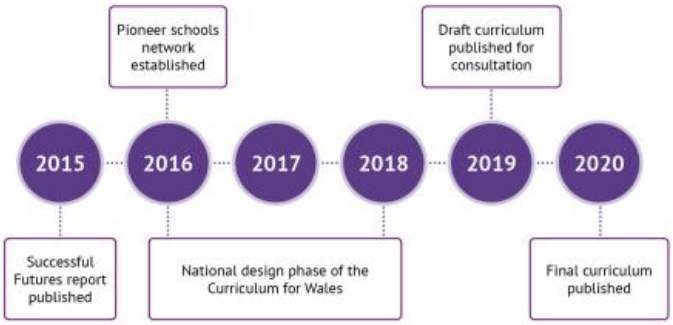

Figure 1: Curriculum for Wales Development Timeline, Estyn (2022)

As the above timeline shows (Estyn, 2022), the publication of the *Successful Futures* report (Donaldson, 2015) came just a year after Huw Lewis had set out his agenda in *Qualified for Life.* Spurred on by Lewis’ desire for what he termed a “new deal in teacher training” bringing “order to [the] chaos” of teacher training, along with “stronger school to school collaboration” (Lewis, BBC News, 9th November 2014), pioneer schools began to be established in line with Charles Handy’s principle of subsidiarity advocated by Donaldson (Donaldson, 2015, p.99). Lewis recognised the importance of a collaborative approach as those involved in teaching would concur, “teachers and teaching are the most important

influences on student learning… the broad consensus is that 'teacher quality' is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement." (OECD 2005, p.2)

Quality teachers were recruited from pioneer schools to work alongside the Welsh Government, Estyn and regional consortia to create a collaborative structure. Creating a network of middle and senior leaders who would have direct responsibility for their own continuing professional development, whilst providing a more detailed infrastructure for Donaldson's 2015 proposals, Lewis was shoring up Andrews' legacy alongside embedding the OECD's 2014 recommendations. In a structure which is remarkably similar to Scotland's CfE, Donaldson's proposed Welsh curriculum was to be underpinned by 4Ps,

1. ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
2. enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
3. ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
4. healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Donaldson, 2015, p.29)

with the underlying philosophy being that every child would become a 21st century citizen who could fit into society.

Following a two year consultation process involving the pioneer schools set up to 'flesh out' Donaldson's vision, a draft curriculum ready for further consultation was published in 2019. This was now the era encompassing Kirsty Williams' five year tenure as Minister for Education (2016-2021), where there was no loss of momentum in rolling out the new curriculum and the reforms already in place such as improving teachers' professional development. Williams commissioned what many saw as a seminal document *Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021,* with two of the three aims linked to the developing of Donaldson's curriculum to encourage:

- using pedagogic research and effective collaboration to support the development of a world-class curriculum that will help raise standards in Wales
- extending and promoting pupils' wider experiences so that the curriculum is rich and varied as well as being inclusive, broad and balanced (Welsh Government, 2017, p.18).

In 2018, the Welsh Government published a report into the collaboration which had taken place between the pioneer schools and their partners, with one recommendation stating, a requirement for "stronger links between curriculum pioneers and professional learning pioneers" (Welsh Government, 2018, p. 10). Thus, despite an extensive period of consultation, collaboration and creation, there was seen to be a "need for more systematic engagement with Partner Schools; ensuring all parties are clear about their functions" alongside "ensuring consistency and coherence in the support available" to all schools (Welsh Government, 2018, p.13). With Donaldson's draft curriculum soon to be published in 2019, the detail which schools were desperately seeking in order to ensure that consistency and coherence was yet to be developed.

2.1.2 Successful Futures

In direct contrast to such previously implemented didactic education systems, Wales' radical new bottom-up approach offered the opportunity to create a curriculum to inspire our 21st century learners. When considering any kind of curriculum reform, it has been said that it is,

> one of the most politically sensitive and high-stakes reforms undertaken in education systems, and resistance to change is often much stronger than the desire to change (OECD, 2020, p. 9)

The individual charged with overhauling and reforming a new curriculum for Wales and overcoming such resistance in what he terms learners' 'Successful Futures', Donaldson, is evidently aware of the need for change as he states,

> The curriculum in Welsh schools, … has reflected the prevailing orthodoxy of the time, from the professionally driven, child-centred philosophy of 'Plowden' in 1967, to the centrally led, subject-centred rationale of the national curriculum in 1988. (Donaldson, 2015, p.8)

Considering the fact that the 'prevailing orthodoxy' to which he refers is more than thirty years old, and was imposed by an English government prior to Wales' devolution in 1998, it is little wonder that the time for curriculum change was seen as necessary. As Sally Power suggests, "eliding Wales with England is … misguided. That this error occurs frequently indicates a lack of awareness of developments in the UK in general and in Wales in particular" (Power, 2015, p.198). In what could be seen as a forerunner to CfW, Wales *has* implemented various policies across schools in the last few decades such as the introduction of the Foundation Phase in 2008 as a new child-centred curriculum in for 3 to 7 year olds, where the emphasis is on play-based learning as opposed to more formal teaching approaches (Welsh Government, 2008). Additionally, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (2012) coupled with government administrated literacy and numeracy testing was introduced in 2013 in order to address the shortcomings highlighted by students' poor performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing.

However, what became clear following the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2014 report, was that as a nation, our educational system still required more than just tweaking. Having ranked at best out of the three disciplines just 35th out of 72 countries in science in the last PISA testing, and faring far below the other UK nations, it had become clear that Wales' education perspectives needed a radical shake up if our students were to compete within the global jobs market (Wightwick, *Telegraph*, 2016). Whilst Wales has clearly advanced "its own distinctive programme of education policies", far from being universally commended, these have "attracted significant amounts of both praise and criticism" (Power, 2015, p.197). In light of such advocacy and with the desire to

climb the PISA league tables to show that Wales is as ex-First Minister Rhodri Morgan proudly boasted, a "small, clever country" (Edwards, *WalesOnline*, 2013, p.12), Donaldson's curriculum was proposed. Evidently conceding that Wales' education system needed radically rebuilding, previous Education Minister Huw Lewis commented,

> *Successful Futures* provides the foundation for an ambitious, engaging 21st century curriculum shaped by the very latest international thinking. Together we now embark on the next stage of the journey. (Lewis, Welsh Government, 2015a)

With such international thinking being considered, the next stage of the journey began and the national curriculum followed across our principality was overhauled (Gillard, 2017), with a somewhat belated introduction of CfW being rolled out up to and including Year 8 from 2023. As Sinnema *et al.* affirm, this curriculum is a "shift from the prescriptive specification of knowledge content evident in many earlier national curricula" (2020, p. 182), to one in which pupil-centred discovery learning is central.

Shifting away from the traditional structure of subject division, the grouping together of Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) allows for greater linkage, with the intention of encouraging learners to make deep and meaningful connections. This would be seen as a deliberate move away from discrete subject division, where "subjects have a tendency to become unchallengeable entities, supported by powerful subject associations" (Goodson and Marsh, 1996, cited in Sinnema, 2020, p. 194). Thus, traditionally disparate subjects such as science, ICT and design technology now come under the Science and Technology AoLE, whilst all languages: English, Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), Welsh etc. are grouped under the heading of Language, Literacy and Communication. This reflects what Bernstein (1971) referred to as an 'integrated code' where the boundaries between subjects become blurred, as opposed to a 'collection code' where subjects are traditionally split. Combined

with considering the 'What Matters' statements each AoLE needs to consider, which reflect the fundamental philosophy underpinning the once discrete subjects, practitioners are viewed as facilitators rather than instructors in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, this has led critics of Wales' new child-centred curriculum to lament that "disadvantaged learners will miss out on the more academic content that will open up the pathways into powerful knowledge" (Power *et al.*, 2020, p.331), believing it to downgrade the importance of fundamental subject content comprehension.

Whilst the naysayers may have a valid point in ruing education's dismantling of Bernstein's collection code and the potential impact this may have on students' fundamental knowledge, there is much scholastic optimism surrounding the proposals made in Donaldson's 2015 review. One such view suggests that in line with its underlying aims, CfW

> positions learners as central to curriculum decision making, promotes active forms of pedagogy and twenty-first-century skills and reduces specification of curriculum content. (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p.181)

That CfW reduces curriculum content requirements could be classed as meiosis as the necessity to teach specific knowledge of any kind has been removed. This has been superseded by the importance of pupil autonomy and skills inclusion, alongside a mindful desire to allow schools to embrace their local context. Thus, no two schools, even those in the same county would necessarily cover the same content as CfW "eschews prescriptive content-led approaches to teaching, and affords schools and teachers considerable autonomy" (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p.182). This, according to Donaldson was approved of by students as they were unconcerned about studying different subjects from their friends (WISERD, 2015). It is views such as those which advocate greater student autonomy that can be seen to be reflected in the constructivist views proposed by Jean Piaget.

2.1.3 Discovery Vs Knowledge Sharing

Whilst Donaldson evidently garnered views from a huge number of stakeholders and subject specialists (over 1000 according to *Successful Futures*, 2015) and considered influences from all corners of the globe to develop his curriculum, Piaget's constructivist theory seems to permeate throughout. In placing students front and centre of the curriculum, and allowing them the autonomy for self-discovery through being child-centred rather than imparting their learning, Donaldson has clearly been influenced by the educational psychologist. With the lack of a knowledge-driven curriculum, the need to ensure students are able to develop skills and understanding whilst learning is clear. The idea that students "create knowledge through the interaction between their experiences and ideas" (Brau, 2022, p.141) proposed by Piaget runs through CfW. Along with the 5 principles of constructivism such as teachers seeking and valuing students' views; providing activities which challenge their assumptions or building lessons around big ideas, there is clear evidence of Piaget's educational influence (Burke, 2011).

This influence is indeed partly acknowledged by Donaldson as he contemplates the merits and demerits of direct teaching alongside discovery learning. However, rather than accepting the clear influence of the Swiss psychologist's practices, he advocates that his proposed curriculum, "should not be regarded as falling into a particular camp'' (Donaldson, 2015, p. 65). As the two approaches considered by Donaldson appear to be diametrically opposed, this would make the blending of the teaching and learning processes navigationally tricky for teachers. As Hughes and Lewis acknowledge,

> changing teachers into curriculum makers, rather than curriculum mediators or deliverers, thus strengthening teachers' agency, can be a difficult process to achieve in practice. (2020, p.292)

Whilst Donaldson proposes that teachers' creative freedom will follow once the constraints of a prescriptive curriculum are removed, this would surely be dependent upon their inherent levels of creativity. Research suggests that altering teachers' ideologies as well as their mindsets is requirement to ensure accountability will invariably be difficult (Wilkins, 2011). In his candid assessment of teacher training across Wales, John Furlong rightfully suggests that without supporting teachers to discover a new way of educational practice, what he terms a 're-professionalisation', the implementation of a new curriculum could surely be doomed to fail. CfW's introduction means it is no longer merely about what is being taught: the knowledge element, but about the how and why something is being learnt: the student-centred, learner-driven aspect. As Furlong proposes, what is required as part of initial teacher training is greater autonomy within learning for the educators themselves, one which offers "teachers themselves the skills, knowledge and dispositions to lead the changes that are needed" (Furlong, 2015, p.38). As Stenhouse (1975) once stated, curriculum development cannot take place without teacher development.

Notionally, few would argue against students becoming more involved in their own learning with their views being rightfully considered, though this would involve a seismic shift in classroom mindset especially amongst the students themselves. Moving from a knowledge based curriculum to one with autonomy, transferable skillsets and discovery based learning at its heart is philosophically admirable. However, believing that it is possible to meld the 'best bits' from each approach to form a pedagogical ideal could be seen as naïve or educationally treacherous.

2.1.4 What *Actually* Matters

Building on the tenet of discovery based learning and the AoLE structure, Donaldson also advocated What Matters (WM) statements which underpin the assessment aspect of CfW. Or rather, in his initial *Successful Futures* publication, he mentioned on three occasions that within the curriculum it would be important to assess what matters (Donaldson, 2015). At this time, no statements detailing what actually mattered within the new curriculum had been produced. Indeed, it was in the years that followed where pioneer schools were established across Wales that classroom practitioners and headteachers were deployed to create those statements which necessarily support teachers with planning, teaching and assessing within the classroom: perhaps more of an afterthought than a fundamental aspect of CfW's design. These statements are broad umbrellas under which the students' principles of progression sit that detail the achievement outcomes of each student within an AoLE. An illustrative example for the Expressive Arts AoLE would be:

What Matters Statement (one of four): Creative work combines knowledge and skills using the senses, inspiration and imagination.

Example from Progression step 3 beneath this What Matters statement (equivalent to what would be expected from a student entering secondary school age 11): I can adapt my work when necessary.

Whilst it would have been interminable to include every aspect of progression beneath each WM statement, the lack of definition within the progression steps has led to much derision from critics, with the WLGA declaring, "In too many cases, not enough of what *actually* matters has been included" (emphasis their own) and that too many of the statements are "poorly defined" (2019, p.2). Considering the example above, this would seem to be an

understatement. Whilst some of the WM statements beneath the AoLEs are indistinct, others are overly prescriptive. Under the Humanities AoLE, there are six WM statements which cover up to ten traditional subject areas including sociology, politics and economics. With each of these statements then having lists of progression steps beneath them, the question raised is how will teachers ensure that students are able to learn enough to be able to progress.

Positively, the Welsh Government (2020) has provided clarity here in stating that progress is based upon a continuum, with each learner moving at their own pace meaning that every step is only broadly age related. They also propose that progress should involve 'deep learning', though akin to the poorly defined progression steps, this statement is difficult to quantify. Additionally, to revisit the main criticism of constructivist learning and its disdain for teaching knowledge, within the Humanities WM statements, there are "no references to the development of Europe over the last 2,000 years, for example, key events linked to: Romans, Vikings, Normans, [or] World Wars I and II" (WLGA, 2019, p.6). As history is one of the core subjects which would invariably be included within humanities, this seems to endorse the flawed nature of CfW and its oversight of knowledge inclusion.

The concept of belonging – or to use the term embedded in the curriculum's statements of What Matters, *cynefin*[1] - is interesting, especially when considering the experiences of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, and how their lack of Welsh roots jars with the expectations of the new curriculum. Much has been written about the need for "flexibility to develop school-level curricula in response to the specific needs of learners" (Welsh Government, 2019, p.10). In line with the new ALN Bill (Welsh Government, 2018) also being introduced in 2022 which reflects the importance of person-centred planning and

[1]The term *cynefin with* which we are familiar: something which embraces our tribal origins.

providing learners with a voice, never has there been a movement in education to ensure an individual's voice is heard more keenly. In a reflection of Aristotle's declaration, "Give me a child until he is seven and I'll show you the man" (Cohen and Cohen, 1960, p.10), underpinning the new CfW, are the four core purposes which embody the potential for the development of each child into a twenty-first century citizen.

Proposing a kind of scholastic nirvana, their aim is to develop students who will become citizens ready to enter and contribute effectively to 21st century society (Senedd Cymru, 2021). Whilst few could argue with the sentiment behind these purposes, coupled with other aspects which need to be considered alongside these purposes: what matters statements, principles of progression, AoLE structures, it is difficult to see how all learners can be supported to reach such educational enlightenment. So what in principle could be seen by educationalists as the answer to Wales' pedagogical concerns, could in fact prove more difficult to implement effectively. Considering the way in which progress is often cyclical, Berlak and Berlak (1981) arrived in England from the US in the 1970s to discover the ways of the feted new child-centred education which had been lauded by educationalists of the time. Their disappointment was evident when they witnessed traditional rather than the radical constructivist-style teaching methods expected. What they recognised was the discernible difference between what they termed the "curriculum as conceptualised" and the "curriculum as practised" (Power *et al.*, 2020, p.322).

In light of the concerns over student outcomes now being raised with CfE in which Professor Donaldson was also instrumental, the hope would be that with so much predicated on the educational journey of our proud nation, the wheel of fortune turns in our favour rather than becoming as Michael Gove, then Education Secretary stated back in 2013 a 'country

going backwards'. There would therefore be the hope that what has been conceptualised within CfW will in practice lead to a forward momentum which truly does develop our students into 21st century citizens befitting of a global society.

2.1.5 Other Countries' Curricula

Further evidence of Donaldson's fusion can be seen in his consideration of how other countries have developed their curriculums. Paying due regard to countries such as Australia, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland and Scotland in whose development of CfE he had a hand in 2010, Donaldson acknowledges their influence on CfW's areas of learning as an umbrella for curriculum organisation. Including the term 'experience' alongside the title 'area of learning' already employed in Wales' Foundation Phase was deliberate in order to flag up, in Donaldson's words,

> the importance of educational experiences as an integral part of the curriculum, to broaden children and young people's horizons, stimulate their imaginations and promote enjoyment in learning. (Donaldson, 2015, p.38)

Choosing to umbrella what would once have been unconnected subjects may indeed develop greater connectivity. However, merely reclassifying and clustering together traditional disciplines does not enable such worthy outcomes as if through diffusion. It is not the grouping of the subject areas which broadens horizons, stimulates imaginations and promotes enjoyment in learning but the classroom practice which enables such experiences to flourish. Students themselves stated when asked about the AoLEs that there were too many subjects "lumped together" and that it has "increased the divide" between the areas which may make it "difficult for children to learn" (SNAP, 2015, p.4). Without the teaching of intrinsic knowledge, inequality of opportunity will widen as children of erudite, wealthy

parents would plug those gaps through providing extra tuition whilst those who are unable to access resources would flounder (Paterson, 2018).

Despite believing that these AoLEs provide an effective, broad curriculum structure which organises what would previously have been discrete subjects, this system has come in for much criticism. In a joint statement given by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW), they stated, “In too many cases, not enough of what actually matters has been included in the AoLEs” (WLGA, 2019, p. 2). ADEW and WLGA are concerned that the AoLEs demonstrate little precision, cautioning, “Too many statements are generic, poorly defined and weak on knowledge and skills development” (Ibid, p. 2). Consequently, they believe that

> pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills development will be left to chance, i.e. relying heavily on the knowledge and experience of individual teachers as opposed to an entitlement defined by the curriculum. (Ibid, 2019, p.2).

With Furlong’s warning of a need to upskill teachers to be able to deliver CfW’s aims, the questioning of the curriculum’s AoLE structure causes further concern.

Along with implementing AoLEs for curriculum organisation, countries such as the Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland share further commonality with CfW in their receipt of criticism for a deficiency of knowledge inclusion in classroom delivery. Following research carried out at Cardiff University (Western Mail, 2019), Nigel Newton discovered that almost half of the 575 teachers surveyed expressed concerns that students would not have access to the same amount of knowledge with CfW, especially subject specific knowledge, and that they would be disadvantaged as a result of the changes. This belief is borne out by research which suggests that in curricula where subject content is being reduced, aspects such as

GCSE students needing to know about the periodic table in science are no longer necessary (Perks *et al.*, 2006).

Alongside CfW, Professor Donaldson was heavily involved in Scotland's reformulated curriculum which is also based upon constructivist, child-centred theory and is showing signs of poor educational outcomes. In his article, 'Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: the betrayal of a whole generation?' (2018, no pagination), Lindsay Paterson reflects on the "widespread disquiet" towards a "mediocre" curriculum which was initially lauded by all Scottish political parties.

Now more than a decade into its introduction, CfE demonstrates why the teaching of knowledge remains fundamental within pedagogy as data suggests a marked decline in students' performance. Where once Scotland's students were returning above average scores in the PISA tests, since CfE's implementation, the country's results have markedly declined, as has students' attainment in literacy and numeracy tests (Paterson, 2018). From the OECD's 2018 sample, Scotland presented the highest number of ineligible students, some 7% higher than any other nation (www. ffteducationdatalab.org.uk). If a natural assumption here is that those withdrawn were low academic achievers, then the toll of CfE on students' attainment appears damning. Rather than transparently researching possible reasons for this decline and thereby attempting to tweak and transform, due to the investment and commitment (both financial and pedagogical), the Scottish government has looked the other way. They withdrew from the next round of PISA testing, scrapped the literacy and numeracy tests and then reneged on the internationally renowned Scottish School Leavers' Survey leading to a data 'desert' (Paterson, 2018). Not only does this appear to be a betrayal of a generation of Scotland's students, but as Wales is steaming headlong

into a seemingly analogous curriculum there should surely be concerns for their students' future education too.

The concern of downplaying the importance of knowledge within curricula internationally is one which has been widely considered by authors such as E.D. Hirsch who writes about the failings of the US education system in his text *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016) alongside David Didau's 2015 publication *What if Everything You Knew about Education was Wrong?*. Hirsch is determined to right what he sees are the wrongs of America's narrowed curriculum, strongly advocating that, "communal knowledge is what students need to possess to become effective citizens" (Hirsch, 2016, p.125)

The inclusion of fundamental aspects of knowledge advocated in previous curriculums was not arbitrarily arrived at but has been honed and built upon for centuries. It is an essential duty of educational establishments to "conserve and transmit" the knowledge of their forefathers as without doing so, this would have to be re-discovered rather than being developed and furthered (Young, 2010, p. 5). To decide that students should construct their own knowledge through discovery learning without the essential elements which enable their learning to be cemented together is akin to them being asked to work out which triangle includes a right angle without first providing them with the knowledge that it will always be 90°. Whilst students may be able to experiment to see which objects float on water, without the knowledge of surface tension which allows this to happen, their understanding would not be contextualised: they would learn the process but without acquiring the underlying fundamental knowledge. Thus, again overstating the importance of the 'how' over the 'what' of learning (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014) As Young and Muller (2010) claim, the lack of demarcated teaching of knowledge leads to a "blurring [of] the well-established boundaries between everyday knowledge and disciplinary knowledge", one

which fails to enable further pedagogical construction to continue (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p.182).

Whilst many countries are adopting a child-centred approach to learning, others are becoming more traditional in their approach. In complete contrast to the curriculum autonomy offered to teachers in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland, countries such as England and Australia are facing greater prescription with more explicit emphasis on knowledge and an expansion of curriculum content (Sinnema, 2016). As Sinnema states, "it would be valuable to look for an equilibrium, somewhere between both extremes, countries seem to struggle to perform this balancing act" (2016, p.5). Rather than radically overhauling a curriculum: the way in which subjects are defined and demarcated, or being concerned with students becoming active learners, a more concentrated approach towards fundamental student knowledge and what practically, culturally and ideologically they are expected to learn needs to be the starting point (Muller, 2000; Young, 2007).

Whilst many researchers have advocated the need to distinguish between knowledge learnt at school and the knowledge they have previously acquired (Muller, 2000; Maton and Moore, 2009), this seems needless. As the acquisition of "knowledge itself is power" (Bacon, 1597, no pagination), surely where that knowledge is acquired is irrelevant. Importantly, from developing their knowledge, students would gain confidence and self-belief which in turn should invariably lead to greater academic successes. The emancipatory implications linked with social mobility here are clear, with a hope that the creation of an agreed and shared 'canon' of knowledge would ultimately narrow education's attainment gap by providing equity of opportunity to acquire knowledge. There is therefore the opportunity to discontinue the correlation seen between societal and economic disadvantage affecting

students' access which continues to impact educational attainment (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). Indeed with independent, public and private schools invariably continuing with their traditional educational practices which are laced with the importance of knowledge acquisition, what Wales' state sector is doing by overhauling their curriculum is opening the fissure of financial disadvantage from a gap into a chasm. Thus, in developing a curriculum based on constructivist values, despite their intentions, educationalists are "likely to render the contours of knowledge less visible to the very learners that the more open curriculum hopes to favour" (Young, 2010, p.8). This is in spite of influence from curricula across the globe, which it appears was all too readily sidelined.

2.2 Influence of Global Curricula

Despite historical curriculum design invariably being driven by top-down, decision-making educational experts, it is widely acknowledged that classroom practitioners play a fundamental role as curriculum developers in their own schools (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, and Miller, 2012). Such practitioners were involved in CfW's foundational development through the establishment of the pioneer school's structure. With learners' needs always central to curriculum design, classroom practitioners will often adapt and develop curricula to best fit their students' requirements. These divergent curricula have been referred to as the "planned and the enacted curriculum" (Kelly, 1999, p.11), with the changes implemented being viewed as a potentially deliberate attempt to wrest control whilst overtly commenting on perceived inadequacies of experts' designs. As Kelly suggests, classroom practitioners are able to ensure the success or failure of curriculum reform through their rejection or endorsement of its tenets, and have been known to "sabotage attempts at change" (Ibid, 1999, pp.14-15). Evidently, such change "can succeed only when teachers concerned are committed to them, and, especially, when they understand, as well

as accept their underlying principles" (Ibid, 1999, pp. 14-15). Having witnessed the recent failings of CfE, it is such expectations of commitment and acceptance that may have been absent when the final drafts of CfW were rolled out in 2022.

In a deliberate move away from the previous national curriculum which was seen as parochial, and to encourage commitment, the design of CfE was intended to allow teachers greater autonomy to be able to direct and facilitate students' learning rather than obediently following what had been provided. Prior to the consultation process in the early 2000s, teachers had not been overly involved in decision-making in terms of curriculum change. The hierarchical nature of curriculum rollout meant that decisions would be taken in terms of logistics and fitting subject choices into timetables rather than developing syllabi to facilitate learning (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2013). There is however still debate about whether CfE has allowed "actual moves towards greater teacher autonomy and influence", questioning if such agency has led to greater freedom with pedagogy and content (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson, 2015, p.2) therefore potentially enabling students and directing their learning rather than providing dictatorial instruction. Couched within this change was a movement away from "a perceived dependency culture among sections of the teaching profession" towards developing the "confidence to take increased responsibility for young people's learning and progress" (Hayward and Hutchison, 2013, p.56).

The success or failure of CfE similarly rested with those classroom practitioners charged with implementing it across Scotland. With so many practitioners having been involved from its inception being instrumental in aspects of its design and able to then feed back, expectation would suggest that a greater sense of ownership would lead to greater acceptance. Scotland is one of a number of countries who have re-designed their curricula in the last few

decades. The reasons behind the changes to education and Anglophone curricula in particular are rightly seen as economically driven: in order to thrive in an ever-evolving world, we must equip our young school-leavers accordingly with the skills to thrive (Yates and Young, 2010).

Globally, prominence is placed upon different measures according to expectations. In some countries, greater emphasis may focus on skills mastery with more flexibility as to how these are delivered, whilst in other countries, curriculum expectations may be more prescriptive in terms of teaching expectations (Wallace and Priestley, 2017). Many evolutionary curriculum designs have diverged from placing knowledge at the heart to what Young (2008) has coined genericism: placing the learner at the centre with teachers becoming learning enablers. It is this shift away from content-based, knowledge-filled curricula that has led social realists to criticise what they see as 'downgraded' educational systems (Yates and Collins, 2010).

One of the main concerns highlighted by critics such as Wheelahan (2010) and Young (2007) is what they perceive as the global movement to downgrade knowledge. Their social realist view considers the blatant shift away from knowledge being part of a student's learning journey to one which focuses on a requirement for 21st century skills development. Such a shift is evident in CfE, where experiences and opportunities for developing skills for work supersede the previous National Curriculum's requirement to "extend knowledge about the past" as part of the history curriculum (SOED, 1993, p.34). Whilst this is merely one example, the inclusion of the four capacities in CfE, becoming: confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens are seen as evidence of

movement towards skills development whilst shunning knowledge (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014).

Similar curriculum design focus can be seen in CfW with the 4Ps: ambitious, capable learners; healthy, confident individuals; enterprising, creative contributors and ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world clearly encouraging skills development. Perhaps even more overt are the five key competencies detailed in New Zealand's curriculum, encouraging thinking, using language, symbols and texts, managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007). What the three curriculum examples provided show is that there is a clear focus on the centrality of the learner and their personal development.

In a similar fashion to CfE, New Zealand's curriculum (NZC) was developed between 2004 and 2007 in a protracted process which involved over 15,000 students, teachers, headteachers, academics and advisors trialling and providing responses to a draft curriculum finally shared in 2006 (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014). The NZC was rolled out the following year in 2007 with a key change to previous national curricula being the emphasis placed on schools to develop their own curriculum within the broad boundaries of its policy scope. Similarly to CfE, the NZC was organised into areas of knowledge, learning domains and achievement objectives. With the autonomy awarded to teachers, the initial reaction to the implementation was positive, with teachers committed to developing it within the classroom. However, when new policies were implemented requiring national standards for reading, writing and mathematics, teachers' commitment was tested as they felt a backward-looking focus "compromised the freedom and autonomy needed" to implement a forward-facing curriculum (Ibid, 2014, p.57). Importantly however, the NZC includes details

of a vision which involves the inclusion of knowledge in developing students. Linking the capacities and purposes from both CfE and CfW, from the very outset, the NZC stipulates that it will include

> a framework designed to ensure that all young New Zealanders are equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and values they will need to be successful citizens in the twenty-first century (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4).

An alternative approach, increasingly common internationally, focuses more directly on the expected outcomes of learning. Its proponents argue that learning is shaped by much more than individual subjects and syllabuses, and that fulfilment of the purposes of the curriculum requires approaches which are more directly relevant to emerging personal, social and economic needs. In this approach, the curriculum is often framed in terms of the key skills, capacities or competences that will be developed in children and young people (Donaldson, 2015, p.5), those whom Donaldson clearly believed were vital to the success of his curriculum's development.

2.2.1 Curriculum Design: Purpose-driven and Discovery-Based

According to Donaldson's *Successful Futures* report (2015), there is a "fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy" (Donaldson, 2015, pp.63-64). In 2020, following extensive collaboration between pioneer schools, the Welsh Government and regional consortia, CfW was published (Welsh Government, 2020), receiving royal assent in April 2021 (Senedd Cymru, 2021). Such interdependency is evident in CfW's composition with the legal requirement established to develop a purpose-driven curriculum (see *Background to CfW* above*)*, alongside the development of:

six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs):

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Language, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology (Senedd Cymru, 2021, p.2)

and three mandatory cross-curricula skills:

- Digital Competence
- Literacy
- Numeracy (Ibid, 2021, p.2)

Linked to the 4Ps, are the statements of What Matters, which provide detail on what is essential learning for students. Such learning is perceived as holistic and inter-disciplinary, integrating knowledge, skills and experiences, with progress viewed as being on a continuum rather than linked to key stages as was previously the case in Wales (Donaldson, 2015). In accordance with the movement towards more focused teacher professional development, the *Successful Futures* report stated that the 4Ps would "inevitably require a wide repertoire of teaching and learning approaches" (Donaldson, 2015, pp.63-64). Thus the OECD defined Wales' educational shift from a performative system focused on results and league tables to a curriculum which was learner-focused (OECD, 201). This was seen by some as "a softening in neoliberal ideology and a more collegiate approach to policy development" (Evans, 2021, p.13).

In words which evidently influenced Professor Donaldson's composition of CfW's 4Ps, NfER and Arad Research considered curriculum design across countries who were performing at a high level. In their 2013 report, they argue that,

> there is a common, general aim to develop in their learners the necessary attitudes, values, skills and knowledge they need in order to achieve success and fulfilment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit (Welsh Government, 2013a, p.17).

According to *Successful Futures*, developing a purpose-driven curriculum should "mobilise the education community around a common mission" whilst providing "the basis of necessary agreement among national and local government, schools and teachers about the desired overall direction" (Donaldson, 2015, p.21). Despite his belief that CfW offers a 21st century approach to curriculum composition, Donaldson's view is not so far away from that proposed by Basil Bernstein over half a century ago where he stated,

> how a society selects, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge that it considers to be public reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control (Bernstein, 1971, p.47)

The architect of CfW may believe that his vision is remarkable and on trend internationally, but what Bernstein's view proves is that such revolutions are cyclical.

Movement away from curricula which follow discreet subject composition towards those with less prescription which are purpose or skills-based, capability or competency-driven is being made across Europe and OECD countries (Drew and Priestley 2016, OECD, 2017). According to a report from the European commission, the ratification of "eight key competences encompassing citizenship, society, employment and personal effectiveness has influenced changes to curriculum specifications in countries across Europe" (Donaldson, 2015). With Donaldson's contribution to Scotland's CfE, its similarity to CfW is unsurprising, with young people aiming to develop 4 Capacities. This in turn is reflected globally, with both the US and Australia compiling curricula based upon key skills and New Zealand developing a curriculum embracing various competencies (Donaldson, 2015). Such curricula redesign is also seen in countries such as Estonia, Finland and Japan, where changes ensure configuration with learners' requirements to lead fulfilled lives personally, academically and professionally (OECD, 2020).

One aspect that may be said to support the acquisition of the ability to live a fulfilled life is the opportunity learners receive to experience a discovery-based or experiential pedagogy. According to Vygotsky, “the best form of teaching is the form of teaching that leads to and directs development” (Sözcü, 2020, p.25). To be considered a developed nation, one which enables personal growth through educational enlightenment was evidently uppermost in Donaldson’s mind when proposing CfW’s purpose driven curriculum.

2.2.2 Curriculum Redesign across the Globe

As society evolves, so developed nations seek to update the learning provision of their next generation of scholars. With an emphasis very much on placing the child at the centre, inspired by our Scandinavian and Italian cousins, the Foundation Phase was introduced in Welsh education to offer a more discovery-oriented, creative approach to learning (Aasen and Waters, 2006; Maynard *et al.*, 2013). This could be seen as a pre-cursor to the child-centred curriculum design offered by Donaldson which placed greater emphasis on students’ discovery of learning than the knowledge they acquire. Reflecting Donaldson’s wish to provide practitioners with greater autonomy in the classroom, countries such as Canada, Cyprus, Finland and New Zealand are providing local schools with the control to make decisions about the learning which takes place (OECD, 2020). Conversely, in England and Australia, the importance of core knowledge and explicit control over an expanding curriculum is being enforced (Sinnema *et al.* 2020).

Across the globe, nations including the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and of course Scotland have sought to organise their curriculum into broad areas of learning rather than discrete subjects (Donaldson, 2015; Gatley, 2020; Priestley and Sinnema, 2014). In broadening the term to include areas of learning and experience, CfW seeks to acknowledge

the importance of the practicality of involvement in study: of discovery and the promotion of a sense of joy in scholarly acquisition (Donaldson, 2015). Whilst it would be remiss to discount the importance of providing an education befitting of generational changes, academics, despite an abundance of research, fail to agree on the most befitting curriculum for today's learners.

Using data from empirical science and psychological study, critics of skills-based or purpose-driven curricula are dogmatic in their defence of knowledge-based learning as the only way to achieve equity and global citizenship (Hirsch, 2016; Bamber, 2020; Yung-Feng, 2012). Furthermore, academics have been scathing in their belief that knowledge has been diminished in skills-based curricula (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014; Rata, 2012), with discovery, student-led learning focusing more on the *how* of the skill rather than the *what* of knowledge (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014; Rata, 2012; Biesta, 2007). Other writers whose analysis is rooted in the British education system are less vociferous in their distaste for the need for skills acquisition, seeing it as necessary but that its procurement should occur through obtaining knowledge (Didau, 2016; Christodoulou, 2014).

CfW is underpinned by 4Ps which aim to support our next generation of learners to become 21st century citizens who are ambitious and capable, as well as ethical and enterprising (Donaldson, 2015; Gatley, 2020). The underlying premise for developing these competencies is the concept of a constructivist learning philosophy, one which manifests itself within New Zealand curricula as enquiry-based learning (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014; Sinnema and Aitken, 2011). Reflecting the purposes endorsed by CfW, New Zealand's learners are expected to manage themselves, and relate to others whilst participating and contributing. More closely aligned with CfW are the capacities which underpin CfE,

supporting learners to become successful, confident, responsible and effective contributors (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014). Whilst there is evidently a place within CfW to support learners to become twenty-first century citizens who develop such competencies, the research discussed considers whether due consideration has been given to disadvantaged students, specifically those who have ALN or who are EAL.

2.2.3 Knowledge-based v Skills-based Curricula

Designing a curriculum to be accessed by students aged between 3-18 who may be embracing discovery-based learning for the first time could be a daunting experience. For those learners who have an additional need or those whose first language is not English, such access creates greater challenges. Providing accessible learning for these students can often involve prioritising the explicit teaching of knowledge in order to develop initial study habits. Such provision is reflected in Bloom's taxonomy as the lowest point from which learners begin to develop cognitively (Utica University, 2020). According to Vic A Kelly, if there is an acceptance that planning a curriculum

> must begin with statements about the purposes we hope to attain or the principles upon which our practice is to be based, all decisions about the content of our curriculum must be subsidiary to those prior choices (Kelly, 2009, p.32).

As far back as the late 1940s, Ralph Tyler was posing the question, "what educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?" (Tyler, 1949, p.1). Tyler's question is considered in Donaldson's *Successful Futures* (2015) report, which supported a move away from subject-based curricula to one which considers areas of learning or is skills or thematically-based. Fundamentally, with a purpose-driven curriculum there is a common belief that Wales is embarking on an assertion that this new educational

dawn would be for the "betterment of all children and young people in Wales" (Evans, 2021, p.13). As the Educational Endowment Foundation recognises,

> the best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve pupil attainment. Ensuring every teacher is supported in delivering high-quality teaching is essential to achieving the best outcomes for all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged among them (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, p. 26).

In order to assess whether a purpose-driven curriculum would indeed lead to learners' 'betterment', it would be useful to consider different curricula. A curriculum can be defined as that which is learned. On a more detailed level, according to England's Inspectorate, Ofsted, a school curriculum "consists of all those activities designed or encouraged within its organisational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils" (DES, 1985 in Ross, 2000, p.9). To define a curriculum in such terms however, is to devalue it as a concept to the sum of its parts. Whilst a much pared down definition could be what is learned, numerous aspects should be considered that constitute a curriculum, albeit less overtly. Such aspects would include the 'hidden curriculum': those norms, values and attitudes that are not openly taught but are expressly present, what is referred to as the planned and unplanned curriculum: that which is intended to be taught and that which naturally arises and the formal and informal curriculum: subjects that are taught as opposed to extra and co-curricula (Kelly, 2009).

Much discussion abounds regarding what constitutes a curriculum that would ensure the 'personal, social and physical development' of students and whether the inclusion of some fundamental aspects of knowledge are essential. In Cartesian dualist fashion, there is a belief that knowledge should be an essential part of all curricula, therefore what is required to be learnt should form a central part of the planning. According to some educationalists, a major concern

with curriculum planning is the belief that a certain element of core knowledge should form part of all curricula and that this fundamental knowledge, which can and should be agreed upon, forms the first and only stage of planning (Kelly, 2009). What should be included in curriculum planning is therefore uncritically assumptive, based on ideological beliefs of certain knowledge being universal and essential rather than creating a broader curricula that offers greater developmental scope. Consideration of the importance of knowledge transmission in curriculum planning would also be crucial when contemplating how this knowledge links with other parts of the curriculum: eschewing skills, purposes and intentions, an area which a knowledge-based curriculum would overlook.

In terms of epistemological acquisition, different philosophical perspectives advocate diametrically opposed views. Rationalists such as Plato, Descartes and Kant propose that our sensory perception is deceptive and that knowledge can only be attained independently of the senses. By deduction, this suggests knowledge is acquired by what Descartes termed a priori, implying a type of osmosis of knowledge which is "timeless, objective, in no sense related to the particular circumstances of individual eras, societies, cultures or human beings" (Ibid, 2009, p. 34). Surprisingly, such a belief that certain aspects of curriculum content within particular subjects are 'timeless' as they represent intellectual superiority and should therefore continue to be included regardless of educational evolution, remain. Educational absolutists such as Richard Peters (1966) and Michael Young (1971), along with the American educationalist Howard Gardner advocated, "the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake over the obeisance to utility" (Gardner, 1999, p.39), believing that the acquisition of knowledge should ergo be a quest of and for itself.

In direct opposition to rationalist thought is that propounded by empiricists. As the founder of empiricism, John Locke's a posteriori view holds the belief that all knowledge is presented and acquired through sensory experience. Thus, theoretically, a far more cautious approach educationally is taken towards the importance of knowledge acquisition as fundamental to curriculum planning. Building on John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, with its view of learning through active participation and reaction to one's environment (Hildebrand, 2024), and a facet of Vygotsky's constructivist ideas of knowledge acquisition occurring through interaction with peers and key individuals (1978), empiricist views reflect more progressive educational concepts: those based upon experiential or skills-based learning. Such ideas question the view that certain knowledge is essential within curricula, with educationalists suggesting that for learners, "we cannot impose what is knowledge for us upon them; we must assist them to develop their own knowledge, their own hypotheses, which will be different from ours if the process of evolution is to go on (Kelly, 2009, p.36). The process of evolution considered by Kelly formed a central tenet of Donaldson's *Successful Futures* (2015), where alongside productive learning, life skills, social competencies and increased confidence were all seen as expected

2.3 Contradictory Curriculum Design

Not all countries that have re-evaluated their curriculum in the last quarter of a century follow a similar structure to that of the 'new curriculum': using competencies or capacities and ambiguous learning outcomes. Portugal chose to move away from what it saw as 'faddy' educational influences to what many would see as a regressive curriculum where summative testing takes centre stage. Emphasising that teachers were tired of the "constant interference" and the lamentable introduction of fashionable educational concepts such as "competences instead of knowledge, learning in context, discovery learning" (Crato, 2019, no pagination), the Portuguese government returned to what it saw as fundamental

curriculum requirements. Starting with re-introducing mandatory subjects such as reading, mathematics, humanities and English, whilst deliberately moving away from what was seen as “vague and unstructured” concepts such as “learning in company…the project area …and civic education”, Portugal provided clear learning outcomes which it shared with all stakeholders. The importance of student learning and the enjoyment of knowledge acquisition was also introduced, all of which led to Portugal being one of few countries to increase the number of top performing students whilst reducing the number of underperforming students in the 2015 PISA testing (Ibid, 2019, no pagination). Possibly, the most interesting aspect of the curriculum change was practitioners’ “firm belief in students’ capacity to learn more and to progress further” (Ibid, 2019, no pagination), along with a celebration of knowledge acquisition central to learning and progress.

Purists who believe in the necessity of knowledge inclusion go as far as to state that the ‘new curricula’ emphasise “not what children are expected to know, but how they should be” (Watson, 2010, p.99), implying a move to insidiously brainwash students into becoming skills-developed clones. Whilst there is an argument that the erosion of knowledge would lead to a clear gap in students’ learning; to suggest that a curriculum which includes the explicit teaching of skills negates the need for, or indeed inclusion of, knowledge, would be simplistic in the extreme. Indeed, it would be naïve to assume that skills can be developed in isolation and without the knowledge in order to contextualise (Young, 2009). In opposition to social realist theory, critics suggest that it is the very essence of a school to develop the whole child: to prepare students for life through developing skills using everyday knowledge rather than delineating the two (Kelly, 1999).

The Organisation for Economic Development (Definition and Selection of Competencies) 'DeSeCo' project is generally accepted as the establishment credited with including competencies or capacities within curricula (Priestley and Sinnema, 2014). This has led to what Phillips and Ochs (2003) believe is an international penchant for 'policy borrowing'. As Raffe (2006) states, in terms of understanding, there is a good deal for countries to learn from each other as opposed to borrowing policy understanding should lead to policy learning. In the case of CfE and CfW such piracy is blatant, conceitedly demonstrating a belief that a formula to enable 21st century education has been discovered. Rather than mutually appreciative educational experts enacting much back-slapping and self-congratulation at endorsing one another's successes, educationalists should perhaps consider heeding advice from today's young people. In failing to meaningfully include today's students in consultation for tomorrow's educational developments, countries enacting changes to their curricula are allowing themselves to fall into the same trap as many of their forbears: being risk-averse and blinkered to the real challenges.

2.4 Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and its Influence on Curriculum for Wales: Lessons from a Celtic Cousin

2.4.1 Why Scotland changed its curriculum

Almost a quarter of a century ago, post-devolution Scotland set out to radically overhaul its education system, championing its intentions within the Education (Scotland) Act, 2000. With echoes of continuing inequality and children from socially deprived backgrounds under-achieving compared to their more affluent peers, and a curriculum viewed as overloaded and with too much emphasis on assessment rather than forging links across learning, Scotland set about redressing the educational balance by developing a radical, more flexible new curriculum. Overhauling the education offering was part of a wider national focus, with the government commissioned, Getting it Right for Every Child,

determined to deliver on its aim to guarantee that "all Scotland's children, young people and their families have consistent, coordinated support when they need it" (Scottish Government 2008, p.11).

With the values underpinning Scotland's CfE taken from those etched into its parliament's mace: wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity, the deliberate intention to intertwine Scottish societal principles with those expected within the classroom was evident, helping "young people in Scotland define their own position on matters of social justice, and personal and collective responsibility" (Henderson, 2010, p.40). Expectations of 'collective responsibility' would be equally as fundamental to teachers' changing practice, and with such movement in pedagogical paradigms proposed by CfE, would also require a shift in their epistemological beliefs (Wallace and Priestley, 2017). However, as research has demonstrated, "teachers modify curriculum to align with their own moral and educational beliefs" (Van Driel, Beijaard and Verloop, 2001; Kelly, 1999), therefore such changes would have been welcomed.

The reasons behind Scotland's curriculum re-evaluation were numerous, as the 5-14 curriculum - last re-vamped in the 1990s - was now seen as somewhat dysfunctional (Mills, 2021). There were concerns about curriculum 'over-crowding', that learning needed to be more enjoyable and 'academic' and 'vocational' learning needed to better equip learners for the 21st century. Added to this was a need to 'de-clutter' the primary curriculum alongside a requirement to review the science curriculum on offer (Ibid, 2021). Whilst the rollout of CfE provided the impetus for such changes, the numerous reports and policy documents written prior to its implementation had been calling for greater autonomy for teachers and for them to have more of a say in curriculum design. These included the McCrone Agreement (2001)

presented in conjunction with the Scottish Government which gave teachers unequivocal accountability for creating curricula; Donaldson's report entitled, 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (2010) that provided evidence for including teachers in decision-making for all educational matters, and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report penned by Raffe (2006) which considered the quality and equity provided by Scotland's education system and advocated greater consultation with education practitioners about curriculum development and design (Wallace and Priestley, 2017, p.3).

Until this time, like the vast majority of global curricula, Scotland's offering would have chartered a traditional, content-driven course; what CfE's introduction in 2010 offered was greater teacher freedom: a constructivist stance to develop experiential, student-led learning (Priestley, 2011). As has been recognised for decades, teachers invariably decode and adapt curricula disseminated to them, ensuring the students they teach are provided with the most befitting resources to meet their learning needs (Cuban, 1998; Richardson, 1996). What CfE afforded was the official authorisation to be able to develop, create and modify the pedagogical practice to cater for 21st century learners in their classroom – modifications they had invariably been conducting surreptitiously for years.

As well as identifying a need to streamline the overly burdensome assessment requirements of the Scottish curriculum, one of the main reasons behind CfE's composition was a desire to create a continuous 3-18 curriculum. Coupled with an intention to provide learners with more autonomy and teachers with greater pedagogical independence, the bold new CfE was developed. An unprecedented number of stakeholders were involved in shaping Scotland's innovative curriculum. Teachers were drafted in to work with Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in creating new teaching guidance which was imaginatively written from the

perspective of a child and what they would be expected to learn at particular stages entitled Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os). Prior to the final publication in April 2009, the teaching guidance was shared and developed over a number of months the previous year. Numerous trials took place using the Es and Os, with more than 600 educational establishments testing the new draft curriculum. Linking with a research team from the University of Glasgow, thirty-seven focus groups worked to refine the teaching guidance in readiness for the April 2009 launch.

Perhaps the main difference with the development of CfE was the deliberate involvement of Scotland's teachers from the initial consultation through to its implementation (Henderson, 2010). Where in previous incarnations, curriculum changes would have been developed by educational 'experts' who would provide programmes of study that could be delivered with little imagination and some adaptation, from 2008, aspects of the new curriculum were published in draft along with online surveys to collate feedback from individual teachers, schools and other learning organisations. Thirty-seven focus groups were also established involving school leaders, as well as parents, professional education bodies and learners themselves to consider CfE's proposed aspects such as the experiences, outcomes and capacities prior to final decisions being taken, executing "the most extensive consultation ever of the people of Scotland on the state of school education" (Mills, 2021, p.29). Importantly, as a nation, Scotland had recognised the need to include the stakeholders most affected by curriculum changes in order to develop buy in and create a sense of ownership, with its full title undergoing a change to include the tagline "the responsibility of all practitioners" (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 1). Such weight of responsibility was clearly not enough to ensure CfE's success and to avoid discord in the coming years (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013).

2.4.2 Scotland's Curriculum: An Outline

In what was acknowledged as a curriculum different to any other developed in Scotland before in terms of "scale, scope and approach" (Henderson, 2010, p.40), the rollout of CfE in 2010 aimed to provide learners with greater opportunities and autonomy to develop transferable skills and offered teachers more freedom, flexibility and autonomy to support learners rather than teach didactically. The 'approach' of CfE is written from a student's perspective and involves the provision of teaching guidance entitled 'experiences' and 'outcomes' which are linked to each student's expectations and what is anticipated they will have learnt by a particular stage. Whilst the 'experience' aspect links with the learning expected to take place, developing "active engagement, motivation and depth of learning" (Ibid, 2010, p.44), the 'outcomes' relate to what each student would be expected to achieve. The teaching guidance is continuum-focused, encompassing a seamless curriculum for students aged 3-18, with five levels loosely demarcated every three years.

Like Wales' CfW - which follows a similar structure - the purpose of CfE was "to ensure that all the children and young people of Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work, now and in the future" (Ibid, 2010, p.41). As CfW explicitly states in one of the 4Ps which underpin the curriculum, these curricula are designed to develop students into 21st century citizens ready to face challenges and to thrive in a global society.

Through underpinning CfE with experiences and outcomes which run from early years through to higher secondary school years (3-18), theoretically educators are able to see where their support of a child's progress fits within the continuum of learning. Alongside the

experiences and outcomes, traditional subjects have been streamlined into eight curriculum areas for learning and development:

- Expressive arts
- Languages and literacy
- Health and wellbeing
- Mathematics and numeracy
- Religious and moral education
- Sciences
- Social studies
- Technologies

These have replaced discrete subjects, with a view that greater cross-curricula and thematic learning can take place, developing cohesion and a greater depth of understanding within the learning process. Central to CfE are 4 fundamental capacities, designed to support students to become:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors (Scottish Government, 2008)

The capacities are achieved through what is planned for students' learning within areas of what matters across the curriculum. This is identified as "the totality of all that is planned for children and young people throughout their education" (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 230) and are delivered through:

- Curriculum areas and subjects
- Interdisciplinary learning
- Ethos and life of the school
- Opportunities for personal achievement

Fundamental to the success of CfE is the provision of flexibility to enable teachers to provide students with the "freedom to think imaginatively about how to organise and plan children's learning in creative ways that encourage deep, sustained learning" (Henderson, 2010, p.40): to think critically and develop greater depth of understanding and application.

Ultimately, CfE was designed to develop a feeling of trust amongst Scotland's teaching profession by providing the freedom and opportunity to support students to become successful learners able to contribute to a global society. Whilst such freedoms implied an intent to 're-professionalise' the teaching profession, critics of CfE felt that a disharmony with expected accountability remained (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013). Thus the excellence proffered within the title of its curriculum failed to convince the practitioners charged with its delivery.

2.4.3 Policy Borrowing: Similarities between CfE and CfW

As outlined below, definitions of what constitutes a 'curriculum' differ according to context and wider political implications. Depending on whether consideration is being made of a prescriptive curriculum: intentionally planned learning experiences or outcomes delivered by a practitioner, or a descriptive curriculum: the knowledge and experiences which enable the learner to grow - or indeed a mix of both - curricula are multi-faceted and complex (Summers, 2019). Definitions can be as divergent as learning which takes place following a plan (van den Akker, 2010) to the much more delineated consideration of instructional material and textbooks used for teaching and learning (Stroll *et al.*, 2006). Whichever definition is considered, and whatever form a curriculum takes, commonality should involve putting students at its heart.

In what is now widely termed 'new curriculum', similarities due to 'policy borrowing' can be seen in education systems that have undertaken revision since the early 2000s across the globe (Priestley and Biesta, 2013; Sinnema and Aitken, 2013). These curricula champion greater teacher autonomy within the classroom, viewing practitioners as facilitators who encourage students to develop skills and embark on learning through experiential and

discovery-based pedagogy. Recognising the need for practitioners to become agents of change, there is a need to accept that,

> teachers are not solely passive executors only playing a role at the final stage of the reform, but rather active actors that should be taken into account throughout the whole reform process (OECD, 2020, p. 7).

Moving away from curricula that are based upon knowledge acquisition and regurgitation, these new curricula look to centralise the learner, facilitating their acquisition and improvement of skills in order to become 21st century citizens of a global society. In what is seen as a need to prepare young people for future employment, the OECD is currently leading their Education 2030 project involving over 40 countries focusing on supporting global education systems to enable students to succeed in future employment (OECD, 2020).

Having embarked on their reform journey at the start of the millennium, Scotland was evidently one of the first nations to be influenced by the common elements of the 'new curriculum', moving from a knowledge-based to a capacity-focused curriculum. According to Fullan (2015), for any curriculum reform to be successful, changes to three elements need to be undertaken: teaching materials, approaches to teaching and beliefs. With CfE now well over a decade into its implementation, critics have considered its achievements and whether planned improvements have been successful. Clearly influenced by the NZC, as well as Scandinavian countries' schooling, CfE appears to have cherry-picked curriculum aspects, placing them together in what has been described as a "mish mash of different contradictory underpinning curricula models" (Mills, 2021, p.33).

Looking to countries such as Finland, CfE shifted its focus from 5-14 to a curriculum covering 3-18. In essence, the greater inclusivity, along with the introduction of a learning continuum ought to have led to a less 'crowded' curriculum with more effective outcomes. However, whilst there has been an attempt to focus on discovery learning in early years which aimed to bring about an "innovative and ambitious child-centred curriculum that would restore teacher autonomy" (Ibid, 2021, p. 33) reflecting the Scandinavian model, in reality a lack of research into the reason for the country's educational effectiveness, and the failure to develop a clear vision meant that it has become "ahistorical and atheoretical" (Priestley and Humes, 2010, p. 27). Despite clearly bringing together the most appealing aspects of various new curricula, CfE's creators have been accused of failing to research existing curricula by disregarding its canonical literature and therefore creating sets of 'woolly' guidelines which left practitioners 'floundering in the dark' (Ibid, 2010; Priestley and Minty, 2013). Accordingly, in considering the impact of CfE's changes on young people and their subsequent curriculum choices, Shapira et al. (2023) considered evidence that there was "significant curricular fragmentation in many schools, with a large proportion of students being taught by over 15 teachers a week" (Shapira et al., 2023, p.9). This in turn led to a narrowing of the curriculum and fewer qualifications (Ibid., 2023). Whilst the research considers the impact of deprivation and the bearing on student choices which are consequently reduced, there is no consideration of students with additional needs such as those with EAL (Shapira, 2023).

Whilst Donaldson provides a link between the construction and composition of Scotland's CfE and Wales' CfW as the architect involved with both curricula, there is also a clear connection with other global curriculum aspects. Having clearly mined the numerous 'new curriculum' global designs prior to developing CfE and CfW, there are echoes of many

aspects evident across both. In keeping with the move towards capacity-focused curricula, there is little variance between CfE's capacities and CfW's purposes (See Table 1 below)

CfE	CfW
Successful learners	Ambitious, capable learners
Effective contributors	Enterprising, creative contributors
Responsible citizens	Ethical, informed citizens
Confident individuals	Healthy, confident individuals

Table 1: Comparison of CfE and CfW's Purposes

Whilst evidently attempting to put students at the centre of their learning, placing the capacities and purposes as the *what* is achievable at the heart of the curriculum, both of these curricula appear to fail to demonstrate *how* these elements can be achieved. As Priestley and Humes point out when considering the values-based aspect of CfE, movement away from an "aims and objectives model of curriculum" where clear intent for learning is shared to a "softer" less definitive focus offers little in the way of guidance (2010, p.12). Furthermore, despite achieving a position of reverence in both Scotland and Wales, being chanted at county-level education meetings or at conferences, little critical evaluation of their importance has taken place. With an interchange in the use of adjectives employed between CfE's implementation and that of CfW some years later, their prominence appears less significant (Ibid, 2010). Despite veneration therefore, the capacities/purposes become less meaningful as their achievability is vague and undefined. Whilst the intention of the curriculum planners may have been to provide the Aristotelian aim to enable students to become 21st century citizens ready to take on the world, what has resulted is a somewhat hackneyed set of purposes which appear to fail to define their clear significance.

Further similarities in curriculum design can be seen in CfE's Curriculum Areas and CfW's Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs), which reflect NZC's learning areas. In the case of CfE (8 Curriculum Areas) and CfW (6 AoLEs), these are designed to link with the capacities and purposes, providing Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) for CfE and descriptors of learning for CfW which demonstrate what learners can achieve at various stages.

CfE (Curriculum Areas)	CfW (AoLEs)
Mathematics and Numeracy	Mathematics and Numeracy
Sciences	Science and Technology
Languages	Languages, Literacy and Communication
Expressive Arts	Expressive Arts
Health and Wellbeing	Health and Wellbeing
Social Studies	Humanities
Technologies	
Religious and Moral Education	

Table 2: Similarities between CfE's Curriculum Areas and CfW's AoLEs

Both the Es and Os and the descriptors of learning provide statements of learning linked to five continuum-focused, loosely-defined progression stages. In an attempt to link with the capacities and purposes, the statements are written using first-person to deliberately place each student at the centre of their learning. Examples from each below demonstrate the expectations at particular (equitable) stages and for a particular curriculum area/AoLE looking at 'forces':

- CfE - By investigating how friction, including air resistance, affects motion,

  I can suggest ways to improve efficiency in moving objects (CfE, 2017)

- CfW - I can explore how the motion of objects can be affected by applying specific *forces* (Welsh Government, 2020).

Evident similarities can be seen in these statements: both focus on an object's motion and delineate what a student is capable of achieving through an 'I can…' declaration. Perhaps ironically in light of the 'improvements' to the capacities and purposes between the roll out of CfE and CfW, in the latter statements, there appears to be a deliberate attempt to provide practitioners and students with less guidance and greater freedom to learn independently. An argument could be made here that whilst CfE enables students to become 'successful learners' through providing more detailed guidance within its objectives; by providing less detail in the descriptor of learning within CfW, learners would be more likely to become 'ambitious, capable learners' as their need for self-discovery would be greater. However, as the statements were fashioned by classroom practitioners following the planners' delivery of the curriculum outlines, such consideration may be too profound.

More importantly, as both the Es and Os and the descriptors of learning (essentially objectives) number several hundred across the curriculum areas and AoLEs, the likelihood of learners being able to cover these effectively during their school years and to become successful, ambitious, capable learners could be viewed as optimistic. This is especially pertinent when considering that the curriculum covers 3-18 years and the sophistication of the language used would be beyond the vast majority of learners in early years' education. Therefore, in using statements which include the first-person declarative 'I can…' (developed by practitioners in the case of CfW), there is a clear disconnect between expected outcomes and reality. Thus, the "subjectivity of the experiences is misleading, an artifice devised by the planners rather than a true reflection of the learning process"

(Priestley and Humes, 2010, p.16): one which could be seen to be designed to deceptively devolve power to practitioners whilst dis-enabling their learners.

2.4.4 Why both CfE and CfW seem destined to fail many students

Despite an expert-ridden, much-vaunted rollout of Scotland's CfE following the instigation of a 'National Debate' of 2002, attempts to pacify parents and sway the public's perception that the nation was falling behind other countries economically as a result of an antiquated education system, appear to have failed. According to Professor Lindsay Paterson, Scotland's education system was "once the envy of the world" (Paterson, *Scottish Daily Mail*, 6th December, 2023). With such bombast being built upon with a curriculum which many believe is "the most significant curricula change in Scotland for a generation" (McAra *et al.*, 2013, p. 223), educationalists could be forgiven for thinking that the nation's education provision was once again covetable. Whilst the extensive global research and sound sentiment behind Scotland's curriculum reform was evidently well-intentioned, the resulting "botched" (Paterson, *Scottish Daily Mail,* 6th December, 2023) structure, as damned by Paterson, is clearly not the outcome desired.

During the Scottish Assessment Summit of September, 2019, the 'refreshed narrative' presented by the Scottish Government was telling in the aspects mined from the OECD 'Improving Schools in Scotland' report. Despite a governmental conviction that CfE aims to "ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need to flourish in life, learning and work" (Scottish Government, 2016) the explicitly cogent language extracted was evidently intent on sending a very clear message to proselytize sceptics. Staking claims such as CfE being the '*right* approach' for 21st century Scottish education; that there was a need for a '*strong*, *fresh* narrative' whilst

espousing an aim to '*powerfully* … *galvanise* activity and *enthusiasm'* (emphasis author's own) all point towards a determination to reinforce and reignite a curriculum in crisis. This view is further critiqued by Paterson who states that the 2021 OECD report was "shaped around the Scottish Government's agenda", damningly referring to its content as "partial, sycophantic and superficial" and believing it to be "shallow … [and] badly written, … [with] no systematic statistical evidence base" (Reform Scotland, 2023, p. 16)
Interestingly, according to Hayward and Hutchinson (2013), Scotland's was "not an education system in crisis" (p.63) citing the 2009 PISA results as evidence of progress. Travel forward a couple of testing rounds to 2015 and 2018, and the evaluation becomes very different. The 2002 National Debate had sparked a wider discussion about curriculum concerns. There was a belief that the 5-14 curriculum was too content heavy, with practitioners believing they had to plough through rather than take time to develop learning more deeply. Similarly, junior school teachers had become too reliant on national assessment, focusing on levels of achievement in the core subjects rather than enabling students to develop as enthused learners (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013).

As a result, in February 2003, a review of Scotland's curriculum was instigated. What better way to demonstrate a commitment to the next generation of children's education than to take the four values, including wisdom and compassion imprinted on the mace presented by Queen Elizabeth II on the opening of the Scottish parliament in 1999. From the earliest discussions about re-framing the curriculum, wisdom seemed to prevail as education professionals were asked by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) to provide their knowledge and advice throughout continuing consultations (Henderson, 2010). However, as communications committee member and early critic, David Cameron pointed out, despite his role being to promote the new re-framed CfE, the curriculum guidance was, according to

Buie, “a nightmare to read and a nightmare to use … [and was] not a document which teachers could use to change their practice” (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013, p.56). This has been recognised as,

> the difference between the attainment of those who are new to English and those who are fluent in English is greater in the later key stages (Department for Education, 2020, p. 4).

Thus, to ensure that students who arrive later in secondary school achieve results which reflect not just their English acquisition but their overall intelligence will require far more than identification on a PIE scale.

To consider Wittgenstein’s words at the opening of this chapter, without the language to be able to articulate one’s views, emotions, fears, lack of understanding, could leave EAL students bereft of support (Ratcliffe, 2016). Having been part of a school where at least 12% of learners were routinely classed as having EAL, with the curriculum changes taking place, now more than ever we need to ensure we listen and act, putting strategies in place to support these students. Without the fundamentals of language, or indeed a basic level of speech to be able to articulate themselves, it is difficult to see how EAL learners could become confident, much less enterprising and ethical.

Whilst the roots of CfW evidently grew from benevolent means, its moniker of *Successful Futures* could be seen as somewhat discordant. Whilst the vast majority of students may be able to access CfW’s 4Ps and to develop 21st century skills through discovery learning, those with ALN and EAL may not be quite so successful. In considering the influence of the global curricula, as well as what could be seen as CfW’s trial run with the introduction of Scotland’s CfE, it is clear that a number of educational concepts were combined to develop

Donaldson's Welsh vision. However, whilst the philosophy may seem utopic in its apparent prescience, in failing to consider those students who may be disadvantaged, a large number of students will be left unable to access a curriculum which prides itself on its 21st century eminence.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Overview

Much of the literature review focuses on the consideration of classroom practice and what this looks like for support staff and learners. Whilst Wales' devolution is covered as it can be seen as the catalyst for the changes which followed, importantly here, the review places the learner at the centre of both the curriculum and this study. The ways in which EAL learners have been perceived over the years is included, examining how students have often been viewed in terms of their 'otherness'. The review also considers the support provided for EAL and ALN learners and what this may look like in the classroom. Consideration is given to the lack of training and support provided for TAs which in turn impacts on the progress of EAL and ALN learners due to a lack of delineation between those who are EAL, ALN or indeed may be both.

3.1.1 A Split Begins to Emerge

As any senior leader involved in teaching and learning will attest, the introduction of a new curriculum in Wales was at once full of promise and truly terrifying in its pedagogical expectations. The scope of this chapter is to consider Wales' current educational philosophy, looking at how the country has reached its recent academic destination and the journey taken towards its arrival. This will include looking at the influence of CfE and Professor Donaldson's involvement, the impact of curriculum changes across the globe and how those disadvantaged learners: EAL and ALN students have been identified and supported across the years. In considering the implementation of CfW and its support of disadvantaged learners, it would be pertinent to provide contextual background to its inception.

Whilst various education acts have introduced numerous curriculum changes over centuries, fewer radical reformations of secondary education have taken place across the UK since the introduction of GCSEs in the 1988 Reform Act and the rolling out of league tables linked to the now beleaguered Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) in 1991 (https://revisesociology.com/2017/10/24/the-1988-education-reform-act-class-notes/). As Fisher (1998) points out, the 1988 Reform Act was "driven by an intention to dictate to state schools what was to be taught and how it was to be assessed in an attempt to control from the centre and drive up standards" (Kelly, 2009, p. 256). Key to the implementation of the Act as Fisher points out, was the desire to 'dictate', 'control' and 'drive' through curriculum reform which by its very nature was based upon a dictatorial paradigm.

Coupled with the requirement issued to schools to teach the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and Welsh over the border, was the view that marketisation of schools would provide greater parental choice for their child's education, leading to schools becoming more competitive and therefore more results-focused. Following parental access to the publication of the schools' league tables, parentocracy did indeed allow for greater educational choice. However, whilst it became possible to see which schools were posting the best results, critics began to question educational institutions' morality as allegations of teaching students to pass examinations as well as a 'dumbing down' of the testing were raised along with a narrowing of curriculum offers in order to spend more time teaching compulsory core subjects rather than creative subjects leading to a lack of consideration of students' welfare. (Fisher, 1998). It was on the back of the backlash to this Act, and the subsequent involvement in 2006 in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) where the testing of the ability of 15 year olds in reading, maths and

science is examined where a shift began to emerge which was to filter across the bridge to Wales (Ibid, 1998).

3.1.2 Educational Devolution

Education was devolved to Wales' Senedd in 1999. In so doing, our small nation avoided what some saw as "many of the antagonistic competitive features of the English system" (Andrews, 2011, p. 2). Just two years after devolution, Education Minister Jane Davidson set out the country's education vision for the next decade under a Welsh Labour government seeking to distance itself from Tony Blair's New Right policies in the Welsh Government's 2001 publication *The Learning Journey* (Evans, 2021). Demonstrating that desire for distance from Anglo educational policy, Davidson stated "we shall take our own policy direction where necessary, to get the best for Wales" (Welsh Government, 2001, p.2). Many saw this change of direction as an opportunity to move away from the traditional views of an English-imposed curriculum and to be more progressive in its thinking (Power, 2016, Jones and Roderick, 2003). In the view of education historians Jones and Roderick, there was a hope that the "Welsh Assembly would not just nibble at the edges of educational policy-making but would also conjure up a wider vision of an education system to serve the Welsh nation" (Jones and Roderick, 2003, p. 124). Rather than analogously considering small scale changes to Wales' education policies, the modifications which followed over the next few decades constituted a huge change in terms of the gulf created between England's and Wales' educational vision.

In 2001, just over a decade after they were introduced to appease parents, school league tables were ditched, followed by the phasing out of SAT testing for seven year olds in 2002 and eleven and fourteen year olds in 2005. With Wales seen as one of the "most heavily

high-stakes tested places in the world" (Archer, 2006, p.10) some critics saw this as a step taken too far too quickly. As David Reynolds, a Professor of Education argued, the Welsh Government's decision disregarded stakeholders' capacity to monitor results and to recognise improvement, claiming that testing was scrapped for solicitous reasons: to be "nice to people rather than nasty" (Ibid, 2006, p.10), suggesting it was done for gerrymandering purposes rather than to support the nation's learners.

Whilst abandoning mandatory testing was seen as revolutionary according to some critics, the winds of change were beginning to squall with fifteen year old Welsh students' involvement in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the first time in 2006 seen as "a major turning point for Welsh education post-devolution" (Evans, 2021, p.13). The poor performance recorded in these and following tests led to Leighton Andrews, the then Education Minister for Wales declaring during a speech that PISA was a "wake up call to a complacent system" (Andrews, 2011, p.3) and that its learners were not being sufficiently supported.

3.1.3 PISA results: their influence on a new curriculum

Further portentous misgivings surfaced with changes in ministerial positions: Jane Davidson being replaced after seven years by Jane Hutt who in turn was succeeded in post in 2009 by Leighton Andrews. Despite both Davidson and Andrews being Labour ministers, their educational positioning was diametrically opposed, with the changes brought in by Andrews inflammatorily considered a roller-coaster ride (Edwards, *WalesOnline*, 2013). During this time, educational reform was viewed by many as destabilising, with research commissioned by the OECD finding that,

> Head teachers and other stakeholders reported that the sheer number and often short time spans for schools to implement these

> reforms brought with them a risk of only partial implementation, or reform fatigue (OECD, 2017, p.44)

Davidson introduced the Foundation Phase across Wales' junior sector and the Welsh Baccalaureate in secondary schools, whilst Andrews relented on league tables, bringing back testing and school banding, shored up by literacy and numeracy frameworks published in 2013 closely followed by the introduction of tests that same summer (Welsh Assembly Government, 2013) which provided structure and comparison (Dixon, 2016). Gone were the overly-supportive, kindly ideals (Ibid, 2016) presented in the Welsh Government's 'cradle to grave' educational agenda *The Learning Country* under Davidson, with a laser focus on school banding and results re-introduced under Leighton Andrews demonstrating a huge shift in focus, "where knowledge is perceived as measurable and often explicitly defined" (Hennessy and McNamara, 2013, p. 9). One area upon which both ministers appeared to agree was a need to be part of PISA international testing. Ironically, whilst consensus had been reached, as Edwards stated, with the many and various changes to come, thus began "the white-knuckle ride for education in Wales" (Edwards, *WalesOnline*, 2013, p.12).

In what may now be seen as a hugely ironic statement, back in 2011, Andrews scoffed at the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove that "one of the advantages of devolution is that it allows England to be a laboratory for experiments" (Andrews, 2011, p. 3). What followed with subsequent PISA test results in the poor inaugural Welsh entry of 2006 and the even more disastrous results of 2009 was suffering the proverbial egg on face. As the Chief Inspector of Training and Education in Wales back in 2011, Ann Keane remarked, "the failure in Wales even to maintain what was a disappointing position in the results of the 2006 assessment raises many questions about our education system" (Ibid,

2011, p. 3). This failure, in the post-devolution era could be seen as a major educational turning point as Andrews saw it as "evidence of systemic failure" (ibid., 2011, p.3). Speaking on behalf of many people involved in education who held similar views at the time (Baroutsis and Lingard 2018), critics suggested it was time the country acknowledged its educational flaws and stopped being so unperturbed by the poor PISA rankings (Dauncey, 2016). This movement was summed up in Florian Waldow's 'PISA shock' article following Germany's ignominious testing performance (Waldow, 2009), echoes of which impacted on Wales' education policies moving forward. Comparing the nation to countries who spent similar amounts per head yet consistently performed very highly (Finland), and less per capita but outperformed Wales' fifteen year olds significantly (New Zealand), Andrews set about transforming education practices in Wales, supporting learners who he believed deserved better (Andrews, 2011). However, not everyone was convinced by PISA's "highly respected and robust measure[s]" (ibid., 2011, p. 5) as there was a distinct lack of data analysis (Jerrim *et al.,* 2018) and more worryingly, a complete disregard for limitations that had been raised (Jerrim, 2019; Rees and Taylor, 2015), wholly accepting the global measure as a panacea for Wales' education sector.

Ironically, despite Andrews' belief that PISA offered the robust measures that Wales needed to kickstart the improvement in its performance, this measure of student assessment was soon to be derided by over 80 global academics. In an open letter to Dr Andreas Schleicher, PISA's Director, these academics who believed the testing regime harmed children and impoverished classrooms, poured scorn on the performance measures so highly lauded by Andrews and his contemporaries just three cycles into its establishment. Perhaps most damningly, completely subverting Andrews' intentions, these academics stated that "no reform of any consequence should be based on a single narrow measure of quality" (*The*

Guardian, 2014, p. 7). Neither Andrews, nor his successors paid much heed, looking instead to global curriculum reform and seemingly adapting ideas from constructivist learning theory.

3.2 Consideration of Constructivist Learning Theory in the Classroom

Recent curriculum changes in countries such as America, New Zealand, Israel, Switzerland and Australia have been developed through a constructivist lens (Matthews, 1993). The concept of constructivism theorises that students should play an active part in their learning in order to deepen their understanding and therefore promote greater understanding, or in the words of Hein (1991) that they construct their learning independently. Hein believed that the reason behind learning was to construct meaning. Learning therefore takes place as individuals reflect on their individual experiential learning, absorbing new knowledge and creating more profound understanding. Importantly, constructivist theory suggests that learning is an active rather than a passive process. Whilst John Dewey (1938) believed that learning should be a social enterprise undertaken as a collective, Vygotsky (1978) proposed the centrality of community as a way of supporting individuals to create meaning. Influenced by Marxism, Vygotsky advocated that there were two key aspects which supported the building of knowledge and the composition of meaning. One is the psychological tools which allow learners to create new pathways and acquire new skills; the second is the importance of socialisation: the role of one's peers and adults and the modelling which takes place as part of a child's learning. As far back as 2010, researchers were beginning to recognise the shift from teachers having sole responsibility for learners' pedagogy to the student being more involved in a choice of what they were learning: the concept of "learning to learn" (Young, 2010; Muller, 2000).

Despite Donaldson's insistence that in his CfW outline, there is no "appropriate teaching and learning approach", a major shift in the way in which students are expected to learn is fundamental to its successful future (Donaldson, 2015, p.65). Students are supported to become - amongst other aspects - ambitious, capable, enterprising and creative contributors to society (Ibid, 2015). As part of this educational journey, students are expected to take risks and to become autonomous discovery learners rather than passive recipients of a didactic approach. This change is one that is being globally promoted, with schools investing in developing what's known as 'Innovative Learning Environments' or ILEs. The development of ILEs has become popular in countries such as Australia and New Zealand due to research into traditional teaching methods and their lack of alignment with how students learn (Jones and Le Fevre, 2021); Imms and Thomas, 2021). Importantly, what researchers have discovered is that if ILEs are to become effective in classrooms, practitioners have to develop a new way of thinking within learning spaces as well as a new way of teaching (Jones and Le Fevre, 2021; Bradbeer, 2021). A study of international education carried out by the OECD (2013), acknowledged that seven overarching principles should be seen to exist in order for an ILE to be recognised. Two of those seven principles included the requirement to:

- Recognise the learners as its core participants, encourage their active engagement, and develop in them an understanding of their own activity as learners ("self-regulation").

- Be founded on the social nature of learning and actively encourage group work and well-organised co-operative learning (OECD, 2013, p.16).

Both of these principles clearly reflect Donaldson's view of the prerequisites needed to enable students to become 21st century learners, whilst echoing Vygotsky's constructivist philosophy. A key term used to describe such innovation is that linked with John Hattie from his 2009 text *Visible Learning,* where he writes of the desire to transform and the dismissal

of traditional teaching ideals. As the OECD clearly state, the concept of 'visible learning' is paramount within ideas of leadership of teaching and learning, demonstrating,

> the need to transform schools into formative organisations, so that the whole environment is drawing lessons from the learning taking place and constantly redesigning as a consequence (Ibid, 2013, p.18).

This view mirrors that of Bradbeer, who believes that,

> ILEs and the pedagogical affordances they offer are considered to more readily support diverse requirements of 'twenty-first Century learners' than traditional classroom-based environments (Bradbeer, 2021a, pp.47 and 48).

Aligning this with CfW, a significant amount of professional development would be required for teachers to change the endemic acceptance that it is a teacher's role to lead learning more traditionally rather than developing innovative spaces where adventurous learning takes place. This would be particularly pertinent when considering the support required for disadvantaged learners, especially in terms of roles and expectations of TAs within twenty-first century classrooms.

3.3 The Role of Support Staff in the Classroom

The Swann Report (1985), otherwise entitled *Education for All* reflected on the provision for children from ethnic minority groups. Believing that students who spoke EAL were unfairly disadvantaged, the report advocated that schools should foster the "linguistic diversity of our society and a real understanding of the role and function of language in all its forms" (Swann, 1985, p.429). In terms of consideration of EAL students' education, the Swann Report argued against the withdrawal of students from classrooms on linguistic grounds, seeing it as educationally unacceptable to prevent socialisation taking place. There was a belief that students' linguistic needs would be met by including them within the mainstream

teaching in the classroom, having a “responsibility to cater for the linguistic needs of these pupils” (Swann, 1985, p.427, Frederickson and Cline, 2015).

Just a year after the publication of *Education for All*, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) published a report condemning the actions of Calderdale Borough Council following an inspection of their schools’ language units, where it found learners had “no access to a normal school environment” (CRE, 1986, p.9). As important as the decision to develop inclusive classroom provision for EAL students was, just as significant was the recognition of the need for appropriate training and support for teachers to provide for these learners’ needs. In a radical shift away from the belief that immersing EAL students in the English language would best serve their language acquisition, the expectation for LEAs and schools to “provide all teachers, through induction and in-service training …to appreciate the nature of the difficulties children may be experiencing with English” (Swann, 1985, p. 427) was raised. There was similarly a recognition within the CRE’s report that demands on staff supporting EAL students should not be disproportionate and that the additional support they need should not detract teachers’ attention away from other students (CRE, 1986). Whilst education provision for EAL learners did not change immediately, the mid-1980s onwards heralded, “the end of a particular historical phase” (Costley, 2014, p.283) which included non-native English speakers being integrated and welcomed into classrooms rather than being segregated and marginalised.

In an attempt to fully integrate all students into an educationally inclusive environment, there has been a drive to embed diversity into schools’ ethos of educational practices (Welply, 2023). Along with the recognition that segregating students is unethical and leads to their denigration and ostracisation (Frederickson and Cline, 2015), is the requirement to

meet the linguistic needs of all students, employing EAL co-ordinators and specialist TAs to support their learning as part of mainstream education.

According to a report by the Education Endowment Foundation (2018), TAs can positively affect students' attainment and engagement when utilised effectively. In order to support the drive for greater inclusion of ALN students into mainstream education, numbers of TAs employed has risen exponentially (Sharples *et al.*, 2018). What the research into the deployment of TAs has highlighted is the lack of time afforded to teachers and assistants to plan for students' learning, the failure of senior teams to provide support and an absence of professional development to improve pedagogical understanding (Sharples *et al.*, 2018; Gaipov and Brownhill, 2021; Neaum and Noble, 2023). The suggestion is that most communication regarding teaching and support for students takes place during impromptu meetings and is often reliant on the goodwill of the TAs as these meetings are held outside of their working hours (Sharples *et al.*, 2018; Hicks *et al.*, 2022).

Conversely, teachers also state a lack of training with regard to managing the TAs with whom they work, as well as no allocated time to plan with or support them (Sharples *et al.*, 2018). This leads to a lack of effective lesson preparation for both parties and ultimately, students missing out on tailored support. As such, studies suggest there is an evident need to reconsider the way in which TAs are deployed in the classroom (Neaum and Noble, 2023; Webster and Blatchford, 2013)

An area which has been clearly overlooked in terms of support is the provision of professional development for TAs and support staff. Studies suggest that professional development can "increase teaching self-efficacy, knowledge of pedagogical strategies, and

beliefs about how people learn" (Hicks *et al.*, 2022, p.2). In recent years, with the recognition that TAs provide essential support (and in some cases fulfil an element of teaching), studies have been carried out to evaluate their impact and the effectiveness from the way in which they are deployed. The 'Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants' (2011) report split their consideration into three categories, one of which recognised a need for teachers and TAs to meet to prepare together, with a further aim to develop their communication with their charges to create greater independence. Such requirements would be evident from teacher feedback, and would be especially pertinent following the introduction of CfW due to a need to support those students such as those with EAL who would struggle with the introduction of greater independence and autonomy within lessons.

The Education Endowment Foundation's guidance report 'Making the Best use of Teaching Assistants' (2018) sets out clear guidelines covering the most effective ways to ensure TAs are supported and are able in turn to support the charges with whom they work. Considering three specific areas, the report provided seven recommendations for how best to support TAs with their role. These included:

- Supporting students to manage their own learning and to become more independent
- Employing structured intervention to deliver one-to-one and small group sessions
- Developing connections from everyday classroom teaching and making explicit connection with interventions provided (Sharples, Blatchford and Webster, 2018)

When considering CfW's 4Ps, having an understanding of how best to support students to become more independent and to consider everyday teaching would be fundamental to its implementation. The provision of professional development, which is often not considered

for TAs can increase their "self-efficacy, knowledge of pedagogical strategies, and beliefs about how people learn" (Hicks *et al.*, 2022, p.3). This would clearly make a marked difference if provided for TAs to support the implementation of the new curriculum and their own understanding prior to the expectation to support their charges. Studies of professional development provision for TAs have shown that when delivered in a structured manner, with modelling and effective reflection, they were more likely to provide better student-centred support (Ibid, 2022, p.14). A recent survey by UNISON Cymru, published in November, 2023, found that 66% of TAs from 409 who responded stated they had not received sufficient training to be able to support the delivery of CfW (*Tenby Observer*, November, 2023). In one county, Ceredigion, the number who felt ill-equipped rose to 84%. Instead of joining the teaching staff to learn more about the new curriculum's demands, TAs claimed they were asked to photocopy resources and clean classrooms making them feel woefully unprepared to support their charges in the classroom. As TAs may be "in the best position to advocate for those children with additional needs who may not have the confidence to put their hand up in class, or share their ideas with a group" (Bowles *et al.*, 2018, p.21), support for TAs, along with the provision of effective professional development is imperative.

Whilst John Furlong's 2015 paper outlining recommended changes proposes a need for teachers to be upskilled with the 'knowledge and dispositions' to drive CfW's challenging changes, he also recognises that such training "is not available in Wales" (Furlong, 2015, p. 38). No mention is made of the need to ensure teachers are able to support students with ALN let alone considering those who are EAL. Only scant reference is made of disadvantaged children, suggesting that in a similar way to Donaldson, these students have been ill considered.

It is hardly surprising that despite teacher numbers in mainstream schools remaining constant, the numbers of TAs has "more than trebled since 2000: from 79,000 to 246,700" (Sharples *et al.*, 2018, p. 5). As the need to constantly improve examination results continues to fall on teachers' shoulders, expectation therefore cascades down onto classroom assistants and bilingual specialists to support EAL and ALN students to gain access to mainstream curricula. Such support is complicated by the views of TAs and the lack of support they feel they receive from teachers, especially those in secondary education. In the Education Endowment Foundation's 2018 report considering the best use of TAs, many classroom assistants stated they had little time to discuss expectations with teachers, feeling 'underprepared' for requests made of them. They stated that they had to "tune in" to what the teacher was imparting in order to understand expectations of students (Ibid, 2018, p. 8). Additionally, when TAs did work with students who required support, it tended to be "reactive rather than proactive" as their main focus was to ensure their charge(s) completed tasks as opposed to understanding and acquiring new skills (Neaum and Noble, 2023, p. 70).

With much focus within CfW being on discovery or experiential learning, and students' expectation to embrace greater autonomy within lessons, the role of TAs is bound for change. However, with overall emphasis being placed on teachers' understanding of and ability to deliver CfW, and the concerns that this in itself will be a mammoth undertaking, support for TAs may well be relegated to afterthought status. When one considers that in primary schools, TAs outnumber teachers by approximately 25,000, whilst in secondary schools the ratio is roughly one TA to every four teachers, failure to consider the need to provide professional development for classroom assistants seems questionable (Sharples *et al.*, 2018, p. 5). This, it would appear, could be a major stumbling block as not only will these

vital classroom assistants be deprived of an understanding of the how, what and why of CfW, but their role in supporting those in greatest need in what will conceivably be a whole new way of learning has been entirely overlooked.

3.4 Defining EAL and Perceived Otherness

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world".

(Wittgenstein, 1922, p.74)

The term used for students who undergo their learning in a country where the predominant language is English is EAL, or English as an Additional Language. Whilst this is a widely used term, now employed more readily than the perhaps more constrictive, English as a Second Language label which relegated other languages through subjugation, it still continues to confound (www.esl.uchicago.edu). Due to the breadth of the term's coverage, it provides no degree of aptitude, offering no consideration as to the level of an individual's English ability or usage. Therefore EAL students could be classed as those who may be newly arrived to a country and speak no English at all or those who are second or third generation, part of an ethnic minority who speak English on a daily basis and are fluent, confident speakers (Strand and Lindorff, 2020, p. 8). Somewhat nonsensically until very recently, all of these students would have been lumped together and seen as having the same learning requirements due to their EAL classification.

Historically, as far back as the 1975 Bullock Report, there has been the view that, "no child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as (s)he crosses the school threshold" (Gillard, 2024, p. 286). Whilst this may have been the culturally supportive view espoused by the government of the time, in practice the reality has clearly differed as

it is only very recently that students' needs have been more seriously considered. Over a number of decades, the way in which students classed as EAL have been considered has varied. From socially and linguistically isolating students through the establishment of language bases where they were placed until they were deemed 'ready' to assimilate, through to training specialist teaching assistants to support EAL students by accompanying them to lessons (Graf, 2011). However, whilst there has been a demonstrable exhibition of support for EAL provision, underlying these displays appears to be a distinct moral turpitude towards such students' learning.

In what could be perceived as conceit, according to a broadly accepted definition, "EAL students are those students whose first language is a language or dialect other than English" (Taplin, 2017, p. 48). When more people speak Spanish and Mandarin than English across the globe, why then do we feel the need to define speakers who may be multilingual as having *English* as an Additional Language? Elevating English to the top of the linguistic podium implies that it should be the unequivocal chosen language of communication, which by assimilation makes it the langue academique. For students who arrive on UK shores with little to no English, this immediately creates a linguistic dissonance as they are plunged into an alien sounding world. Whilst the consideration of supporting displaced students has been debated for decades, never has it been more pertinent than in 21st century Britain (UNESCO, 2019). However, whilst there is evidently a recognition of a need to support such students, the reality is that our understanding of their needs would appear woefully inadequate. As a result, our determination to preserve our Anglo-entrenched linguistic norms continues to isolate such students who "tend to be viewed as less competent", and multilingualism seen as a "problem or a barrier to successful learning" (Welply, 2023, p. 63).

This has led to criticism of educational policies which are seen by many as discriminatory, and by others as "21st-century linguistic apartheid" (Combs *et al.*, 2014, p. 36)

One of the effects seen in students who find themselves forced into learning in English is their desire to no longer speak in their mother tongue as well as suffering low self-esteem (Choudry, 2021, p. 73). These two aspects suggest that in expecting students to adopt a whole new language of learning in order to access a whole new and different curriculum, they feel a sense of 'linguistic otherness' where their home language becomes "constructed as deficient and illegitimate" (Welply, 2023, p. 65). Such a sense of 'Otherness' is fostered within government guidelines in England, which espouses that students studying English Literature throughout secondary school are given the "chance to develop culturally and acquire knowledge of the best that has been thought and written" (Department for Education 2013, p. 3). Whilst focusing on the likes of Chaucer and Shakespeare may be thought to develop the acquisition of the 'best' that has been written, it becomes what has been termed "particular and exclusive" when studied by those who have no cultural or linguistic connection to the English canon (Iffath, 2020, p. 369).

The idea that EAL students would be fortunate to have access to these cultural highlights implies that they should be thankful for being given the opportunity to be exposed to such elevated prose. There appears to be little to no consideration for the language difficulties they would face, merely a recognition of the gratitude these students should display. Moreover, in assigning supremacy to its

> very specific version of the English literary heritage, … the national curriculum is perpetuating a narrative …whereby other cultures are forcibly excluded from what it means to be English and construed as indisputably inferior (Ibid, 2020, p. 370)

Therefore, whilst considering that the most appropriate English literature learning experiences for EAL students would be to "appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage, schools' desire would be to assimilate rather than accommodate" (Department for Education, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, despite a recognition for a need to identify the conceit displayed in considering English as the pinnacle of educational provision, EAL students continue to be left with less opportunity to access their learning.

3.4.1 Identification of and Provision for EAL Learners

The identification of EAL students' needs may, according to Strand and Lindorff, be somewhat inequitable, however what of the strategies used to support those who have been identified as having EAL needs in Wales. Positively, an effort to address the different levels of EAL was introduced in 2009, with a scale from A (New to English) through to E (fluent) being used to assess Proficiency in English (PIE) levels. (Strand and Lindorff, 2020, p. 10) Using this scale, students' linguistic abilities can be tracked over time and their provision more readily adapted to suit their needs. Whilst seemingly dated, Cann's (2009) study of the approaches and support systems is interesting as it provides an insight into an effective system which identifies good practice in supporting students with EAL.

With support strategies including withdrawal from certain subjects along with intense language work as part of an EAL base, Cann's research demonstrates how provision has developed in the twenty-first century. Whilst this provision had clearly moved on from the segregation afforded to students in the 1980s, where they would attend language units (Spafford and Bolloten, 2006), often set up in booths with limited social interaction, even in today's schools it is far from wholly effective, with many schools still having to rely on local authority provision which in itself is patchy (Estyn, 2021).

Whilst it may be claimed that Wales is at the forefront of support for English as an Additional Language, EAL students, with the Proficiency in English (PIE) test developed here in 2009, make up 3%, of Wales' pupil population. With 'White Other' comprising the largest ethnic minority group, making up more than a quarter of students (Welsh Government, 2020a), this should be hardly surprising. As Strand and Lindorff's (2020) work with 'The Bell Foundation' shows, despite the use of the PIE test, the variation in identification is vast. To take one example from local authorities which border one another geographically: Cardiff and Newport, their approaches to assessing students' proficiency in English is vastly different. With these two cities having 60% of all the EAL students in Wales, it could be assumed that the opportunity to develop standardisation of assessment would be straightforward. However, with just 7% of Reception class EAL students adjudged as fluent in Newport, compared with 37% in Cardiff, it seems that these variations suggest it is down to a significant amount of interpretation rather than the provision of reliable data. Additionally, the percentage of EAL students declines between Year 6 and Year 7, as secondary schools commonly conflate identified EAL students with those needing language support (Strand and Lindorff, 2020, p. 11). This demonstrates the need to ensure correct identification of EAL students so that effective, focused support can be put in place which continues through and beyond transition.

One reason for the lack of effective provision proposed by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is that it is the responsibility of all teachers "no real need for mandatory EAL teaching qualifications or specialist teachers as language development is the responsibility of all teachers" (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1996, p.2). This view is hugely problematic however, as – to refer to Wittgenstein's statement that limited

language allows for limited understanding – without specialised support for language acquisition, EAL students will struggle to move beyond the recall phase. Students may give the impression of being fluent (Cummins, 1979), though a more profound cognitive understanding will take much longer, as Thomas and Collier's (1997) study showed: "up to 10 years or more" (1997, p. 36). In order to succeed in tests and assessments, students require well-developed skills in language for academic purposes. It is therefore important to take account of a student's English language development when interpreting test results. (Leung and Scott, 2009, p. 11) The lack of consideration of EAL students' ability to comprehend on a deeper level reflects a dissonance between schools' desire to assimilate their learners believing them to be linguistically adept and the students' inability to understand the assessment outcomes expected of them.

According to assessment guidance provided by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in 2006, there are many reasons why bilingual learners do not perform as well as expected. Reasons why include a student's insufficient experience of academic language or that the assessment fails to consider possible disparity between a student's intellect and their linguistic development. Where prior academic attainment will invariably have been ignored, a student's inability to access the curriculum would be considered to be a lack of ability rather than a poor acquisition of English skills. Thus rather than allowing a student to be assessed to determine their cognitive ability, they would be judged on their linguistic (in)ability alone.

This conflicts with advice given where, "the recommended approach to assessment is to develop a profile of the pupil and to sample broadly across subjects, collating information from different staff, the pupil, and the parents" (Leung and Scott, 2009, p. 12). It also

reflects the inadequacy felt by practitioners where, "newly qualified teacher (NQT) annual surveys show that EAL remains one of the key areas that teachers feel less prepared to teach" (Department for Education, 2018, p. 17). Therefore due to the teachers' lack of confidence in supporting EAL students, their true needs wouldn't be considered or reflected within the classroom. As Leung and Scott point out, EAL has seen very little development as it is

> not a subject in its own right; there is no separate EAL assessment framework. So EAL learners are assessed, or more precisely tested, against a common set of attainment targets in all subjects, including English (Leung and Scott, 2009, p. 10)

which highlights a key issue as these students are being measured against a homogenous set of objectives which fail to account for EAL students' very different learning needs.
One key difference between the assessment undertaken in England and that carried out in Wales is the greater role that teacher rather than external assessment plays. This forms a core role within the new CfW framework, which could provide some hope for future EAL provision in Wales, as "educational environment that puts a good deal of premium on teacher assessment is likely to be sensitive to student needs" (Leung and Scott, 2009, p. 11).

Conversely however, it is this very teacher assessment which practitioners have stated they feel less confident carrying out, with just 41% of secondary school teachers stating that they felt well prepared (Department for Education, 2018). With CfW in its infancy and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales being overhauled to become more research orientated, it will be interesting to note whether teachers' confidence begins to grow and EAL students' outcomes begin to benefit as a result.

3.4.2 EAL in Schools

Of the 8.1 million students in state-funded schools in England in 2018, some 1.6 million or 18% were considered EAL (Department for Education, 2020, p. 4). With such high numbers recognised and these growing year on year, there could be an expectation for provision to be more tailored and for smoother integration into education across the UK. From the 1960s right up until the mid-1980s, EAL students were removed from mainstream education and taught in separate language bases. This practice was outlawed by the Calderdale judgement of 1986 which deemed this segregation discriminatory (Choudry, 2021, p. 67). Whilst such separation may be seen as counter-intuitive as a lack of exposure to and immersion in the English language would have invariably slowed the process of language acquisition, it may have supported an individual's initial integration.

In England, following these changes, local authorities (LEAs) supported schools by fulfilling a need where specialist trained teachers were not available to upskill students to be able to access the curriculum. With the emphasis on inclusion and moving away from specific provision for EAL students, the 2013 English National Curriculum merely skirted over such need, focusing instead on the "universalism of English education and an emphasis on mainstreaming" (Evans *et al.*, 2020, . 27). However, whilst teachers have been responsible for teaching EAL students in their classroom in England since 2011, there has been a recognition of,

> the difficulty of carrying out 'truly' inclusive practices and mainstreaming for EAL students in an educational system that was overwhelmingly anglocentric, privileging whiteness and English culture across the curriculum (Welply, 2023, p. 70)

Thus the desire of many LEAs to be seen as inclusive and non-discriminatory results in the very outcome they are aiming to avoid, thereby leaving EAL students excluded and unable to partake in the proffered learning.

Another issue with the provision for EAL students, especially in rural areas is the lack of effective training and support for staff. Rather than seeking to upskill staff, Murakami found that EAL student underachievement was affected by their lack of "language proficiency [or] cognitive ability" (Murakami, 2008, p. 265). Additionally, Franson's (1999) study of 3 primary schools on the outskirts of London found that teachers were "often left to manage as best they can" (1999, p. 68). Part of the reason for this is because EAL is considered a 'general' rather than a 'specific' teaching and learning concern (Leung, 2007), becoming a type of catch all term with almost all students, regardless of their linguistic ability or experiences, placed into mainstream English classes which "masks huge heterogeneity" (Murakami, 2008, Welply, 2023, p. 64).

Without detailed diagnoses taking place when students who are EAL arrive in schools, any further learning obstacles which may require support such as dyslexia would remain undetected. As an EAL practitioner in a school has acknowledged,

> in practice, there really is not much acknowledgement of the relationship between SEN and EAL…where EAL students might actually have special educational needs, schools tend to think 'well we can't really tell if that pupil is 'SEN' because they are also EAL' so they drag their heels with a diagnosis that might actually help that child. They would not take that long with a native English speaker. (Welply, 2023, p. 76)

Learners' lack of language becomes a barrier, raising a multitude of questions which remain unanswered as the singular focus becomes the students' inability to access the curriculum. This in itself raises further issues such as the need for scaffolding, differentiation or

effective teaching assistant support or even, more contentiously, when considering the insistence upon teaching the English canon, that a more befitting culturally diverse curriculum could be introduced.

3.4.3 EAL Within the Classroom: How Additional Language Speakers are Supported

Since the first use of the term English as a second language (ESL) in the 1950s, when a large number of immigrants settled in England and needed to be integrated into English-speaking schools, there has been much debate as to how best to support these learners (Costley, 2014). Coming on the back of the arrival of HMS Empire Windrush with its commonwealth passengers arriving on British shores to fill vacancies in the labour market brought about post-war skills shortages (Mead, 2009), and bolstered by the 1948 British Nationality Act which removed the requirement of a visa to obtain employment (DES, 1971), the 1950s represented a significant growth in the immigrant population. This in turn led to an increase in student numbers in schools which were, at the time, overwhelmingly "monolingual, monocultural institutions" (Edwards, 1984, p. 49).

Consideration for these students, whose language would undoubtedly not have even been second language English was overlooked as their arrival was seen as transitory, with many believing they were "not here to stay" (Levine, 1996, p. 12) and others viewing them as "alien visitors" (Stubbs, 1985, p.11). Being seen as migrants as opposed to immigrants, classroom provision for EAL learners was not a consideration as there was a belief that students would be 'absorbed' into the education system, picking up enough English to get through their temporary stay (Edwards, 1984). There was an expectation upon the student arrivals to integrate, with a belief that the greater their cultural appropriation, the more likely they were to do well in society. Education therefore provided "caring but short-term,

reforms that would get things back to 'normal' as quickly as possible" (Levine, 1996, p.12), with the best way to assimilate these learners being to treat them as if they were "just another child" (Derrick, 1977, p.3).

By the 1960s, the 'caring', 'short-term reforms', were no longer apparent, with political concerns being raised about the effect "ethno-linguistic diversity was having on the overall standards teaching and education in general" (Costley, 2014, p.279). Fears were raised about the dilution of language and the impact this would have on the "academic standards and scholarly attainments of the indigenous students" (Leung and Franson, 2001, p.155) with the most extreme views believing that Britain's schools were becoming "irretrievably immigrant" (Edwards, 1984, p. 52).

It was not until the mid to late 1960s that the 1966 Act (HMSO, 1966) combined with the Schools' Council report *English for the Children of Immigrants* (1967) and the Plowden Report (1967) that consideration for providing support for non-native speakers was made, advocating the "bringing together of non-English-speaking children in one school for English classes" (Edwards, 1984, p.51), making use of what was termed Section 11 funding to support the needs of children arriving in the UK from across the Commonwealth (HMSO, 1966). This support took the form of complete withdrawal into 'language labs' until such time as the EAL students were deemed 'ready' to re-integrate; partial withdrawal, where sessions were provided during lunchtime or after-school sessions or immersion: placing non-native speakers into mainstream classes where they were expected to acquire English naturally (Costley, 2014). With the publication of the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE, 1986) report about the organisation of EAL teaching in Calderdale, there was a clear

recognition that separating students merely strengthened feelings of difference amongst both sets of learners, whilst limiting access to pedagogical experiences and opportunities.

With numbers continuing to rise across the British Isles in the following half a century, due consideration continues as to the most effective linguistic and pedagogic support which should be offered to EAL learners (Baker and Jones, 1998, Leung, 2001, Andrews, 2009; Costley, 2014). As such, expectations are placed on practitioners to ensure inclusivity within the classroom as well as providing creative and effective ways to engage additional language learners (Safford and Collins, 2007; Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). In a bid to ensure students who have EAL requirements are given equitable opportunity in terms of curriculum access, they are now part of mainstream lessons rather than being taught in separate language classes (Harris and Leung, 2001; Szymczyk et al., 2022). Whilst this may have removed potential stigma and isolation of additional language students, a lack of consideration for those teachers and teaching assistants expected to support their needs is evident (Coleman, 2010). The failure to recognise a need for professional development in order to effectively support learners would clearly impact on practitioners' ability to support EAL students in the classroom thereby leaving them potentially frustrated and the students theoretically facing greater inequality (Lucas and Villegas, 2010; Miller *et al.*, 2005).

Worryingly, critics of the National Curriculum for England (Department for Education, 2013) highlight the lack of support for EAL students within the mainstream curriculum (Leung, 2005; Gaipov and Brownhill, 2021). Added to this is the recognition that despite advocating inclusivity within mainsteam for EAL students in the National Curriculum, no provision is proposed with regard to differentiation between native English speakers and those who are EAL (Costley, 2014). Whilst Leung (2016) has recognised that a mere ninety-four words are

used in England's National Curriculum document to refer to EAL, this pales into insignificance in Donaldson's CfW proposals as there is no reference to additional language learners whatsoever. Research focusing on EAL provision has increased in recent years, though this has tended to consider primary rather than secondary school provision (Hall, 2018).

As Safford and Collins (2007) suggest, greater consideration of subjects taught as part of a secondary curriculum highlight the "additional linguistic, cognitive and cultural demands on learners with EAL, as each subject area requires different levels and types of language use on the part of learners" (Gaipov and Brownhill, 2021, p.761). This creates further difficulties for secondary school teachers as they need to consider both the content being delivered, as well as the language barriers faced by EAL learners during their planning (Miller, Windle and Yazdanpanah, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2013). Perhaps more pertinent is the perceived reasoning behind why these difficulties and language barriers remain. As Welply (2023) considers,

> monolingualism in Europe is firmly embedded within educational systems, which have failed to adapt to new forms of linguistic diversity brought on by increased migration and mobility (Welply, 2023, p.63; Barbour and Carmichael, 2000; Mignolo, 1992; Mbembe and Mabanckou, 2018).

Greater recognition of the difficulties faced by those EAL students as well as the staff charged with supporting them needs to be considered.

3.4.4 Bringing EAL Learners 'into the fold'

Notions of inclusivity provide an idealistic view of students' assimilation whereby they disregard the cultural and political experiences which EAL students have abandoned upon arriving - often displaced - in their new home in the UK. In our yearning for students to acculturate and osmose linguistically, we conveniently overlook essential aspects such as "equitable assessment" and "inclusion" (Welply, 2022, p. 64). With regard to education in

Wales, in contrast to Mererid Hopwood's belief that it is possible to find a common root which deep down binds us all to the same history, there will always be a disconnect between those raised within a particular culture and those seen as outsiders as a lack of shared etymology creates a schism between language and access to cultural capital (Hopwood, 2019).

Furthermore, in delivering a curriculum which is "rooted in Welsh values and culture" (Welsh Government, 2019, p. 3), EAL students will feel a further detachment as the accessibility of the folktales and sense of belonging or 'Cynefin' experienced by students native to Wales will be totally foreign. Therefore, despite the numbers of EAL students registered in schools in Wales who are fluent in English dropping from 44% to 27% (Welsh Government, 2015, p. 3), the provision remains unequal.

Wales' new curriculum has stated its intention to,

> support education professionals and practitioners to enjoy the autonomy to make school-level decisions within a common framework, and to design and develop curricula relevant to the context and specific needs of learners (Welsh Government, 2019, p. 6).

Providing schools with the freedom to design and deliver their own curricula would appear to be a sensible strategy. Moreover, allowing schools to contextualise students' learning, placing the needs of specific learners at the forefront of how curricula are delivered could potentially revolutionise differentiation across the capital. The potential for success with the changes being implemented by CfW has been recognised as,

> with the likelihood in Wales of a higher degree of linguistic awareness in an official bilingual national policy, there are clearly possibilities of innovation and development (Leung and Scott, 2009, p. 12).

With 36,835 students classed as EAL out of approximately 460,000 learners across the whole of Wales in 2022, consideration of their specific needs would be welcomed, especially

as “attainment increases with greater English proficiency at all key stages” (Department for Education, 2020, p. 4). However, with 22,430 classed as being at Stage C, developing Confidence on the PIE scale, this leaves just 14,405 students who could be adjudged as competent in their English acquisition (www.statswales.gov.wales). Whilst the assessment of and recognition that EAL students can be categorised into five different groups according to their levels of English and therefore specifically supported is worthy, this would merely be the beginning of the learning process. The fact that EAL students’ English acquisition skills are being categorised in Wales is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. However, whilst the collation of data enables identification, getting the individualised support which follows right, will be paramount.

3.4.5 Not confusing EAL with ALN

Recognition of the need for support in the classroom is presented by the Education Endowment Foundation’s paper, written by Sharples, Webster and Blatchford (2018) who consider the most effective use of TAs both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as considering learning within everyday contexts. TA support takes many different forms, though this will invariably be executed according to the class teacher’s instruction. With particular regard to EAL students, this would be carried out through one-to-one or small group targeted support which could include adapting work, delivering content, dealing with anxiety or managing behavioural issues (Neaum and Noble, 2023). Alongside TA support, specific consideration when supporting EAL learners should be given to policy implementation, funding, parent-school communication and perhaps most importantly, assessment (Evans *et al.*, 2016). A framework to support EAL coordinators and senior management teams was devised by Evans *et al.* to provide guidance for EAL learners’ needs. Importantly therefore, classroom practitioners should be encouraged to question their own

pre-conceived ideas they may hold about students' needs, considering their 'decision-making' and "ways in which their attitudes constitute a barrier to learning" (Conn and Hutt, 2020, p.154).

Further barriers to learning for EAL students arise as a result of a lack of understanding amongst teachers as to how to support learners in their classrooms. Not only are teachers poorly equipped as part of their teacher training to recognise the needs of EAL learners, they also struggle to appreciate the difference between a learner's language barrier and having an educational need. As a result, "pupils from minority groups are twice as likely to be diagnosed as having SEN than monolingual children" (Strand and Lindorff, 2021, p.8). The SEND Code of Practice, in 6.24, states that "Difficulties related solely to limitations in English as an additional language are not SEN", and urges great care in making assessments as to whether there is a special educational needs issue as well. (Department for Education, 2015, p. 96)

A number of teachers interviewed in relation to the impact the reformed curriculum would have on those students who were disadvantaged stated that they felt it would prove beneficial. However, when asked to provide examples of how these groups of students would be better off, concrete examples were not forthcoming (Newton, *Western Mail,* 2018).

This failure to consider the impact such fundamental changes could have on learners disadvantaged either due to poverty or due to an inability to access learning: ALN or EAL students, appears to be a major stumbling block for Donaldson's CfW vision. Such "tensions and unaddressed issues" flagged by Nigel Newton highlight the need for continuing

research, as “failure to do so may leave children with something far less beneficial than their teachers hope for” (Ibid., 2018, p. 12). To expect teachers and students to enter into a whole new way of teaching and learning based on the premise of *hope* would seem naïve in the extreme. With specific reference to EAL students, the clear ‘unaddressed issue’ pertains to their ability to learn through the medium of English. Currently in Wales, students who are classed as EAL represent approximately 8% of the population (Welsh Assembly Government, 2015, p.11). As the vast majority of these young people come from ethnic minority backgrounds where English is not spoken at home, they are reliant on schools to support their acquisition of academic English, which in turn can leave them “significantly disadvantaged” in their capacity for learning (Ibid., 2015, p. 9). Studies have shown that linguistic attainment continues to be a key factor affecting the performance of EAL pupils “… [identifying] a strong correlation between fluency in English and academic achievement” (Ibid., 2015, p.9). Considering the amount of time it is suggested it takes to reach the stage where academic competence is achieved is between five and ten years, expecting EAL students to be able to access the new curriculum, aside from undergoing assessment in such, seems wholly optimistic (Collier, 1989, p. 509).

As Donaldson himself writes,

> Competence in literacy, including competence in the spoken word, syntax and spelling, is essential for learning across the curriculum, not least because of the fundamental role of language in thinking (Donaldson, 2015, p.40).

Whilst the ability to speak, write and mentally compute in a particular language would be indisputable in terms of being able to understand one’s learning, what is not considered is which language is actually being referred to here. The assumption would be English, though considering the cross-curricula skill is being embedded in Wales’ curriculum, perhaps this supposition would be premature. What is clearly not considered is that this competence

could be required of a student whose first language is not English or Welsh. This suggests complications on two levels: firstly an EAL student would be unable to access the learning taking place due to their 'other tongue' and secondly, a student's thinking, considered by Donaldson to be predicated upon their linguistic prowess, would be curtailed due to an inability to access the learning taking place. Thus the grandiosity of the statement, which in essence is perfectly reasonable, upon closer inspection affirms the lack of consideration given to learners who may be linguistically disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

When considering the rationale behind the development of the *Language, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE)*, Donaldson extends his consideration of the importance of language as "the essence of thinking [being] integral, not just to effective communication, but to learning, reflection and creativity" (Ibid., 2015, p.48). This therefore suggests that not only is being able to cogitate and communicate intrinsically linked with linguistic ability, but in the professor's view, it extends to being able to retrospectively consider and embrace innovation. So whilst being potentially linguistically barred from embracing the content of learning, EAL students would also be unable to execute fundamental skills thereby excluding them from learning which, certainly in the case of creativity, should be universally accessible. Donaldson's lack of consideration merely endorses the views of the 'Bullock Report' (Department of Education and Science, 1975) and the decade later 'Swann Report' (Department of Education and Science, 1985) which acknowledged that British society - and its educational attendees - was now multilingual, though continued to circulate a view of society as largely monolingual (Szymczyk et al., 2022, p.123).

In what would be seen as a positive step amongst many, schools have been expected to teach students identified as EAL within mainstream classrooms since the 1980s (Ibid., 2022, p.123). Whilst this avoids the enforced segregation and stigmatisation of students needing to learn English or Welsh, when assessments take place, there is no adapted provision for these students (Leung, 2003). This was the case with the national curriculum in place prior to Donaldson's overhaul, though it remains an issue still as no consideration has been made for EAL students' adapted assessment as part of CfW. Despite acknowledging the need for

> a deep and secure understanding of the curriculum and of the roles of both formative and summative assessment together with the skills associated with designing and interpreting the wide range of techniques that good assessment demands (Donaldson, 2015, p. 69)

there is a distinct lack of consideration for any other student aside from those who would be part of mainstream. An added complication would be the recognition by Estyn, the schools' inspectorate in 2003 that "few mainstream teachers have the training or skills to meet the needs of EAL pupils effectively" (Welsh Government, 2015, p. 17). This often results in EAL students' needs being mistakenly conflated with those who have additional learning needs as there is a lack of effective support for classroom teachers to be able to distinguish between the two. As Hasson *et al.* (2013) recognise, there is an important requirement to develop an understanding of how to assess standards and needs and to recognise the differences between linguistic difficulties and special educational needs … in teacher development (Welsh Government, 2015, p. 17).

Importantly, considering both the reasons why CfW was introduced: following Wales' political devolution and the country's failure to pull itself out from languishing of the bottom of the PISA league, and the influences on its composition, it is easy to see why its development arrived with such a fanfare. Whilst looking to the constructivist tenets of

Piaget and Vygotsky which clearly fit with the concept of 21st century experiential learning, what appears to have been overlooked is those students who may not fit the 'ideal' version of an envisaged student. The vast majority of students may well be able to access CfW and to embrace its 4Ps, those who have ALN or who are EAL will evidently need further support. Expecting TAs who themselves will invariably require training to able to understand how to provide for their charges, and whose numbers have increased so dramatically over the past few years will be a huge undertaking. In failing to consider those students who may have needs, so many will have been overlooked and their learning needs neglected.

Chapter 4 Methods and Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter offers an outline of and justification for the methods to be used as part of the research process of this study. Starting with a brief review of the available paradigms of research, there follows consideration of the paradigm to be used and the effect this may subsequently have on the choices taken for the sampling frame and participants. This then moves through to the data origination and analysis. In carrying out action research using semi-structured interviews with two ALNCos and four TAs, alongside questionnaires with Year 7 students from two large secondary schools, data could be gathered. The sample reflects the variation in diversity across the schools, including the schools' geographical locations, size and category, with one being a Category 2B school where 80% of subjects are taught through the medium of Welsh, and the other a Category 2C, where 50-79% of subjects are taught through Welsh and are offered through the medium of English. Critically reflecting on my position as a researcher and changes which took place as a result, this chapter concludes with the ethical contemplation undertaken.

4.2 Research Paradigm

According to Alex London, research is a pursuit which relies on the mutual participation of a range of contributors working in collaboration (London, 2022). Such research includes the acquisition of knowledge as researchers utilise belief systems, ethical principles and expectations predicated on a theoretical appreciation as they carry out their research (Kuhn, 1977). This collaboration of epistemology or knowledge reflects the ontology - existence of the researcher's own perspective and its influence. Thus in order to present findings that have been bound by the overarching parameters of research, the apposite approach, strategies and methods need to be employed. A paradigm is therefore required to frame the

research as a shared world view that reflects the beliefs and values in a subject and that directs how hypotheses are resolved (Schwandt, 2001).

In considering the methodology for the research, it was pertinent to consider access to both students and practitioners who worked with Year 7 ALN and EAL students on a regular basis (see Table 3 below). As the implementation of the new curriculum is on-going, it was important to establish the depth of understanding amongst both staff and students. Therefore the study grew from a constructivist paradigm. This enabled participants to respond to the research techniques chosen and to construct their own ontology through considered, reflective collaboration. As one of the main aspects of Wales' new curriculum is inquiry-based learning, alongside active participation developing greater autonomy, this choice effectively reflected the basis of the study. The constructivist approach fitted with interpretative nature of the research, and the ways in which the students were creating meaning within the context of lessons.

Consideration was made of the use of the pragmatic-participatory paradigm linked with John Dewey's view of ideas being used to make sense of the world (see Chapter 3), though as the underlying aim here would be discovery leading to change, it would not have fitted as well with the experiential learning methods expected as part of CfW.

Type of Study	Qualitative	
Setting and Context	Two large schools in different counties: one all-through and a second large secondary school	
	Online meetings	
	In-school meetings with TAs/students	
Data collection methods	Semi-structured interviews	
	Focus groups	
	Questionnaires	
Sampling	Purposive	ALNCos (known to me)
	Convenience	TAs (accessibility and availability)
	Quota	Year 7 students chosen from EAL/ALN register
Sampling frame	Those students identified with EAL/ALN	Nfer test scores (SAS) used for identification
Participants	ALNCos: one from each of two schools	
	TAs: two each from two schools	
	Students: eight from two schools	
Data analysis techniques	Thematic analysis	
Software	Microsoft Teams transcription	

Table 3: Table showing methods and sampling

As the main data collection methods used were qualitative semi-structured interviews, the most appropriate theoretical perspective was the constructivist paradigm. This follows the hermeneutical consideration outlined in Table 4 from Denzin, Lincoln *et al.* (2024) below. Whilst a critical theory approach could have been taken as similar qualitative data gathering methods could have been used, the researcher/ participant relationship would have differed as there would have been a greater sense of reciprocity. Using a constructivist paradigm meant that as a researcher, I was able to collate and interpret the data as an objective outsider rather than holding strong beliefs about what the data would show in terms of a need for change.

Table 4.3 Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms—Updated

Issue	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical Theory et al.	Constructivism	Participatory[a]
Ontology	Naïve realism—"real" reality but apprehendible	Critical realism—"real" reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible	Historical realism—virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time	Relativism—local and specific co-constructed realities	Participative reality—subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Transactional/subjectivist; co-created findings	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
Methodology	Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/dialectical	Hermeneutical/dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context

Table 4: Paradigms of research (Denzin, Lincoln *et al.* 6th ed. 2024, p.78)

As a study undertaken within education, the epistemological consideration focusing on social constructivism was particularly pertinent. Due to the nature of CfW' concept of experiential learning in collaboration with peers, the links with becoming a creative contributor and a confident citizen as part of the 4Ps were clearly apparent. Social constructivism, where meaning is constructed through human interaction and students build their own knowledge aligned closely with the qualitative methods used was effective as it is the "meaning-making activities themselves [that] are of central interest" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p.220). Further expansion of social constructivism was also pertinent due to links with Vygotsky, who himself was so instrumental in shaping our understanding of the world of education.

According to Crotty (1998), in keeping with the tenets espoused by Wales' new curriculum, meaning is "constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are

interpreting" (Creswell, 2009, p.26). In accordance with this philosophy, qualitative research is the method invariably used to enable participants to communicate using open-ended questions. With this in mind, and closely aligned with Vygotsky's views, of language supporting human beings to "overcome the natural limitations of their perceptual field by imposing culturally defined sense and meaning on the world" (Vygotsky, 1968, p.39), the constructivist view allowed for focused analysis of the views presented by the EAL learners questioned.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Introduction

As several types of stakeholders were involved in the research process alongside myself, the evaluation was constructivist. This paradigm can be viewed as positive with regard to, "being more attentive to the views of others, being more prepared to engage in dialogue and becoming more reflexive" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p.877), features which were vital in gaining participants' trust. Coupled with social constructivism whereby communication elicits meaning, harmonisation with experiential learning allowed for qualitative data to be collected. As stated, using a constructivist design, the aim of study was to explore how the four purposes proposed for CfW support ALN and EAL learners.

With little research currently carried out into the curriculum in term of its application, it was pertinent to focus on how current provision supported ALN and EAL learners in chosen secondary schools in rural Wales. Taking into account Murakami's (2008) study which highlights the distinct lack of training for classroom practitioners supporting EAL students in England, as well as Conn and Hutt's (2020) view that the new curriculum will necessitate the need for support for all ALN students to continue in its present form, my primary focus was

specifically on what - if any - changes will be needed within the new curriculum to ensure that the support available to mainstream students to access the four purposes would be as accessible to ALN and EAL learners.

Starting with the literature review, my research took on the following design which enabled me to consider the development and implementation of CfW, which provided a framework for the research that followed:

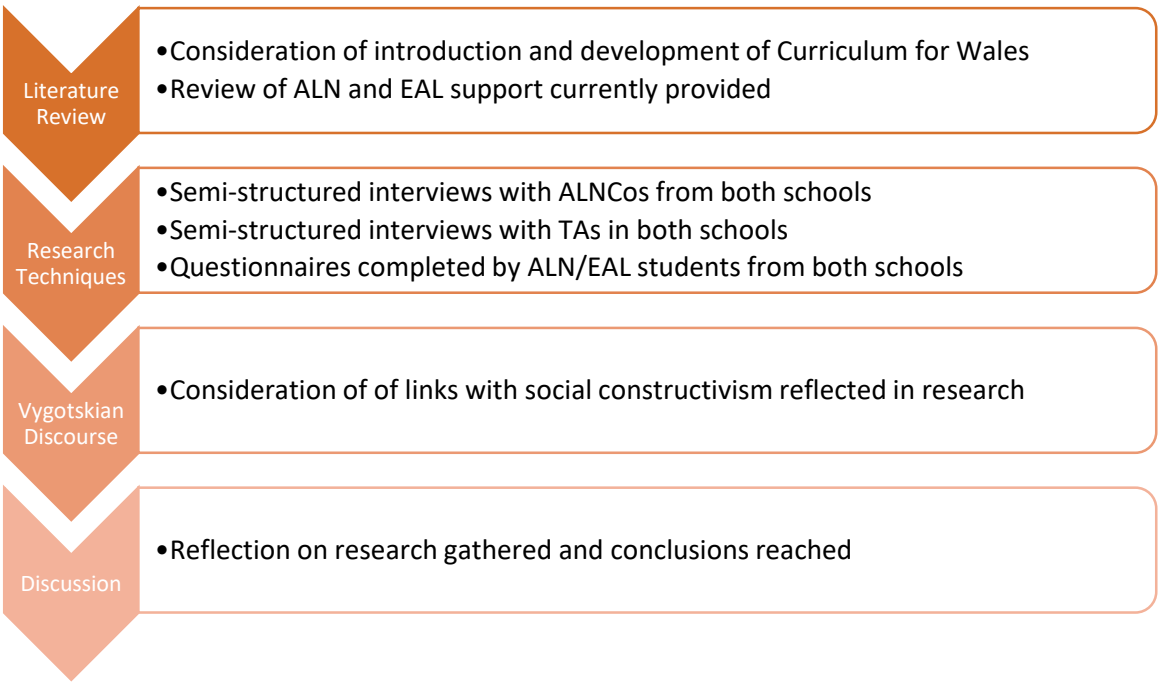

Figure 2: Overview of Research Design

According to Snape and Spencer, a broad definition of the aims of qualitative research are to provide,

> an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world, by learning about people's social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories. (Snape and Spencer in Richie and Lewis, 2003, p.22)

Such interpretation may be seen in the words of Descartes, who stated, “If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as

possible, all things". **https://www.britannica.com/quotes/biography/Rene-Descartes** Before attempting to consider a definitive, overarching meaning of qualitative research, it seems prudent to first reflect upon its origins. Additionally, Snape and Spencer also perceive,

> approaches most closely associated with qualitative research were developed to overcome some of the perceived limitations of the prevailing methods used to study human behaviour (Ibid., 2003, p.5).

When reflecting upon Descartes' words above which suggest that nothing is infallible due to the frailty of human conditioning, it seems pertinent that qualitative research, with its emphasis on understanding and interpreting social reality (Ibid., 2003) came to be. Whilst there should be no suggestion that qualitative research usurps the place of its more scientific cousin quantitative research, historicity demonstrates its importance in developing broader research practices.

Whilst Descartes' philosophy attempted to refute Aristotle's academic ontology dominant at the time, his seventeenth century musings highlighted the importance of objectivity when studying, maintaining distance from potential distortion of external influences. (Ibid., 2003) The qualitative data resulting from the semi-structured interviews, alongside the quantitative data from the questionnaires was considered in light of Vygotskian constructivism, taking into account the participants' experiences and perspectives. Whilst interview data may be seen as "valid as a source of information and suspect as a complete source of understanding" (Greene and Hill, 2005, p.7), this method provided greater detail than a questionnaire and allowed for further probing with the ALNCos and TAs. The use of interviews also allowed for supplementary questions (see Appendix i and ii) leading to richer data and the opportunity for greater clarification. Some quantitative data were used by the ALNCos to identify the Year 7 students, though there was no comparison of these data as they were used to establish a linguistic baseline. The reason for this was that it allowed for a

less constrictive approach, which provided more detailed responses and richer data. The resulting data informed the research questions outlined in the introductory section of this study.

4.3.2 Sampling Approach

Different sampling approaches were taken with the chosen schools. As I had previously worked at one of the schools: School A, I was fortunate in knowing the ALNCo and TAs at this particular school. Therefore, purposive sampling (Schutt, 2006) was used as I was aware of the identity of the ALNCo, using my knowledge and judgement in order to choose the most fitting respondent. In order to impose an element of fairness, convenience sampling was used for the TAs in this school as the ALNCo chose the participants based on accessibility and availability, alongside knowledge of their particular responsibilities at the school. This actually had a positive impact as there was no sense of obligation upon the TAs' behalf as they hadn't been chosen by me. Therefore using convenience rather than purposive sampling appeared to create a greater sense of trust and openness during the interviews.

Furthermore, the Year 7 students who completed the questionnaires were also chosen by the ALNCo using quota sampling. As the students responding to the questionnaires needed to be on the additional learning needs register as well as part of the EAL group, the sampling frame involved those who scored 85 or below in the GL CAT4 testing taken at the start of the year. A case could have been made for simple random sampling, though due to the specific requirements of the students involved, this would have narrowed the selection available significantly. Therefore, allowing the ALNCo to create the sample based on their

understanding of the students meant that the most fitting respondents could be approached.

I acknowledge that having worked with the ALNCo and the TAs from School A closely, the study may have been affected by researcher bias. However, this was mitigated by ensuring that the questions asked as part of the semi-structured interviews were carefully followed, with additional questions focusing strictly on the responses provided. As Creswell points out,

> Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study. The investigator's contribution to the research setting can be useful and positive rather than detrimental (Creswell, 2009, p.181)

I was therefore also aware that the participants with whom I'd worked may have replied in a particular way in order to provide responses that met with my hypotheses. However, I believe that my questions were open enough to have been reliable and not leading as the pilot study carried out with colleagues not involved in the final research allowed for any anomalies to be tweaked prior to the study's commencement. Conversely, the mutual acquaintance between myself and the ALNCo and the TAs could also have proved positive as there would have been a greater element of trust that may not have existed with the second school.

The sampling utilised with School B mirrored that of School A, though I did not personally know and had never met any of the participants involved. The student participants were chosen in the same way using quota sampling with the TAs nominated by the ALNCo who knew them best using convenience sampling, and the ALNCo nominated by the headteacher at the school. I did however know the headteacher of School B, who attested to my

experience as an educationalist and therefore allayed any concerns that the ALNCo at the school may have had. The importance of relationships and familiarity is seen as an important feature of the process of semi-structured interviews (Tannenbaum and Spradley, 2016; DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Whilst my having worked with participants from School A could have led to researcher bias due to their desire to support me in my research, I believe that there was no difference in the way in which responses were provided by participants involved in the semi-structured interviews conducted with both schools.

Considering Vygotsky's social constructivist ideas, the fact that learning would take place as part of a group or as part of social interaction fitted particularly well with the research parameters (Vygotsky, 1978). The fact that the participants knew or were told that I was an experienced practitioner helped to alleviate any fears they may have had about the importance of my research. Furthermore, the fact that the TAs who worked so closely with their respective ALNCos who would also be their line managers were so honest in their responses, demonstrates that they felt reassured of my position as a researcher. In order to further reassure the participants, detailed information was shared about the purpose of the study, with permission sought and guaranteed anonymity assured.

Whilst the ALNCos were chosen due to their roles and responsibilities, the TAs were selected due to the specialist role they undertook at both schools. These staff needed to have worked with students with additional learning needs but more specifically, those who spoke English as an additional language. In School A, the TAs had a wealth of experience within their role, with more than fifty years' experience working with students with ALN. An interesting contrast was formed with the TAs from School B, where one staff member had more than seventeen years' experience whilst a second TA had been in the role just twelve

months. This proved interesting when responses were gathered as the TAs from School A were outspoken and fearless when sharing their views but perhaps a little more reluctant to accept change. The TA who had been in the role just twelve months displayed far more positive views about the new curriculum though believed this was due to a lack of experience rather than a more receptive outlook.

ALNCos in both School A and School B were contacted by email prior to other participants being approached. As I had worked in School A, I was able to contact the ALNCo directly following my request for permission from the headteacher who I also knew. In School B, I contacted the headteacher for permission prior to emailing the ALNCo. I then relied on the experience of both ALNCos to recommend TAs who worked with students with ALN and EAL. The approach was initially made by their line managers; I then followed up directly via email. The Year 7 student participants were chosen using the quota sample from the CAT4 testing carried out at the start of the term. As the participants were under eighteen, parental permission needed to be sought. With students being on the ALN register, the ALNCo was in regular contact with parents and could readily contact them. Detailed information and permission forms were therefore sent via the school to parents who returned the forms stating they agreed to allow their children to be involved.

Although the two schools were geographically and linguistically a long way apart, the adult participants all shared a common concern: access to a curriculum which required a sound knowledge of the English language. Initially, I approached a school in the same county as School A. Whilst the ALNCo was willing to support my study, when I sought the headteacher's permission to approach the TAs at their school this was denied. There was a reluctance to take part in the study as telephone calls were not returned and emails

remained unanswered. As I had visited the school on previous occasions and had supported staff there as an external advisor, I had assumed support would be forthcoming. However, when I later requested feedback as to why my request had been declined, I was told that anything involved with the new curriculum was a 'hot potato' which could reflect badly on the school should they agree to take part. Perhaps ironically, the headteacher's refusal may have proved positive as the subsequent research covering two very different schools, from two very different counties contextually, may have made the study (whilst small) more representative.

4.3.3 Research Tools and Interview Execution

The primary method of research used to generate data for this study was the semi-structured interview. The main reason for this is that it allowed for relevant questions to be posed but at the same time, provided autonomy for the participants to be able to respond openly, providing relatively high validity and for me as a researcher to follow up with appropriate supplementary questions (see Appendix i and ii). This qualitative method is seen as befitting as

> a primary benefit of the semi-structured interview is that it permits interviews to be focused while still giving the investigator the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up in the course of the interview, which can further enhance understanding (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021, p.1360).

Preparation for the semi-structured interviews was time-consuming, though this proved worthwhile due to the richness of the data provided. Whilst an argument could have been made for using a focus group setting, the fact that the TAs were interviewed in pairs meant that the risk of social desirability bias was avoided. This was aided by ensuring that the responses from the semi-structured interviews were focused, though there was ample opportunity for the TAs to provide further detail as part of the supplementary responses

which were “used to penetrate a number of research questions” McGrath *et al.* 2019, p. 1002). Additionally, whilst a focus group setting would have offered the opportunity to interview more TAs, confidentially could not have been assured due to the increase in participants.

Two ALNCos were chosen for the study from schools which differed contextually. School A is a rural school with approximately 1200 students. This meant that the ALNCo would have a wide enough student sample, as well as line managing experienced TAs who could be involved. The ALNCo from School A is also very experienced and could therefore offer a depth of knowledge when considering the students’ abilities in relation to CfW’s changes. School B has over 1600 students and is geographically very different. It is situated in a different county and is in an urban setting. This means that the students’ experiences, especially those who are EAL would differ greatly from those involved from School A. The ALNCo from School B was less experienced than the ALNCo from School A, though has still been in the role for more than five years. Both individuals were therefore chosen due to their experience, though the differing context gave the data a greater richness.

The TAs were also chosen for their experience, especially those from School A who had over 50 years’ experience supporting students. This meant that they were well-versed with students’ needs, as well as with their linguistic needs having worked with these students for so long. The TAs’ experience in School B differed as one had just 12 months’ experience, whilst the second had over 17 years. This provided an interesting contrast as the TA who had not been supporting students for an extended period would have a slightly different perspective and expectations of the students. As the TAs were from different schools with

very different student backgrounds, this allowed for the numbers to be representative enough.

Ten students from each school were initially approached, with two declining to participate, eight from each therefore took part. The students were selected by the ALNCos using testing data and linguistic ability through quota sampling. In School A, those students classed as EAL had arrived at the school as their families had moved to the country due to employment, with most coming from Poland and eastern Europe; those from School B were mostly migrant children whose families were seeking asylum. The numbers chosen were large enough to be representative.

The use of questionnaires as a method of data collection with the students provided several advantages. These included practicality: allowing the TAs to support the students and clarify any questions they may have had; comparability as the same questionnaires could be used with all of the respondents and also participant ease as they were known to the TAs who supported them. One limitation of using questionnaires rather than interviews or focus groups was a concern about the interpretation of the questions. Whilst the TAs would have done their best to have explained the questions' meanings, this may have proved difficult as they had not been involved in their composition.

Whilst the interviews carried out with the TAs could perhaps have been viewed as focus groups, the size of the group: pairs, alongside the greater formality of the questioning meant that the focus was sharper and more constrained. As opposed to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer greater scope to focus on areas thought to be important with regard to the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This meant

that despite the addition of supplementary questions as seen in the tables below, the focus remained on the introduction and impact of Wales' new curriculum in line with the research questions.

Having worked at School A for a time, I was mindful of maintaining a distance between myself and the adult participants. Asking the ALNCo to choose the TAs to take part ensured that there was no prior contact and therefore less chance of researcher bias. Fortunately, as I had left the school the previous term, I had not met or taught any of the Year 7 students who completed the questionnaires. Therefore, there was no influence from myself which may have led to the students being afraid that their refusal to take part would have had an impact on their education (Ferguson, Yonge and Myrick, 2004). Ensuring the surroundings were familiar to the students: using their nurture base was important, as was establishing that all responses had to come directly from the students to ensure the study remained valid. The level of English understanding students had was established prior to completing the questionnaires. As such, I used an Nfer reading test (rather than the less diagnostic PIE test) with EAL students, comparing the results to mainstream students in Year 7 to identify the disparity in linguistic understanding, collating quantitative data.

In order to ensure there was a level of standardisation through the interviews with the ALNCos and the TAs, pre-prepared open and closed questions were composed linked specifically with each of the participants' roles. The initial research questions remained the same for all interviews, whilst the supplementary questions varied and were closely linked to the participants' responses. The tables in the appendices provide a list of the questions asked, along with additional research questions and links with Vygotskian theory. Student questionnaires composed mostly of closed questions were presented to the Year 7 students

by their TA. This mitigated any interviewer bias by myself as I did not deliver the questionnaires. This made for greater validity in the responses. The reason for providing mainly closed questions was to make them as easy as possible to understand so the students could complete them independently and the responses were easily comparable. This also ensured there was a level of reliability as the questionnaires could be replicated.

The interviews were carried out online via Microsoft Teams following the acquisition of consent from all participants. The interviews with the ALNCos lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, whilst the interviews with the TAs were between 60 and 80 minutes due to the fact there was more than one participant involved. All of the interviews were transcribed using the live transcription facility. This made the conversation flow more readily as I was able to listen and follow up directly rather than worrying about a need to note responses. Initially, I had arranged to interview the participants from School A during an INSET day whilst still working there, however, as it took a little longer to arrange, these were subsequently carried out online. The fact that I had worked alongside the participants from School A and they knew me helped to alleviate any concerns they may have had with being interviewed. Additionally, I believe that the participants were more open and honest in their responses as there was an element of trust already in place. Research suggests that

> … the virtual and often anonymous nature of the internet means that researchers must establish their bona fide status and the boundaries of their research work more carefully than they might in a face-to-face situation (Sanders, 2005, p. 78)

This was evidently not an issue with School A, and as I knew the headteacher at School B well too, they were able to speak with the adult participants to reassure them of my credibility. Importantly, all of the ALNCo and TA participants needed to see me as bone fide within education which was evident from the online discussions despite the fact they were

virtual. All of the responses, as many were sensitive in nature didn't appear to be affected by interviewer bias.

4.4 Ethical Reflections

One of the most important considerations with regard to carrying out the research was the ethical considerations. In accordance with the British Education Research Association's guidelines (BERA, 2018), due diligence was paid to ensuring all regulations were followed, as well as maintaining accord with Trinity Saint David's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice and Research data Management Policy. Most importantly before any research was undertaken, approval was sought from the education ethics committee. First and foremost with regard to ethics was ensuring that informed consent was received. Whilst this was straightforward amongst the adult participants as they could voluntarily sign the consent forms distributed, as there were students' views sought who were under the age of eighteen, gaining permission here was a little less straightforward. It was important to ensure that the parents of the students were well informed, with consent sought, and that there was an avoidance of harm. Fortunately, as the parents of the students involved were known to both ALNCos, acquiring their permission to distribute questionnaires amongst their children was uncomplicated. Individual online meetings were arranged, with information about the study shared and permission gathered following these explanations.

As some of the information gathered, especially from the TAs could be seen as critical of the school's management, every effort was made to ensure data remained confidential. This was important as the ALNCos were line managers for the TAs who participated. In line with safeguarding the participants, guaranteeing that no harm came to them mentally was vital. As Denzin and Lincoln argue, "it is the researchers' ethical and moral responsibility to

transform contexts whenever possible to achieve or maximize greater equity and well-being among participants" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p.443). This moral responsibility continued through to the student participants' questionnaire completion as they were anonymised following completion. All data was also securely stored on a computer which was password-encrypted.

Whilst carrying out interviews may have been perceived as easier face-to-face, conducting the remotely via Microsoft Teams actually proved more conducive to openness and, on a practical level, easier to execute. The transcription tool allowed for greater focus during the interviews as there was no requirement to write any responses down; this also meant I was able to consider follow up questions more readily, being able to listen intently. Participants were provided with the option to choose the date and time most suitable for them, as well as the opportunity to meet outside of school hours or in a private location. According to Ess, "educational researchers face a range of ethical issues in their efforts to acquire new knowledge about many behaviours and practices that arise in these virtual spaces/sites or when using online methods" (Ess, 2002, p. 25). However, the very opposite appeared to be the case, with a feeling of trust and frankness rather than ethical issues creating a problem.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative data could be "used to allocate blame to individuals…[if] found to be ineffective" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 1346). To ensure this didn't occur, it was important that the collation of data and its analysis was phenomenologically executed. The semi-structured interview is often used when little is known about a particular topic, so pre-coded responses are more difficult to create. They are also valuable when considering respondents' attitudes due to the open-ended nature of

responses, though it is perhaps even more important that the interviewer maintains a neutral tone when asking questions due to the lack of pre-coded responses. Alternatively, semi-structured interviews offer the possibility of continuing clarification between researcher and respondent as prompts or cues can be offered where explanation is required.

Using Vygotsky's social constructivism as a framework for thematic analysis, the data from both the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaires was transcribed from Microsoft Teams. The reason for using Vygotsky's theory (1978) was due to its links with education and ways of learning, and the way in which it relates to sociocultural analysis. Sociocultural analysis is concerned with the development of shared understanding in a particular context (Mercer, 2010). The particular context in question related to the introduction of a new curriculum, as Wales "embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform and introduced a range of policies to improve the quality and equity of its school system" (OECD, 2017, p.12). The data collection thus focused on what ways the new curriculum may have begun to provide opportunities for students and staff to improve schools' quality and equity.

The focus in both semi-structured interviews was to consider whether disadvantaged students: those with ALN or using English as an additional language would be able to access the new CfW. According to Johnson and Mercer (2019), when considering the qualitative data collected, focus falls upon how the language derived is utilised as a way of thinking: how it is used "as a tool for teaching-and-learning, constructing knowledge, creating ideas, sharing understanding, and tackling problems collaboratively" (p.267-268). With this in

mind, the ALNCos feedback to the interview questions demonstrated just how important language, its usage and understanding would be for the learning within CfW.

As Vygotsky advocates that language is the most important tool for acquiring knowledge, a curriculum based upon greater autonomy and therefore a need for effective language skills, would create further division. It was felt that learners who may be linguistically or cognitively disadvantaged would evidently struggle due to a lack of consideration for their provision. One aspect which CfW advocates will develop learners' independence and 21st century skills is its focus on experiential or discovery learning. This pedagogical approach is a core tenet linked with the curriculum's 4Ps, yet it was the one area that almost all of the participants knew nothing about.

With regard to the TAs questioned, the focus was on supporting learners, understanding what the new curriculum entailed and how learning may take place. Broadly speaking, these aspects could be categorised into how much support the TAs believed learners would require to access CfW, whether they would have the depth of understanding and linguistic capacity to learn and whether such learning could take place independently. Linking this with Vygotsky's social constructivism, a child taking an active part in their own learning was considered, as was learners constructing their own knowledge based on culture and context.

One area which was seen to be problematic was the concept of autonomy as all of the TAs who participated felt that scaffolding would need to continue in order for the students to be able to access the curriculum. Therefore, far from being able to execute interactive learning and peer-to-peer collaboration, the TAs felt that without continuing support, there would

be a disconnect. One key drawback of using semi-structured interviews is that they are time-consuming due to the individuality of responses which need to be transcribed and codified, whilst the planning and preparation required are infinitely more robust. This was made easier using the Teams transcription tool which allowed for greater focus during the conversation as there was the knowledge that all responses were being interpreted.

As the student questionnaires were almost all composed of closed questions, analysing their responses was relatively straight forward. What became clear was the learners' lack of knowledge of the 4Ps within the new curriculum. Not only were the students unable to name the purposes, but they were not aware of their existence. This demonstrated that any training and support offered to staff involved had not filtered down to the students despite the curriculum's introduction. In a similar way to the TAs' responses, the students could not be seen to play an active part in their own learning without embracing these 4Ps. With this in mind, becoming an ambitious, capable learner or one who is confident in their learning could well be a step too far for our EAL learners. Interestingly, almost all of the students believed they could work independently of their support teacher, though felt they did take part in peer-to-peer collaboration. Rather than forming part of CfW's intention to encourage greater autonomy and collaborative working, this was seen by students as a practice which already took place.

4.5.1 Data Collection

As the implementation of the new curriculum is in its relative infancy, it was important to establish the depth of understanding amongst both staff and students, using a positivist paradigm. In considering the choice of method, it was pertinent to consider access to students as well as practitioners who work with Year 7 EAL students on a regular basis.

Access to staff was straightforward as online meetings allowed for easy access. Support staff who work as part of one school's nurture base supporting EAL students on a daily basis were approached. Additionally, I spoke with each ALNCo who supports the TAs to explore what support and training had been provided for EAL students, and to establish how involved TAs were in training for the new curriculum.

The research approach was mainly qualitative, using methods including semi-structured interviews with the ALNCos, as well as semi-structured interviews and focus groups for TA participants. Whilst interview data may be seen as "valid as a source of information and suspect as a complete source of understanding" (Greene and Hill, 2005, p. 7), this method provided greater detail than a questionnaire and allowed for explanation from the staff involved. The reason for this was that it allowed for a less constrictive approach, providing more detailed responses and richer data. The sessions were carried out online and lasted between 25-45 minutes. Year 7 students completed questionnaires with eight from each school asked to participate. Two students from one school declined to take part, however views from two further students were sought. Due to the nature of the students participating and their EAL status, support was provided for the students in reading the questions in order to source reliable data. Some secondary quantitative data was utilised following testing that had been carried out by the schools, though there was no direct usage of this data as it was merely used to establish a linguistic baseline.

With little research currently carried out into Donaldson's curriculum in terms of its application within schools, it was pertinent to focus on how current provision supports EAL learners in secondary school classrooms in rural Wales. Taking into account Murakami's (2008) study which highlights the distinct lack of training for classroom practitioners

supporting EAL students in England, as well as Conn and Hutt's (2020) view that the new curriculum will necessitate the need for support for all ALN students to continue in its present form, the focus was specifically on whether any changes would be needed to ensure that the support available to mainstream students to access the four purposes would be as accessible to EAL learners. Hence, key questions about whether the students would be able to embrace the meaning behind the 4Ps and how much training they themselves had received were asked of the TAs. The focus for the ALNCos reflected on the support provided for the TAs in enabling an understanding of the 4Ps for their charges as well as the impact of language on the EAL students' understanding. The students' views were sought, with questions such as, *Do you know a new curriculum is being introduced in Wales?* and *Do your teachers refer to the 4Ps in the classroom?*

4.5.2 Data Analysis

Due to the inclusion of mainly closed questions in the students' questionnaires, the data was reliable and easily comparable. The one aspect to be considered was the input from the TAs who supported the students. As Bowling (2005, p. 281) states, there are four aspects which need to be considered when respondents are asked to provide answers, such as "comprehension of the question" or an "evaluation of the link between the retrieved information and the question". Due to the nature of the students' additional language requirements, this would have been more pertinent as would the TAs' desire not to influence their charges. However as the responses reflected less positively on the students' understanding of CfW which they themselves would be partly responsible for imparting, this demonstrated a lack of guidance and greater validity. Furthermore, the questionnaires clearly stated the requirement for each respondent to answer independently, with consent forms signed by parents and TAs stating as such.

The data collected from the online interviews and focus groups was collated and transcribed. As these took place via MS Teams, the transcription was readily available for the interviews due to the platform's functionality. This made the time-consuming task of transposing responses less onerous. Whilst the interviews were semi-structured in nature and therefore allowed participants to provide extra detail where desired, there were core questions which allowed for key responses to be compared. There were three stages considered for the data collection due to its online collation:

Figure 3: Stages of Data Collation

The questions which formed part of the semi-structured interviews with the ALNCos were grouped into four areas: Access to CfW; Supporting Learners with CfW; Awareness of CfW's Requirements and Embracing Difference in the New Curriculum. Despite being broken down, all of data collected was pertinent in terms of answering the key question: *How will Wales' new curriculum support disadvantaged learners to realise the 4 purposes?*

To exemplify what the recordings looked like being taken from Teams, showing what data was taken from the one of the interviews with the ALNCos, an excerpt is included below.

Naomi Edwards (1606140)
Yeah. Next one then. Do all EAL learners have the language skills to be able to develop discovery based learning?

ALNCo School A
Again, it depends on their language acquisition, but I think it's quite, you know, that's quite suited to their needs, really, isn't it, you know, *because it's more hands on* (SL), **you know, and they are going to need support with the language, but it's amazing how quickly they pick up that language much quicker than adults** (LS).
Naomi Edwards (1606140)
So do you think that there would be any particular support then that would help them with discovery based learning?

ALNCo School A
I think it would just be general support, but on a need to basis. I think again it's you know *important to step back and let them you know do as much as they can do and then step in and support where needed* (IL). **Again, with the language, you know that that's all it is, that language barrier, because capacity wise they've got that capacity, haven't they?** (LF)

Naomi Edwards (1606140)
So providing then that that support is given linguistically then it would support them you believe.

ALNCo School A
Yeah.

Naomi Edwards (1606140)
Thank you. Also, do all ALN learners have the cognitive ability to be able to develop discovery based learning?

ALNCo School A
Yeah. Well, again, you know, it depends on capacity, doesn't it? *Depends on how it's been presented, because depending on your level of additional needs, you know you're going to have to tweak things. But I think everything's accessible to everybody. It depends on how we tweak it and adapt things* (LF).

Naomi Edwards (1606140)
So would you say that differentiation would need to continue?

ALNCo School A
Yeah, definitely. And that's good practice. I think it's adapting to the needs of your learners. You know that differentiation needs to happen throughout regardless of where you know, because *you're going to have some form of additional learning needs in your class, whether it's, you know, this level or this level, you're still going to make the adaptations* (SL).

Naomi Edwards (1606140)
Thank you. Next one, then are support staff are aware that the four purposes underpin the new curriculum?

ALNCo School A
Yeah, well, this is quite an interesting one really because it's, you know, it's something that's been presented to us as teachers, you know, for the last couple of years, we've done a lot about it but it's been on a *much, much lower level for the teaching assistants* (TAS). **And they have asked you know can we have additional training?** *We've set-up additional training for them. So we had training that had been written for the TAs locally and delivered on a day that wasn't an inset day. So I couldn't release all the TAs to go, so straight away it wasn't accessible. So we asked for the recordings. We had them ready to go very last minute for the last INSET and they were all in Welsh* (TAS).

Figure 4: Excerpt of interview transcript with ALNCo from School A

Key
SL – Supporting Learners
LF – Language Fluency
IL – Independent learning
TAS – TA support

The different fonts provide the data used within the analysis and findings, with the detail in bold showing what was considered and the italicised font showing some aspects which linked with my research questions. A key is provided below the excerpt linked to the themes generated by the questions posed. Whilst this is merely a snapshot, the example of the themes generated covered the responses from the ALNCos of both schools, considering their experiences and viewpoints.

Importantly, as the semi-structured interviews of the ALNCos and TAs gave rise to greater variance in responses due to the difference in school context, it allowed for the "observer's scrupulous recording of naturally-occurring social interactions from which patterns [could be] inferred and interpreted" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 20). In the second stage, responses from key questions were compared to ensure that the focus remained on the experience of EAL learners, whilst more personalised answers which reflected the individual experience of the TAs were considered. Finally, the question 'Does Wales' new curriculum currently support disadvantaged learners to access the 4Ps?' was considered. Having familiarised myself with the transcripts, I was then able to pick out similarities between the two sets of interview data as well as differences seen. Common to thematic analysis, I used an initial coding system which reflected the focus of the research, whereupon I was then able to identify themes considered in Chapter 5.

4.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is important as it encourages reflection upon oneself as the researcher, considering influences, the way in which the research was executed and the results gleaned (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). According to Snape and Spencer, in some cases, there is a need for empathic neutrality: "a position that recognises that research cannot be value free but

which advocates that researchers should make their assumptions transparent" (Richie and Lewis, 2003, p.26), thereby ensuring an avoidance of deception. In considering the study's subject and its influence upon me as researcher, it is important to note my experience as an educational practitioner of almost two decades. It would be remiss to suggest that my senior leadership experience within teaching and learning would not have led to the assimilation of certain views. However, whilst my understanding of Wales' new curriculum may have helped hone my research questions, it also made me acutely aware of the need to negate any insiderness. Critics suggest that, "listening and writing with reflexivity are often described as tools to help situate oneself and be cognizant of the ways your personal history can influence the research process and thus yield more "accurate," more "valid" research (Altheide and Johnson, 1998; Ball, 1990). Having worked within education and been privy to training courses and having delivered a great deal myself gave me a wider, more balanced view in order to be able to carry out such accurate and valid research.

Understanding the language surrounding Curriculum for Wales, as well as the many different facets involved provided me with a privileged platform from which to develop my hypothesis. Additionally, inhabiting a high level position as a member of the senior team responsible for teaching and learning meant that I was privy to information which was directly shared about Curriculum for Wales, as well as being part of high level Welsh Government groups and leading county-level meetings. Self-reflexivity within the study then became "a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness" (Callaway, 1992, p. 33). My understanding of curriculum developments enabled me to be well-positioned with regard to shaping the semi-structured interviews, providing a sense of reciprocity as my knowledge was current and sound.

Despite asking more closed questions during the ALNCo interviews, responses from participants were detailed and informed. It was important to distinguish between ALN learners' and EAL learners' support which I feel was successfully achieved. Approaching the two schools, who both had between 12 and 15% of EAL learners on role (see Chapter 3) meant that their understanding of the different challenges faced by these students was clear. Additionally, the openness of the responses provided by the TAs demonstrated a credibility in their shared views. The one shared question which proved difficult to elicit a response considered the participants' understanding of discovery learning. Despite being one of the central tenets of Curriculum for Wales, the way in which the curriculum was being delivered in both schools suggested they were at the early stages of their journey towards greater student autonomy. Therefore, when considering responses in relation to Vygotsky's social constructionism, it was clear that a link was not forthcoming.

What became evident as the research took shape was the importance of the design aspect and the links with education. Using a constructivist design reflected Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which linked effectively with the learning aspect considered. Whilst several types of sampling were considered, as I was reliant on the ALNCos' support for the students selected and therefore felt that quota sampling would work best. Additionally, the TAs were also selected by the ALNCos as they knew them best, therefore convenience sampling was used. Again, linking with Vygotsky's social constructivism was effective when considering the additional questions asked during the semi-structured interviews. These proved really effective in gleaning those extra nuanced responses allowing for richer data.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of research findings following the data collection. In order to anonymise the two schools involved, they are referred to as School A and School B. The context of the two schools is briefly provided, along with the how the ALNCos and TAs were chosen and the sampling frame from which the student participants were selected. Each of the methods used is considered: semi-structured interviews along with questionnaires presented to the students. Detailed analysis of the students' data is considered, alongside the interviews carried out with the ALNCos, splitting the findings into subheadings which reflect the different aspects of CfW focus. Data collected from the TA interviews is also presented considering the different understanding of CfW, as well as how learners will be supported and may or may not cope with expectations. Three stages were followed due to the data being collated online: 1. Recording and Transcribing; 2. Linking and Expansion; and 3. Analysis and Comparison. The use of MS Teams for the interviews made the data collection and transcription easier to handle. Whilst the transcription required further interpretation and translation, the tool saved hours of manual work. The findings were split according to the different participants involved as the data collected was quite disparate. Importantly, some of the interview questions were considered in detail as the responses showed a marked difference in how CfW was viewed.

5.2 Participants and Context

The aim of the research was to explore how the four purposes (4Ps) which underpin Wales' new curriculum would be accessible to EAL learners during their first year of secondary school. Data was collected from two rural secondary schools in two different counties. One school (School A) is a naturally bilingual school of approximately 1100 students which has a

Year 7 intake of approximately 120 students, whilst the second school (School B) is an English speaking school with a Year 7 intake of approximately 220 students and 1500 on role. This meant that the sample considered was large enough to be representative. ALNCos from both schools agreed to take part in the research, along with two TAs from each of the two schools. Eight students who were classed as EAL took part from each of the schools. The EAL students who participated all appeared on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) register which was used as a sampling frame: those who had been identified as having English as a second language in Year 7. It was important that the students felt comfortable when completing the questionnaires – they were therefore accompanied by a TA with whom they were familiar who read the questions to them. Responses came directly from the students ensuring that these were valid. Students' level of linguistic understanding was established using testing already carried out at the school at the start of the term with data from the Nfer reading test.

5.3 Findings

The ALNCos from both schools were known to me, enabling a positive aspect to the administration of the interview questions. Whilst the respondents had access to a number of Year 7 students with additional learning needs and could therefore provide responses based on a breadth of experience with students, they were also involved with numerous students classed as EAL. This meant that both the initial questions such as 'Do all EAL learners have the language skills to be able to understand what's expected with the 4Ps? along with the supplementary questions which arose from their responses including, 'Would you say that differentiation would need to continue?' were able to be responded to fluently and knowledgably.

As the individuals responsible for line managing TAs in both schools, the responses given to questions about support provided in the classroom were enlightening, especially in comparison to those given by the TAs themselves. When considering the question, 'What key differences do you foresee with the way support staff will need to adapt to supporting EAL/ALN students to embrace the 4Ps?', interestingly, the ALNCos saw very little difference in the continuation of provision. Rather than considering change being necessary as students would need to demonstrate greater autonomy, the ALNCos both believed that the TAs would merely be able to adapt and continue in a similar vein. This appeared to show a lack of consideration for the role of the TA in the classroom and how they would need to adapt.

One reason for this was invariably the contrast in the way the two sets of staff saw the TA role which became clear when the question of training was broached. Whilst the ALNCos believed that ample support and training had been provided for the TAs, the teaching assistants themselves clearly felt under-prepared and ill-informed about CfW. This demonstrated that the ALNCos believed they had supported more than they appeared to have done and also how over-looked TAs' roles are despite their key importance. The different responses also showed a dedication from the TAs to their roles and their charges, as well as a desire to continue their professional development in order to provide the best support possible.

Linking the data collected with Vygotsky's social constructivism demonstrated the importance of interaction and its place in CfW's structure. One example where a clear link was apparent was the significance of language playing a central role. For students who have EAL, being unable to vocalise their understanding or lack of would undoubtedly impact their

access to learning. Similarly, when considering whether ALN or EAL learners would have the cognitive ability to be able to develop discovery-based learning, the fact that they would need to be guided in such discovery appeared to be obstructive to their learning.

Due to the longevity of three of the four TAs in their roles, the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews was rich and appeared valid. There was a real honesty apparent in the responses provided, especially when questions were posed about their lack of knowledge of the curriculum and its structure. This showed a sense of trust in me as a researcher as well as a desire to improve their own understanding and to be able to support their charges more readily. When asked about their awareness of the 4Ps, some of the TAs stated they knew what they were but couldn't name them and had little or no idea how to support their charges to be able to embrace them. Linking this with social constructivism, with the TAs themselves having little idea of the 4Ps, it would prove almost impossible for them to be able to prompt their charges and to increase their independence in learning.

Some of the most interesting responses came from the initial and supplementary questions about becoming 21st century learners. This involved the requirement for them to support learners through scaffolding and modelling using Jerome Bruner's ideas. There was a sense that as TAs, they were learning at the same time as the students rather than being able to support as part of the lesson planning. Previously, they would have helped deliver the scaffolding and model responses, whereas due to learners needing to become more independent, less support was now being provided by the teachers themselves. The TAs felt this put them at a disadvantage as they too were learning at the same time and were therefore unable to provide effective support.

All of the TAs felt that EAL learners would struggle to access the curriculum and specifically, to embrace the 4Ps. There was a clear sense that the language used for the 4Ps would act as an initial barrier prior to any learning taking place. Linking the TAs' role with Vygotsky's idea that they should set the climate and develop interaction with the students in order for them to access the learning, this appeared to immediately prevent this taking place. As the TAs had previously stated a lack of understanding of the philosophy behind the 4Ps, expecting them to be able to support their charges would be almost impossible. This became more apparent when the students themselves responded to questionnaires provided.

As the curriculum was in its infancy having been introduced up to and including Year 7, focus on this year group was key. Using the TAs with whom they worked on a daily basis to administer the questionnaires ensured that the learners were comfortable in providing responses and in line with BERA's ethical guidelines, potential harm was avoided. There was a clear sense that the students in School A were not as well versed with the curriculum's aims as those in School B, who seemed more confident with the 4Ps. Despite this perceived awareness, the learners were unable to name them readily. Almost all were comfortable in acknowledging that they were supported by a TA in the classroom, though in line with Vygotsky, there was no recognition that there was a shared knowledge within this support.

Perhaps due to perception, none of the learners from either school believed that they worked with their peers to find solutions. This may have been a desire to demonstrate independence and a desire to show aptitude rather than reliance. Equally, the learners stated that they were able to complete work without the teacher or a TA guiding them seeing this as a failing rather than working towards independence. What was wholly clear was that none of the students fully understood what the 4Ps meant or how they could support them with their learning as according to social constructivism, they would become

active participants in their learning. The questionnaires' responses revealed that the curriculum was being done to them rather than with them leading to their knowledge being facilitated.

5.4 Students

Findings from the study across two large secondary schools suggest that disadvantaged students will continue to struggle with the demands of a curriculum which aims to encourage them to drive their own learning through greater use of an enquiry (experiential) or discovery model. The data collated from participants' responses was split into two sections: the students' questionnaire results and the TA and ALNCo interviews and focus groups. From the questionnaires, what emerged was the different stages the two schools were at in terms of student knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum. Student responses from School A were all negative to the question 'Are you aware that a new curriculum is being introduced in Wales?', whereas in School B, a third of students stated they knew of its intended implementation. That there was greater awareness in School B demonstrates there is more dialogue around the curriculum and therefore that staff are potentially more ready for its introduction. Their willingness to share this with students and the students' knowledge that it is being implemented shows greater advancement in its development at School B.

One aspect of relative strength seen by many regarding CfW is the linking together of discrete subjects under headings known as Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) around which it is structured. This is due to the "potential opportunities for developing learning processes" and the way in which it will "enable learners to think in ways … critically, ethically and creatively" (Jones, 2022, p. 2). Students were asked a second question

regarding the new curriculum's introduction as to whether they were aware of subjects being grouped together. Half of both schools' students stated that they were aware that subjects would be linked rather than being taught separately. This shows greater confidence amongst teaching professionals in this area as the change in the curriculum's structure has been shared with half of all students questioned across the two schools.

When considering if they were aware of the 4Ps and whether their teachers referred to them in the classroom, seven of the students from School A stated that they were not spoken about. Despite one student from School A stating that they were aware of what the 4Ps were, none of the students were able to name any of the four. Responses from School B's students regarding whether teachers referred to the 4Ps varied with two of students stating they did, four stating they didn't and two stating they did sometimes. When asked if they were aware of what the 4Ps were, one student answered maybe whilst the rest stated they weren't. Again, not one student could name any of the purposes.

As one of the new curriculum's purposes is to encourage independence, students were asked whether they were able to complete work without guidance. In School A, two of students answered yes; four of the students answered sometimes and two stated that they couldn't work without support. Answers were identical in School B, where two students answered yes; four students answered sometimes and two stated that they couldn't work without support. One question which was surprisingly positive was whether the students understood how to stay healthy. This resulted in all of the students stating that they did understand how to stay healthy, however, the ambiguity of the question may not have encouraged the students to make a link between looking after themselves and the purpose of being a healthy, confident individual linked with CfW's statements.

Students were asked if they knew what was meant by being ethical and informed. In School A, none of the students stated that they knew what this purpose meant. Whereas, in School B, half of the students stated they knew what it meant, however, none of these students could provide a definition of any kind. The final question was an open one where students were asked what they thought ambitious and capable meant. There were some interesting responses from School A students with the closest in meaning being "someone who wants to try something they have never done before". Responses from students in School B reflected a greater understanding with responses such as "being able to do things on my own…thinking I can do anything" and "when you can do certain tasks believing in yourself". Both sets of students believed the expectation was to be able to execute a task or be able to do something which reflected the idea of being capable, with the concept of being ambitious being slightly more opaque with perhaps the closest in understanding being "believing in yourself".

5.5 ALNCos

Access to CfW: Language Fluency and Support

School A's ALNCo felt that the new curriculum lent itself nicely to different learning needs and that access to learning would depend on a student's level of "language acquisition" and "the level of support" they received. This would suggest that those who had lower levels of English would be at a disadvantage compared to students whose first language was English. There was a feeling that schools needed to "immerse [EAL students] in the language … to develop that fluency because without that fluency, you're not going to get total immediate access to what you need to be learning". The need for immersion would reflect current thinking regarding the most effective way for EAL students to develop English language skills, "since immersion learning is an authentic, naturalistic experience of the language, it can prove beneficial toward language growth" (Porter and Castillo, 2023, p.165). However,

as the fluency required to access the curriculum would not be apparent and TA support may be required, the “total immediate access” would not be possible.

Importantly, access to the curriculum would be facilitated through guidance and would therefore depend on the TAs’ understanding. In order for EAL students working with TAs to be able to access the curriculum content and to learn independently, the ALNCo from School A believed there would need to “provid[e] them with that structured language immersion in that language so that they really develop it”. This would mean that the students’ language acquisition would also be predicated on the TAs’ own understanding not just of the content the students need to access but also supporting their charges with language acquisition in order to understand the fundamental learning in the classroom. With regard to language support for EAL students, the respondent felt it was about ensuring there was a balance between immersion into English and the provision of effective support. More importantly, it would be about “stepping back and allowing [the students] to take the learning on themselves” whilst providing structure to develop language acquisition.

There was a feeling that an important message to relay to support staff was to allow students to make mistakes rather than jumping in too quickly to correct. It was thought to be more fitting with the new curriculum to “let them make those mistakes and let them see that is OK and that that's how they learn”. ALNCo A felt there was a misconception amongst the TAs regarding allowing students greater autonomy “because … they feel that the expectation from us is that they prevent those mistakes from happening” in order to prove they are doing their job as a classroom support. “That isn't the case”. The presumption would be that students’ mistakes could suggest the TA wasn’t doing their job effectively, though it was important to accept that this wouldn’t be the case.

There was also a belief that education has moved on from the time when support staff "practically breathed" for their charges. More recently, the advice offered was to "step back" and provide what the ALNCo described as the school's "mantra" of "satellite support": moving around the classroom to support any student who required help so as to prevent one to one reliance as "just because 'Johnny' doesn't have a statement doesn't mean to say that you can't go and check in on him and check he's okay". The advice given by the ALNCo in this school was not to "dive in too quickly and try and stop the students from attempting to access the learning themselves. Additionally, "staff [had been told] not use the term one to one and to stop using it in reports [as] there's no such thing: it doesn't exist" which further enhances the importance of allowing students greater autonomy by supporting only when necessary.

The ALNCo from School B stated that EAL students would struggle to access the expectations within the new curriculum due to a lack of structure and because it is "too broad" in nature with end goals that are "so open". They referred to the "barriers that [the students] are facing daily [and those that] the staff are facing daily" supporting students who are not first language English as they are unable to access basic literacy. There was a belief that CfW was "too broad and there's not enough structure" to allow learning to readily take place.

It was their belief that it was,

> all very well having an all singing, all dancing new curriculum with creativity and big wonderful ideas

but without the "basic skills they need to be able to access the curriculum" such concepts were meaningless. Interestingly, the respondent felt there should be a programme of basic skills literacy with one to one and small group sessions provided prior to placing EAL

students into experiencing a curriculum in which they would be “completely out of their depth”. There was a feeling that schools were “almost bypassing the basic needs of EAL students” in order to roll out a new curriculum into which they didn’t fit. Additionally, there was a feeling that there “wasn’t enough staffing to be able to support them with the literacy and basic skills to be able to flourish in a creative environment”.

A key phrase used was, “it needs to be tailored” in terms of what effective access would look like, considering how “this style would work and this wouldn’t” and therefore ensuring learners’ needs are considered. School B’s ALNCo felt that there should not be a “one size fits all” approach but rather each class within the year group would have bespoke activities where “a more formal approach is taken” according to the learners’ needs. Accounting for the language needs of the students, the respondent felt that EAL and ALN learners would not be supported effectively as they “come with so many different needs “including the “lack of skills and language barrier” which hinders their progress, “even if differentiation was done correctly”. The ALNCo from School B felt that even if adaption was done well it “wouldn’t be enough to support the learners because each child comes with so many different needs – it’s huge”. This response poses an interesting anomaly as CfW advocates individualised learning which thereby negates a need for differentiation, or adaptive learning.

As ALN and EAL students tend to become disengaged quickly if they don’t understand, there was a suggestion that part of these students’ learning processes could involve “building resilience and coping strategies” to become more independent. Whilst this concept would fit the purpose-driven curriculum with students becoming ambitious and capable as they figure out their own learning, to have to teach this prior to supporting learners would seem

nonsensical. As School B's ALNCo states, "I love the idea" of students being taught greater independence but they "can't cope without being led".

Supporting Learners with CfW: TA Support

With regard to EAL learners having the language skills to understand the 4Ps, School A's ALNCo felt that it was to do with "their level of language acquisition" and how learning is presented and the expectations within the classroom which demonstrated comprehension. There was a belief that if the work was "presented as a bundle of texts rather than an expectation, that's just weaved into everything, then they don't necessarily need to understand" what is put before them. It was felt that they wouldn't necessarily be able to verbalise their understanding when considering the 4Ps, but may be able to demonstrate it intrinsically. Some students would "have the language to be able to describe what they're doing and how that all fits in. Others won't. But it doesn't mean that they won't be doing those things". So, whether EAL or ALN students have the ability to explain their understanding verbally is not wholly important; what is important is that they are able to demonstrate that they understand practically by doing the "activities and the tasks". However, this would require further levels of assessment in order to ascertain whether EAL and ALN students were accessing their learning which in itself would place the emphasis of the learning back on the teacher rather than the learner themselves.

This was further built upon through the use of the purpose of being ethically informed. There was an acceptance that the students "may not necessarily understand the terms" but they would be able to complete activities relating to the purpose with guidance. Providing the students could see that it was about "bringing it back all the time to those links [and the reasons] why" they were doing certain things then they would build their understanding.

Additionally, some students with ALN may be able to understand the terms within the 4Ps depending on “how they [they have] presented … how [they have] been taught” to and their level of capacity to comprehend. This would however be on a superficial level and would still “need to be in terms they understand”.

When considering discovery learning, School A’s ALNCo felt that it was “quite suited to their needs because it is more hands on” as discovery learning has more of a tendency to be kinaesthetic. However, there was a clear belief that they would need support with the language skills necessary to access the learning. Support should only be offered where necessary as it would be “important step back and let [the students] do as much as they can do and then step in and support where needed” as it was felt students would have the “capacity” to access the learning, it would merely be the language skills with which they would require help. Whether the students accessing the curriculum were EAL or had ALN, there would be a need to “tweak and adapt” with differentiation required due to some form of additional learning needs being present in the class. School A’s ALNCo felt that access to discovery learning would “depend on how it's been presented, because depending on your level of additional needs, you're going to have to tweak things”. Therefore, it was considered that staff should be able to differentiate the resources provided, and that “everything's accessible to everybody” with the right support. Interestingly, there was a view that every teacher would “have some form of additional learning needs in [their] class, whether it's this level or this level, [they’re] still going to make adaptations”. Therefore, the ability for EAL and ALN learners to be able to access CfW and lessons where discovery learning was taking place would still be determined by the level of TA support.

With regard to the TAs understanding of CfW, School A's ALNCo felt that there was a disconnect. Whilst training had been offered to staff, for the TAs and support staff, this had been on a "much, much lower level". As the TAs would be providing the fundamental support to students in the classroom, this is both surprising and disappointing. An acknowledgement was made that the county had "set-up additional training for them" but this was "delivered on a day that wasn't an INSET day". This meant that the TAs were unable to attend the training as they were needed in the classroom. Moreover, as a number of the texts were not available, and despite requesting the recordings "straight away", these were not "accessible". Added to this was the fact that they were "all in Welsh" which then excluded a number of the TAs working at the school. This would have made it more difficult for TAs to be able to support their charges without the fundamental required training.

School A's ALNCo felt that it was "almost like [TAs] were forgotten about", but that it was "really important that they had that training because they're the ones who are expected to support with it in the classroom". This belief echoed the feelings of the TAs themselves who thought that the training they had received had been inadequate, especially as they were the ones expected to provide the support. There was suggestion that the TAs were "fearful of change" as it would expose their own lack of understanding and ability to learn new ways of supporting in the classroom. School A's ALNCo believed that as some of the support staff "left school at 16" they had to "push them to get out of their comfort zone" to attend training which would help with supporting their charges.

Due to the "lack of confidence when there's any change", it was felt there would be a need to support the TAs to understand that "expectations would be different from class to class". So rather than worrying about understanding the work and therefore trying to complete it

alongside the learners, they would need “guidance from the teacher” and support to “access what is happening” in the classroom. There was also a feeling that with the cross curricular links encouraged by CfW that “everything ties together” and that “everything is accessible to everybody regardless of ability and language capacity” providing they have the linguistic ability to be able to access the learning. Importantly, it is about allowing the students to “bloom” and “supporting them when they need it” rather than stepping in and taking control. It is about knowing “when not to take over” which as educationalists we do “far too often” as there is always “that fear of failure”.

In terms of having the language skills to be able to access the curriculum’s 4Ps, School B’s ALNCo was “100% sure” that EAL learners would not be able to do so. There was a clear belief that these students were “surviving with the day to day school environment” and were just about able to order their dinner and would definitely not be able to understand what it meant to be ambitious. In terms of a wider education, there was a feeling that rather than becoming healthy, confident individuals ready to fulfil their lives as valued members of society, our education system is

> creating children that feel completely demoralised and their self-esteem so lacking and rather than investing [in our children], we are cementing over the cracks.

There was the belief that this concept was “huge … and if it is our goal, then we have got it wrong for education because the curriculum and approach is not creating confident individuals”. Thus there is a disconnect between the new curriculum’s aims to develop learners who demonstrate confidence and independence and the reality which is in complete opposition. When considering the concept of being an ethically informed citizen, there was a belief that EAL students would struggle to understand this purpose on a micro scale within the classroom and what it “means to be a good classmate [or] a good citizen”.

On a macro scale, School B's ALNCo felt we are "expecting children to understand the bigger world" and what this means as part of society which is undeliverable as they're unable to comprehend within a "controlled environment" at school and would be affected by their home setting too.

Despite having a TA and the resources to provide basic language skills support to EAL students, there was a feeling that little impact was being made due to being overstretched. An example of a Year 8 EAL student being taken out of Welsh lessons to support their language learning was given. Even with this intervention, they were said to be "drowning, absolutely drowning in the curriculum" which doesn't work for him "due to the language barrier". When considering the advocation for discovery learning within CfW, it was felt that EAL and ALN learners lack the linguistic confidence to claim an idea as their own as they would be "out of their depth" and therefore don't have "the resilience" to continue to propose ideas. They would not "be able to say this is my idea and … this is what I think and why I think that" as they don't have the "self-esteem" to put themselves forward.

Interestingly, it was felt that autistic students "would probably cope a lot better" with discovery learning as "they see something as it is" and their view is often acceptably abstract. For students with differing learning needs or those with weaker cognitive skills, it was felt that CfW's structure was "too open…to criticism for them" and that they "wouldn't have the maturity" to deal with being wrong which would impact on their learning. These students would need "structure and a focus that unfortunately would be teacher-led lessons" which in turn would dilute the discovery learning element. School B's ALNCo spoke on behalf of the support staff who were "incredibly frustrated" about "the new curriculum

and the expectations for work to be produced [which] often meant that they produce the work for the child because otherwise the child will fail, which is wrong".

Awareness of CfW's Requirements: Independent Learning

Support staff in School A have received little in the way of training about the 4Ps despite much being presented to teaching staff. Additionally, training was arranged though the materials provided by the county were in Welsh which excluded many of the TAs which seemed like "they were forgotten about". Whilst some support staff would be aware of the 4Ps, many would not as the messages had not "quite filtered through". Many TAs would also be fearful of change as they "left school at 16" – therefore they would be reluctant to undertake training meaning they would be less likely to understand the curriculum changes. In assisting learners to access support in the classroom, a "big shift" had been seen in School A due to satellite support. However, whilst the ALNCo stated they went into lessons to ensure support was being given, this did not necessarily mean it was with understanding the 4Ps. It was felt that the confidence of the support staff would "trickle down" eventually when they began to feel more confident with the new curriculum's aims.

School B's ALNCo felt that support staff were aware of the 4Ps, though their understanding was on a superficial level due to being seen as "babysitters or crowd control" in the classroom. There was a feeling that with greater involvement of the TAs, the work produced by the students could be more in depth and the TAs' role "much more effective". An example was provided about a trip outside the classroom by the humanities department that involved Year 7 and 8. Rather than being asked to support the learners to "look at this view", they were merely instructed to "stand at the back of that line and make sure everybody's there" or to undertake "crowd control [with naughty little Mickey at the back".

Additionally, there could be greater support for ALN learners to look at a specific area rather than considering “eight different areas” which they would find more difficult.

It was stated that there was increased pressure to support EAL and ALN students due to the openness of the curriculum’s structure. This could result in “nothing being done and the children sat there” with a lot of pressure on the “support staff to prompt and encourage but not give answers” and not to “produce the work for them”. It was felt that there were “a lot of barriers with having [a curriculum] that was so open-ended”. When asked about training and support with CfW, there was a view that the implementation “could be so much more effective” if professional development could be given. When asked about whether EAL and ALN students would be able to access CfW, the response was clear: “not without the support of the LSA”. The ALNCo from School B felt that there was “a lot of increased pressure to support so many” students with CfW being “new to teachers [and] very, very new to children …[who] require prompting continuously”. Furthermore, when it comes to understanding what is meant by being a healthy, confident individual, TAs would be in a better position to discuss this purpose as they spend more time conversing with their charges and could therefore support teachers with students’ understanding.

Embracing Difference in the New Curriculum

With regard to what being a twenty-first century learner looked like for students in School A, there was a belief that the new curriculum would “tie in nicely with learning for additional needs learners”. There was a suggestion that the curriculum would be “accessible to everybody regardless of ability and language capacity”. This was considered an exciting change due to having higher expectations at the school in order to encourage students to believe in themselves.

School A's consideration of key differences needed for support staff to adapt in order to support EAL and ALN students to embrace the 4Ps were seen as a "work in progress" by the ALNCo. It would be about "stepping back and allowing [the students] to bloom", offering support where the students needed it rather than where the support staff believed they needed it: knowing when not to intervene. There was a belief that in embracing failure rather than fearing it, mistakes could be made and students would become more ambitious and capable. The emphasis here was on progress: no matter how small, it would still be progress.

In School B, the ALNCo felt that being a learner in the twenty-first century was tough as there was greater focus on discovery learning and providing reasoning. There was a view that it would take a lot of encouragement to develop students' ability to question rather than passively accept information provided and that TAs should have "more conversations around the new curriculum with pupils than a lot of teachers because of the time [they] spend with them" . As developing autonomy and confidence form the basis of the new curriculum, this would make its implementation difficult. Reference was made to Ukrainian students who had arrived and were placed in mainstream GCSE lessons in Year 11, questioning why, as there are "more than 100" such students in the county, "there is no provision for these poor children". Whilst the experience of these students was beyond the study of the new curriculum, it was interesting to note that it was their EAL status which set them apart. It was felt that with more funding provided at a local level, these students could be provided with a mutually supportive network.

A further key difference with EAL students accessing the new curriculum was the view that they would never "meet the aspirations of their parents because the curriculum isn't successful for them". Additionally, with the needs of ALN students becoming ever more complex, focusing on emotional and behaviour issues, the "academic focus is the last thing on the agenda" as it's "all emotional, all behaviour…overtaking everything".

The questions which formed part of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the TAs were grouped into four areas: Supporting Different Learners; Understanding of CfW; Learning Under the New Curriculum and Supporting Learners with the New Curriculum. Whilst both schools differed contextually, responses provided demonstrated similar hopes as well as fears for the new curriculum's implementation.

5.6 Teaching Assistants

Supporting Different Learners

The TAs from School A had over 50 years' experience working together at the same secondary school, with TA1 starting in September 1997 and TA2 joining in September 1998. Their responses, from practitioners with a vast amount of knowledge, provided a rich source of information as they had both seen many educational changes over a quarter of a century. In relation to the students they supported, there was a view by TA2 that their role was to "tailor the lesson" for their charges so they could understand the work given. Whilst the work provided hadn't been differentiated by the teacher according to whether the student was EAL or had ALN, TA1 felt their role was to adapt the work and to "chunk it and change the work so that [their charges] could understand … breaking it down so it can processed as small, small chunks". There was evidence from TA2 that the way in which students are supported has changed from one to one and group support outside of the classroom to one

to one and small group work “inside the classroom” with TA1 stating that they used to “oversee four in a group” in the classroom which then changed to taking “small groups out”. One key change which TA1 shared was the supply of resources which now falls to them to source as they are told what topic to teach rather than being “given out packs and things and we'd know which direction to go, but we don't seem to have that support anymore” with teaching material which they may or may not have had to differentiate.

School B’s TAs had vastly different experience from one another as TA1 had over 17 years’ experience whilst the TA2 had just 12 months; both showed a deeply positive connection with their students. There was less stability with the charges they supported as this changed on a daily basis according to need; both stated that they were looking forward to being back with a class whose needs they knew well, with TA2 stating she felt “a bit all over the place” as the students she supported changed so often. The students’ needs differed widely from ASD and dyslexia to those who were EAL who also displayed ALN. TA1 from School B stated that they supported “everyone” when asked, including ALN and EAL students meaning the support can feel “kind of mixed up”. These students’ requirements needed “investigation and patience to work out what’s what” and to ascertain what support was needed, initially “observ[ing] them in the classroom and then mak[ing] a kind of assessment of need”. TA1 from School B stated they didn’t use formal tests to establish the needs of EAL students as they found them “of limited use” but merely had “a chat” to ascertain and implement the most “appropriate support”.

Understanding of CfW

With regard to understanding what the 4Ps are within the new curriculum, TA1 from School A stated that as they “don’t attend any meetings [and] are not involved”, they had very little understanding and could not name any of the purposes. TA2 confirmed that online training

had been arranged by the county about the 4Ps but “everything was in Welsh [and] they couldn’t find the English recordings”, this didn’t take place. Both TAs stated that they were not able to name any of the 4Ps. Neither TA knew what discovery learning was, though when pressed TA1 remarked that it could be “hands on” learning: “discovering how things work and how things get done” and TA2 though it was “getting students to try things first before intervening…if it’s on the right track”.

TA2 from School B had no knowledge of CfW whilst TA2 who was more experienced felt it was about making learners “a bit more independent” having an “holistic approach to learning” with a “more integrated skill set”. TA2 then went on to state that they “hadn’t read up on it [and] no one had really explained it” so they would have to make a “guess” as to what it was about. Neither TA knew exactly what the 4Ps were. TA1 said they had “very little knowledge about the new curriculum” and that they thought it was “meant to make learners a little bit more independent and maybe a more holistic approach to learning”. They also felt that students would develop a “more integrated skill set” however, they knew little beyond this about the 4Ps.

Responses to an understanding of discovery learning were interesting as both School B’s TAs’ knowledge had come from seeing it in primary schools first. TA1 stated that they believed it was about completing more “independent research” and students using a “different way of presenting [their] findings” in a way of their choosing. Ways of presenting were fitted to the students’ needs according to TA2: they were able to “produce an outcome of the work [using] laptops or by doing it on paper”. This could entail completing a “poem or a poster…whatever way [the student] would find easiest”. TA1 from School B explained how discovery learning meant they could “play to their strengths” so an EAL

student could copy and paste images though they would be working towards understanding the same topic. There was a belief that laptops used made a difference in engaging the EAL and ALN students, as according to TA1,

> being cut off from the writing process…an ALN child who is new to English [can] push ahead in the same direction as the rest of the class just displaying [the work] in a slightly different way.

Similarly, TA2 agreed that the EAL and ALN students they were with would "sometimes struggle with a lot of typing or writing" so to be able to complete a task in a different format would be "a lot easier for them to do".

Learning Under the New Curriculum

School A's TAs were both clear in their view that learning under the new curriculum would still be clearly linked with linguistic understanding, with TA1 remarking, "if they don't understand the language, they're not going to do anything". TA1 also believed that the students "will have to be guided…will need support from the get go". Both also stated that EAL students would require, with TA1 feeling they would need "much more [support] "than they are getting now" as they would need to be guided. TA2 believed that students would "need time to process" information and would require "help to go on to the next step …like scaffolding" or "chunking" whilst TA2 believed they would require more "visual aids…to help and assist" in order to have the confidence to try in lessons. TA1 also added that "if you don't have the resources, you're not going to get anywhere" with supporting ALN and EAL students.

TA2 from School A felt that there would be a need to revert to one to one support for EAL students due to the focus on greater independence. They felt that the TAs would "have to have guidance [and the students] would have to have support" to be able to access the 4Ps. According to School A's TA2, EAL and ALN students will need support as without resources there would be no understanding and they would "have to be guided", otherwise they would be like "lost sheep…who flock together". Both TAs agreed that some of the terminology within the new curriculum was difficult for them to access as they didn't have a degree and it was not "child friendly" as it was aimed at higher achieving learners. TA1 stated that "some of the terms that are used…[they] don't understand" so it's "hard to get [their] heads around" CfW without guidance, whilst TA2 stated that they "needed support as well to make sure they that [they're] supporting [students] in the right way".

The TAs from School B demonstrated a more positive yet cautious approach to how learning amongst EAL and ALN students would differ under the new curriculum. TA2 felt that having electronic devices and access to "different resources make it easier for students to engage with their learning". There was a sense of positivity from TA1 in the way skills were being utilised in a "multidisciplined" way, including lots of different media such as video or "pushing [students'] skills" using graphs in humanities rather than just in mathematics or science which no longer phased the students. According to TA1 from School B, if an aspect usually taught in science or geography was delivered in English, students would be "totally clueless because it didn't belong in English". It was felt discovery learning helped the students as they were able to have greater input through experiencing different stimulus, building their "skills…[through] integrating" in different subjects. TA1 also felt there was a real concern over the speed in which work was completed, as if "on a race track…speeding through" meaning some students are left behind. This linked with a concern for the future

with students still having to sit GCSEs which remain largely unchanged and a worry that they didn't feel that "the knowledge actually sits" and that there could be "a dialogue" to consider how CfW and examinations would fit together.

TA2 from School B reiterated that the needs of EAL and ALN students are vastly different, from those who can "write 10 paragraphs" to those who "can talk it but can't put it down on paper" with others who don't understand a thing unless it's re-explained to them. These students could all be in one class expecting to demonstrate the concept of being a capable learner, and what "might work for one of the pupils in class" according to TA2, can cause "another pupil to go into a meltdown". TA2 stated that there were students they supported who "wouldn't have any idea … they sit in the back of the class, sometimes quite oblivious to what is being said". An interesting example of an autistic student with ALN who will voice his opinion to the class until others accept his viewpoint was given by TA2. As he's incapable of "having his thoughts changed" and if "what you are saying to him is not completely right in his head, he will sit there and tell the whole class". According to TA2, this would suggest he's not necessarily a capable learner. TA2 also stated that "if [the students] weren't willing to take information on board, you're not going to get anywhere with them" whereas, there were "a couple who were like sponges". TA1 also suggested that "some children love structured work and some don't" so being capable looks very different for one student to what it looks like to another.

<u>Supporting Learners with the New Curriculum.</u>

In School A, TA2 felt that supporting EAL and ALN students to be ethically informed meant "making sure they know that everyone is different", with "different feelings and beliefs", and to respect other people's opinions. TA1 believed that much depended on background and

that it was about understanding this along with different cultures, it meant being able to "respect everyone's opinion …regardless of whether it is right or wrong". This was also related to the students' work and the levels they found themselves on as TA2 felt they needed to keep "plodding on together" as everybody learned in a different way at different speeds. Due to the numbers of EAL students at the school, TA2 felt that all students needed to understand that "not everybody's the same…some might have a worse background [and] some are more blessed". This would be important in terms of understanding what it meant to be ethically informed, especially as a migrant coming to Wales. Similarly, TA1 felt it was important "to understand about everybody's culture and backgrounds" so that students didn't think "I'm better than you". Linking with CfW, TA1 also stated that "everybody learns in a different way…at different speeds"; this should form part of the understanding of being ethically informed amongst the students.

Both TAs from School A were vociferous in their belief that education should be inclusive and that students should be able to find their own level. There was a feeling that if EAL and ALN students are not supported, it will, according to TA1, affect "classroom management, the behaviour of the children" and the students will become "frustrated" and fail if they "can't access what they need". With regard to being ethically informed, there was a feeling that learning about this as a concept could benefit all students as TA2 believed "people will understand a bit more about [EAL learners], where they've come from and what they've been through": an appreciation could be shared about where Syrian refugees at the school had come from, what they'd been through and why they had to move to Wales.

The TAs from School A believed that to be an ambitious and capable EAL or ALN learner would be to show students they were able and could be the best person they could be "achieving the best possible grade[s]" according to TA1. A clear link between being able and processing speeds of EAL and ALN learners and the need for "10 second processing time" was considered by TA2 before expecting a response as "you've got to give them that time". There was a belief that teachers would often ask for responses those who process more quickly: asking those without needs for responses rather than waiting develops EAL and ALN learner apathy. Their reservation would result in these learners feeling a lack of confidence and a sense of failure which transposes into a lack of ambition and belief in capability, however, as TA1 states, "it doesn't mean that those who can't process as quickly don't know the answer". As TA2 states, unless students are included more readily, "they'll hold back" as they would "just wait for the answer [or] just wait for someone else to say it rather than them having that opportunity". It would take prompting from support staff to encourage EAL and ALN learners to respond and prove they are ambitious and capable, with those who don't feel able to "feeling like a failure" according to TA1.

Both TAs from School A felt that EAL and ALN learners would struggle to become twenty-first century citizens unless they were fully supported and guided to do so. TA2 felt that as they are not seen as teachers by the EAL and ALN students, "a lot of pupils approach[ed] them" and talked about "anything and everything". This was seen as equating to being a twenty-first century citizen as the students do not see a tiered system when the TAs share details about their own lives and everyday issues they may face. However, EAL and ALN students would continue to struggle with becoming twenty-first citizens, with TA2 stating "we can get them there, but they need a lot of support and guidance".

With regard to accessing CfW, School B's TAs felt that supporting learners to become ethically informed meant to be aware that different people live different lives and that there is a life outside of Wales. When considering whether EAL students would embrace the 4Ps, the TAs from School B considered nuances in understanding of the terms and how they could apply. According to TA1, the fact that EAL students may come from "a particular part of the world [who could] actually talk as global citizens", they would be able to relate to being ethically informed. However, TA2 believed that even though "there are a lot of different religions in Wales …a lot of students are quite oblivious to all sorts of ways of living". Additionally, EAL and ALN students could become enterprising, creative contributors according to TA1 as they will "have something to say about where they come from or [their] religion". However, when considering being ambitious or capable, it could refer to so many different aspects such as being able to explain where different countries are located or comparing and contrasting different religions. Therefore, this would be beyond some EAL and ALN students' capabilities. TA1 felt that there could be a "question mark" over being ambitious and capable as "there are some skills which might be lacking" as some of the Muslim students "don't read fiction texts, they read …the Qur'an".

When considering how EAL learners embraced being ambitious and capable, there was a feeling that it would depend on expectations. TA1 gave an example of a Syrian refugee who has mastered "200 high frequency words" having "been in the country for 6 years". Whilst this is a huge step forward it wouldn't equate to a GCSE English pass. Similarly, levels of ambition and capability were considered for ALN learners, some of whom according to TA2 were unable to spell basic words "like dog and cat" but should they master these, would display capability within their own realm, providing them "with a major feeling like they've done really well".

Becoming a twenty-first century learner raised some interesting views with TA2 from School B with regard to life skills and the ability to complete everyday tasks such as buttoning up a shirt or making a cup of tea. There were mixed views about technology, with TA2 seeing phones as a positive in terms of taking photographs of work displayed on the board to trigger recall from previous lessons as "they've always got it so they can keep going back to things" and using them as translators, which, as TA1 pointed out, "allows [the students] to quickly access whatever's being talked about". However, as TA2 admitted, chrome books could also be used to search "KFC menus or football scores" which makes them a negative influence in the classroom. Providing the learners were given clear instructions, technology was seen to help rather than hinder learners. Both TAs saw their role as changing. As TA1 pointed out, students will now be able to "easily access examples [and] might not even have to write anything" so there would be less requirement for support. There will be, according to TA1, a movement from focusing on "academic skills": what needed to be written, what keywords would be used to having to understand the focus of the lesson and the learning expectations. Where previously teachers may have provided resources and possibly differentiated work which could provide scaffolding, now the expectation would be for TAs to understand the lesson themselves and to explain this to their charges.

5.7 Discussion

As outlined in Chapter 3, over a decade ago, Elaine Edwards compared Wales' educational changes to a roller-coaster ride (Edwards, *WalesOnline*, 2013). Whilst this specifically reflected Leighton Andrews' proposals which preceded CfW's introduction, pertinently, the tumultuous impact that the succeeding elections of several Welsh education ministers afforded clearly created a sense of scholastic consternation. Reacting to the poor PISA results over several performances as far back as 2006 and the "even more disappointing

results" of 2009, there was a clear recognition that something radical needed to be done to shake Wales out of its complacency (Geomaths, 2024). The introduction of CfW was undeniably timely in its inception, but what this thesis hopefully shows is the lack of consideration given to ALN and EAL learners' needs. No education system should rest on its laurels, failing to heed required changes. However, in purportedly bringing the best aspects of different educational systems together from across the globe and expecting students to access all aspects as one homogenous mass appears naïve in the extreme.

The renowned educational reformer John Dewey believed that learning should be a socially collective experience, one which requires students' active engagement (Hildebrand, 2024). Additionally, Vygotsky advocated that the development of knowledge and the creation of meaning occurred through the acquisition of new skills and the creation of new pathways. His belief that we look to others to learn in a kind of educational imprinting achieved through observing the modelled behaviours of others clearly befits the constructivist learning proposed by Donaldson (Vygotsky, 1978). However, one aspect which has been overlooked in CfW's composition is the importance of what current thinking terms adaptation (differentiation) for those learners who require extra support and guidance. If a teacher acts merely as a facilitator both within Vygotsky's social constructivism and in order for CfW's 4Ps to be developed, this would leave those students who may require support needing quite significant adaptation for their learning. Those students who are already at a disadvantage as they lack the underlying knowledge or the linguistic skills to be able to access the curriculum will evidently be left behind. Therefore, far from being a panacea for the recognised lack in Wales' education system, optimistically, CfW could be seen as a farrago of idealistic proposals randomly set together rather than a carefully constructed inclusive curriculum for 21st century learners.

As one of the TA1 from School B stated, “it takes a little bit of investigation … to work out what's what” in terms of the needs of students who arrive at the school with lower level English skills. This exploration is required as the school does not “do any formal testing with them” but merely makes time to “have a chat” and observe these students in a classroom situation. Furthermore, the students may have additional learning needs as well as having English as an additional language making their possible requirements “kind of mixed up”. With the expectations of CfW and the greater focus on autonomy in the classroom, more formalised testing of English skills using for example a CEFR test to establish levels of English and to therefore provide appropriate support in the classroom based on need. Additionally, involving the ALNCo in classroom observations and specific testing for dyslexia, dyscalculia or even autism would ensure students who have EAL/ALN are provided with the most appropriate and targeted support available. Ensuring diagnostic testing takes place would allow students greater access to experiential learning and thus more involvement with CfW. Perhaps most importantly, TAs require training and support to fully understand CfW and the changes that have taken place. This would be fundamental to ensuring they are able to support their charges in a meaningful way as they would understand aspects such as the curriculum’s 4Ps and WM statements. Whilst such training should have been provided when CfW was first introduced, ensuring that this is now part of every Welsh school’s INSET sessions or is provided during induction for TAs new to a school will ensure that those students with EAL or ALN will be provided with more tailored, befitting support.

A further echo of Vygotsky’s constructivism is reflected in the development of ‘Innovative Learning Environments’ or ILEs whereby classroom spaces adapt in order for different types of learning to take place (Bradbeer, 2021). Such educational practices are clearly evident

both in constructivism with its concept of experiential learning as well as learners becoming enterprising and creative whilst embracing CfW's 4Ps. As Bradbeer points out, whilst the use of ILEs provides space for 21st century learning to take place, the lack of traditional teaching and knowledge acquisition can leave some students with a lack of understanding. A "re-imagining of sometimes long-held teaching identities" (Ibid., 2021, p. 49) is necessary when considering more learner-led activities, however, when considering that the acquisition of knowledge remains fundamental in order to build on understanding, embracing 21st century skills becomes secondary to solid age-old teaching methods.

Despite having been written almost forty years ago, The Swann Report's recognition (1985) for the need to train TAs to support students with EAL is just as pertinent today. Whilst most schools now integrate rather than segregate their English language learners, the responsibility to ensure that EAL students are provided for linguistically is still not as widespread as it should be (Coleman, 2010). The emphasis remains on classroom practitioners: teachers and TAs to provide an inclusive experience for EAL learners. This implies that provision is inconsistent due to a reliance on individual ability.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, students who have EAL often "leave school earlier and have lower academic achievement than their native peers" (Welsh Government, 2015, p. 7). Additionally, when one considers that it takes anywhere between 5 and 10 years to be able to develop English language skills to be able to access learning effectively (Collier, 1989), this puts English language learners at an extreme disadvantage. As there is a clear correlation between speaking English and accessing the curriculum, it is little wonder that students with EAL leave school earlier and achieve less academically. Thus in expecting EAL learners to be able to embrace the 4Ps of CfW and to become autonomous learners when they are unable

to speak a language is unrealistic and unacceptable. Furthermore, expecting TAs to be able to support their charges when they themselves do not fully understand CfW's expectations is unfair and unjust.

The students' data from both schools largely concurred with the view that EAL and ALN students would be unable to access the new curriculum and realise the 4Ps independently. Whilst their responses showed some understanding of what CfW entails: grouping subjects together, and being able to work without support, their understanding of the 4Ps and the ability to be able to embrace them was weak. Further research including non-participant observation within the classroom to witness the learners embracing the 4Ps would be interesting, especially to see the support EAL students received and what this would look like within a lesson. It would also be worthwhile seeing different types of lessons: those which are more practical – design technology or PE and those which are more heavily language based such as biology or English. Additionally, a focus on different schools' categorisations would also be interesting to establish the possible effect of the Welsh language, especially amongst EAL learners.

The data collected from the ALNCos was from two schools who were at different stages of development of CfW. School A appeared to have made less progress in terms of implementation as the learners' responses showed less knowledge of the curriculum's purposes and the TAs felt that they lacked understanding and appropriate training. The ALNCo from School A felt that the new curriculum would enable EAL and ALN students to become more independent through taking control of their own learning and encouraging the TAs to take a step back and to provide satellite support rather than trying to take control. Conversely, despite being more developed in their curriculum roll out, the ALNCo

from School B was critical in their belief that EAL students would struggle to access the new curriculum due to its breadth and their lack of basic skills. There was a feeling that students would be out of their depth as they were used to being closely supported but would now be expected to embrace independence. In terms of practicalities, it could be seen as naïve to assume that learners would be able to access a curriculum without being able to understand either cognitively or linguistically what is being learnt. Therefore, whilst idealistically it would be advantageous for EAL and ALN learners to be able to access the new curriculum with less support, practically, this would not be possible.

One of the main aspects affecting EAL learners' access to the new curriculum would be their lack of English skills. The ALNCo from School A believed this wouldn't be a barrier as their lack of understanding of the terms wouldn't prevent them from completing activities with guidance. Additionally, greater inclusion of discovery learning would play to the EAL and ALN learners' strengths as it can involve more kinaesthetic learning though this would need to be combined with differentiated support. Contrastingly, the ALNCo from School B felt that EAL learners would not have the language skills to access the new curriculum's 4Ps as they were merely surviving. They would not be able to understand what it meant to be ambitious or confident as their low self-esteem at not being able to integrate due to a language barrier would create a sense of isolation. When considering becoming an ethically informed citizen, School B's ALNCo felt this would be beyond EAL and ALN learners' comprehension as they were unable to understand with support in the classroom so would further struggle when asked to consider the concept in wider terms in society. There was also a belief that a lack of comprehension would impact on EAL and ALN learners' confidence when considering discovery learning. As there may no 'correct' answers, ALN learners may not have the

maturity to work through problems and would therefore require teacher input thus negating the concept of discovery learning.

There was an admission that School A's TAs had received little training about the 4Ps making them feel they had been overlooked. It was felt that many TAs would be fearful of undertaking training due to their perceived lack of education and that they would become more confident once the new curriculum had started to become embedded. School B's ALNCo felt that TAs were aware of the 4Ps though their position was seen as less important and they were therefore under-utilised in the classroom. They also felt that the less structured nature of CfW would lead to students either being left without support and therefore not completing work or the TAs feeling obliged to complete the work for them when they failed to understand expectations. This therefore confirms the concern that TAs would not be able to support EAL and ALN learners effectively as they would not understand the most effective way to do so having not received appropriate training.

According to School A's ALNCo, the emphasis within the new curriculum should be on learner progress, however small, through allowing them to make mistakes and producing work autonomously in order to become ambitious and capable. There was however and admission that TAs would be unable to support students to embrace the 4Ps, a key aspect underpinning CfW as the infrastructure was not yet in place. School B's ALNCo felt that creating a safe space for learners to develop their ability to question rather than passively accept information would take a lot of encouragement making a curriculum centred upon independent thought difficult for EAL and ALN learners to follow. Expecting students to be able to access a curriculum where so much is predicated on developing understanding autonomously would be unjust. Thus in consideration of whether these marginalised

students could be part of mainstream education, the clear response would be, without effective support and intervention, no.

Data collected from the two schools' TAs showed similarities in their views of the new curriculum's implementation. Three out of four of the support staff had a vast amount of experience in their roles, demonstrating greater validity in their responses. The TAs from School A demonstrated very little understanding of the curriculum's purpose-driven structure or how students were expected to be more autonomous in their learning. The TAs from School B also had no knowledge of the 4Ps, though one had a vague understanding of the ethos of learner autonomy and independence. With scant understanding of the philosophy behind the new curriculum, it would be difficult to envisage EAL and ALN learners being afforded effective support due to a lack of fundamental knowledge and expectation.

One area of particular significance which was not wholly expected was the TAs' feelings of being marginalised themselves within the classroom. Whilst this was not the focus of the research, as TAs make up such a large proportion of the teaching population, a more in-depth study into their experiences and poor training opportunities would provide useful evidence for change moving forward. Additionally, as this study focused on provision for disadvantaged learners in a senior school setting, considering the implementation of CfW in junior schools, where thematic learning is more commonplace would be interesting. The trials of students understanding the concept behind the 4Ps would still be pertinent so would make for a thought-provoking study as limitations of access may prove challenging.

The TAs from School A felt that learners would require more support to access the new curriculum rather than less. The biggest issue for EAL learners would be the language barrier which would prevent access to learning of any kind, especially without support and guidance. An interesting point about the difficulty of comprehending the language involved in the new curriculum and what the 4Ps truly mean was made as the TAs felt it was inaccessible to them let alone learners with needs. A more mixed response to the language surrounding the 4Ps was given by the TAs from School B. There was a feeling from both schools that being ethically informed would be relatable for the EAL learners who were refugees but the TAs from School B felt that being ambitious and capable was much more nuanced as it could be widely interpreted.

When considering the implications of being an EAL or ALN learner and having to follow Wales' new curriculum, the TAs from School A were clear in the view that without support these students will fail. There was also a feeling that a lack of support afforded to these children with needs would lead to more widespread behaviour and classroom management issues. Both of School A's TAs believed that teachers' reluctance to provide waiting time for EAL and ALN learners would be a factor in them failing to become ambitious and capable. There was a clear sense that without support, learners with needs would struggle to become twenty-first century citizens. School B's TAs considered whether EAL and ALN students would understand what it meant to be ethically informed depended on their needs and ability to understand. Similarly, being ambitious and capable would need to be tailored to the expectations of each learner which suggested this would be achievable even if the steps made were small. Becoming a twenty-first century learner meant embracing technology to a greater extent which was seen as an overall positive step. Fundamentally, the biggest change for the support staff was seen as being less involved in differentiating or

scaffolding to enable learners to access the lesson and more to do with being an active participant who then explains the learning to the student. Whilst this in essence would seem to enable EAL and ALN learners' autonomous development, without the language or cognitive skills to access the learning, as all of the TAs stated, any kind of independent learning would be impossible.

In summary, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that students with ALN or who identify as EAL will struggle to embrace the 4Ps as part of their learning. Additionally, expecting such disadvantaged students to be able to be autonomous and to be part of an experiential learning experience would prove impossible for many. It was evident from the data collected that the TAs charged with supporting learners identified as having an additional need would feel ill-equipped to be able to do so, due mainly to the lack of training they themselves had undergone. This would lead to learners being unable to be supported to understand the significance and importance of the 4Ps and thus being unable to access CfW and what many educationalists would believe is the requirement to develop 21st century transferable skills.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts

6.1 Overview

What is clearly demonstrated within this thesis, is that a core group of learners: ALN and EAL students were clearly disregarded during CfW's inception with regard to accessing the 4Ps. In spite of the breadth of the review involving students, practitioners and numerous leaders from pioneer schools, a whole swathe of students has been marginalised as their fundamental requirements: to be able to understand the language and expectations of the 4Ps was fundamentally overlooked.

The research questions set out to answer:

- ✓ What impact will the introduction of discovery learning have on supporting disadvantaged learners' ability to access the 4 Purposes?
- ✓ In what way will EAL learners be supported with language skills to be able to develop discovery learning?
- ✓ How equipped do support staff feel to assist disadvantaged learners to embrace the 4 Purposes?
- ✓ How able do support staff feel to assist disadvantaged learners to access the new curriculum?

As classrooms become further akin to unbridled environments where students take greater control over their own learning, so students who have divergent needs will struggle all the more. With the expectation on teachers to become facilitators rather than instructors, the emphasis on student knowledge attainment will shift to that of skills acquisition. Whilst the move towards greater autonomy may provide many learners with greater freedom to develop their metacognition, for learners with ALN and EAL this will merely provide greater

challenges. This was evident in the responses from all of the TAs questioned and their belief that their charges would be unable to learn independently, as well as in the students' stating that they would not be able to work independently of their TAs. Additionally, the students' responses to the questionnaires demonstrated that despite responding positively to whether or not they were aware of what the 4Ps were, when asked to give examples, none of the students across either school were able to do so.

Perhaps most vociferous was all of the TAs' insistence that neither the ALN nor the EAL students would have the linguistic skills to be able to access the language of CfW, in particular the 4Ps. Without these skills, accessing the expectations for learning independently would prove impossible. Discovery learning would therefore be beyond the realms of achievement for those learners already disadvantaged, who would suffer greater lack through being deprived of the support required to access CfW and the 4Ps.
Most interesting were the responses received from the TAs during the semi-structured interviews where all stated how underprepared they felt for CfW's implementation. There was a clear belief that a lack of training – especially so in the county where School A was situated – and that as classroom assistants, they had been virtually forgotten about. Therefore, the TAs could be seen to have been as overlooked in the lack of support afforded as the ALN and EAL students had been when Donaldson presented his recommendations without concern for their needs. Such lack of training and support also meant that the TAs spoken with felt forgotten about and under-qualified in their need to support their charges. Without a clear understanding of CfW's philosophy and the importance of integrating the 4Ps in learning expectations and tasks, TAs felt unable to support students in their learning.

The data set shows that the TAs who support EAL and ALN students feel ill-equipped to support individuals with the more discovery-based learning expected to take place as part of the new curriculum. Without the language and cognitive skills to be able to develop deeper understanding of concepts, the data highlights that it would prove difficult to move beyond the ability to recall information, let alone understand those concepts and apply them to new situations. With this in mind, becoming an ambitious, capable learner or one who is confident in their learning would be a step too far for our EAL and ALN learners. Indeed as one of the criteria within this purpose states the ability to "communicate effectively … using … English" (Welsh Government, 2019, p.13), without the fundamental ability to access the language, it would have an adverse effect on EAL and ALN students' learning.

In her ministerial foreword to the country's 'National Mission' document, Kirsty Williams, Wales' then Education Minister, boldly stated that "Education has never been more important" (Welsh Government, 2017, p. 2). Whilst this statement may seem irrefutable and the sentiment commendable, the resultant introduction of CfW, may not have wholly delivered on its promise to develop "strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being" (Ibid., 2017, p. 23). Whilst the concept of Donaldson's vision to develop a curriculum fit for twenty-first century learners is a noble one, the reality is that allowing insufficiently supported, poorly trained practitioners to develop a curriculum in such a haphazard manner borders on the immoral. Our learners are not subjects upon whom an experiment may be foisted: their entitlement to a first-rate education which could determine their future should be a fundamental right.

With its consideration of holistic learning and development of skills, CfW may well be the innovative path to becoming a bastion of exemplary pedagogical practice for which we

educationalists have been searching. However, implementing it with such little regard for the very individuals it affects most is not the right way forward. Much planning, time and money went into developing and honing the curriculum's ethos and philosophy, though so many of those at the very heart of the everyday learning: the support staff, were never consulted. As more than 38,000 TAs work across maintained schools in Wales it would seem important to have consulted such a large proportion of educational professionals who are fundamental to students' learning (Wightwick, *WalesOnline*, 2022a). Despite this, "there is still very little research whose central focus is eliciting the voice of teaching assistants as subjects-of and subject-to changes in work practices from large scale studies" (Neaum and Noble, 2023, p. 5). Those learners who it would appear require the most support: EAL students, will have every right to feel marginalised as their needs have not been considered at any stage.

Whilst the recently introduced ALN Bill claims to listen most acutely to the voice of the learner, those who have EAL needs appear once again to have been overlooked. As Power *et al.* argue, the curriculum of the 70s and 80s could be seen as a "form of cultural domination", one which celebrates the values and achievements of "dead white males" which "render the histories and cultures of the dominated inferior or invisible" (2020, p. 321). Conversely, Paterson (2018) argues that knowledge-based education has continued to evolve over centuries and the absence of that knowledge dissemination would lead to a lack. Additionally, Power *et al.* argue that "the current subject-based arrangements do not provide emancipatory experiences for disadvantaged learners" (2020, p. 321), by taking away the opportunity to develop that fundamental skill of recall, EAL and ALN learners will become more than disadvantaged learners; they will become learners who leave our education system without the linguistic skills to be able to play a full part in life and work.

Indeed, “while moving from a teacher-centred to a more student-centred curriculum may have merits in principle, we contend that it contains risks that need to be addressed if the new *Curriculum for Wales* is indeed going provide ‘successful futures’ for all” (Power *et al.*, 2020, p. 331).

Despite being in its relative infancy, much critical analysis has been delivered regarding Wales’ new curriculum. Whilst the vast majority of this focuses on the planning, construction and early development prior to its scheduled implementation from 2022, there is evidently a widespread view amongst critics that changes have been made with the best of intentions, however,

> like other new curricula in countries such as Scotland, New Zealand and the Netherlands, the new curriculum is open to critique, and faces considerable challenges in efforts to realize it in schools (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p. 182)

As a senior leader involved in teaching and learning who was fully immersed in putting the learning ‘meat on the bones’ of CfW across two large secondary schools, there was an unequivocal initial buzz of excitement about what changes Donaldson’s *Successful Futures* (2015) could bring. Hours spent holed-up in school offices and hotels across Wales involving pioneer schools’ staff seen as best placed to bring the curriculum to life, led to the development of areas such as the What Matters (WM) statements across the six AoLEs, along with the descriptors of learning linking together those statements and the 4Ps at the heart of the curriculum. With echoes once again from other countries, this, “commitment to a co-construction process evident in the Pioneer Schools approach … [was] reminiscent of the process used in New Zealand to develop the national curriculum” (Sinnema *et al.*, 2020, p.188). Such endeavours were seen as a way to successful implementation through

developing ‘buy in’ from the very staff who would be involved in bringing CfW to life in the classroom.

Having personally been part of numerous Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) where curriculum content was mapped across the various aspects to be further developed and rolled out across one’s own as well as other schools across the county, there was no shortage of professionalism and positivity towards CfW’s success. Along with tens of millions of pounds spent holding numerous conferences up and down the country, with guest speakers involving Professor Donaldson, amongst others such as Scotland’s then Chief Education Minister Bill Maxwell, along with those from whom he had taken advice: Mette Hauch, the head of Hellerup Skool in Denmark and David Taylor, the head of Stanley Park High in London, no expense was spared in proselytising the merits of this revolutionary curriculum. When considering the implementation of educational policy changes, Luke (2011) states that whilst political promotion is important, consideration of fundamental beliefs and ethical principles must also be respected. The establishment of “durable educational settlements” are made “around shared values – not through glossy policy launches that misrepresent data and research” (Luke, 2011, p.2). However, despite the evangelical atmosphere surrounding the CfW’s rollout, there was invariably a feeling that something was missing.

Whilst the philosophy was almost exclusively celebrated, the lack of material bolstering CfW’s many statements and descriptors was having an adverse effect on classroom practitioners who were bemoaning the lack of guidance with substantive content. Combined with the many doomsayers beginning to censure CfE’s similar lack: Humes stated it was “under-conceptualised” (2013, p. 31), there was a distinct absence of confidence

surrounding CfW's 2022 launch. As Fullen (2015) pertinently considers "curriculum implementation corresponds to the means to accomplish desired objectives, and for the new curriculum to bear fruit, it needs to be translated into classroom practices" (cited in OECD, 2020, p. 7).

It has been this intangibility as to what the new curriculum's 'desired objectives' should look like in the classroom that have led to much fear and reluctance to move away from entrenched teaching practices which for the most part, practitioners believe (at least due to the continuing improvement in exam performance) are effective. In a review of CfE from Stirling University, Professor Mark Priestley reflected on the noise spawned by Scotland's curriculum which he believes is 'politically motivated' yet demonstrates little based on evidence in its clamour.(https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/research-spotlights/education-andthecurriculumforexcellence/#:~:text=%22CfE%20generates%20a%20lot%20of,research%20we%20do%20at%20Stirling.%22). With the same 'politically motivated' din now abating in Wales, it will be interesting to see how long it takes before the critics of CfW reach the same levels of disillusionment as those of CfE.

Whether similar criticisms as those levelled at CfE begin to take aim at CfW once more research into its implementation in classrooms has taken place remains to be seen. What this study intended to highlight was the lack of forethought put into how those who may require support to access the curriculum's 4Ps and to embrace its desire to develop discovery learning could, as a result of such inattentiveness, be marginalised. Additionally, as those who may require assistance would be supported by TAs, it was important to consider their feelings of preparedness in enabling their charges in the classroom as well as considering their levels of understanding of CfW's aims. The findings from the research,

whilst validating a number of pre-existing beliefs developed as a result of involvement 'at the coalface' over a number of years, also highlighted some interesting data regarding TAs views which have been considered in some detail later on in this chapter.

It could be argued that no classroom practitioner would be opposed to students learning through experiential means; in fact to prevent students' self-discovery would be anathema to teachers' mores. This was evident when TAs responded during semi-structured interviews to questions about the impact of discovery learning on disadvantaged learners' access to CfW's 4Ps. Consideration of the 4Ps and whether the students would be able to access these and become, amongst other aspects, ambitious, healthy, ethical and enterprising (Welsh Government, 2015) varied according to which was being considered. It was felt that creating a safe space for learners to develop the purpose of being 'ambitious' and 'capable' would be a positive step, however, due to EAL learners lower-level language access, expecting them to follow a curriculum where so much is based upon less support and guidance would be unjust. Becoming 'ambitious' when there was a lack of language mastery would prove overly advantageous to EAL learners when a basic level of access to learning would be required in the first instance. Therefore, whether EAL/ALN students could move from being seemingly marginalised within education to being part of the mainstream as part of CfW, even with support from TAs was highly questionable.

Understanding what was meant by being 'healthy' and 'confident' provided the greatest positive response from the students who were clear that they understood what this entailed. However, when asked to provide a written response, only one student could state that this meant looking after themselves. Responses from the TAs were less upbeat as there was a feeling that rather than developing students to be healthy and confident, presenting

them with tasks beyond their capability, was leaving them 'demoralised' and with low self-esteem. This lack of understanding would create a lack of integration due to a lack of adequate linguistic ability, which in turn would create a sense of isolation.

Due to the two schools involved being situated in different counties, their experience of EAL learners varied. Whilst School A had a greater proportion of EAL learners than School B, this was due to family re-settlement for employment. The impetus to learn to speak English and have better access to the curriculum was therefore greater. As the students from School B were more likely to be refugees, whose families would not have spent time in an English speaking environment, their English skills were weaker. Interestingly, the TAs from School B felt that being 'ethically informed' may be more accessible to migrant students due to their status as refugees, but the language barrier would make this a moot point. When the students were asked whether they understood what it meant to be 'ethically informed' their responses demonstrated that they did not. Therefore, not only would EAL learners be unable to understand what the 4Ps might mean, they would also be excluded from being able to learn experientially due to their weaker language skills.

As three out of the four TAs had worked in their supporting roles for decades, there was a clear sense that they were confident in the expectations of their roles. Their responses suggested that they had supported students with varying needs over the years and that they were comfortable with the expectations and requirements. What became evident during both interviews was the lack of confidence these experienced practitioners were feeling in their roles with the introduction of the new curriculum. It was clear that these practitioners who perform incredibly important roles in the classroom felt that they had not been respected. As Baumfield *et al.* state when evaluating CfE's implementation, with any

curriculum changes, especially in terms of support and assessment, consideration should be afforded to

> building teachers' confidence and competence in taking evidence-based decisions about learning … providing time and support for collegiate discussion to build shared ideas [and] evidence from other teachers' conversations (Baumfield at al., 2009,32)

As none of the TAs felt confident in their own knowledge of CfW, there was a sense that they believed it would be almost impossible for them to support students effectively: their own lack of fundamental understanding of the curriculum's structure and expectations would make their execution of their roles less effective. This in turn would mean that EAL/ALN students would be left behind, as without effective support, students would fall even further behind. There was a feeling that whilst 'satellite' support may be useful when considering greater classroom autonomy, those with less developed linguistic skills would flounder as they wouldn't be able to understand the meaning behind the 4Ps let alone embrace them and develop skills for discovery learning. Furthermore, whilst the language barrier faced by EAL students would prevent effective access to learning, the TAs from School A felt that the language involved was inaccessible to them let alone the students with EAL/ALN needs.

6.2 Contributions towards New Knowledge

The data gathered therefore illuminated several areas for potential further probing (as detailed in 6.1), some of which were surprising. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the research findings was how strongly the TAs involved in the study felt about their lack of training. Despite three quarters of the TAs having a vast amount of experience, their lack of confidence with the expectations for CfW and how their role may change, was clear. Interestingly, one of the teaching assistants felt unable to voice their need for more training

as they felt they could be perceived as ‘less educated’ making them feel more vulnerable within their position. Whilst newspaper articles were written following the union conference held in November 2023 stating how unprepared TAs were to support students with CfW (*Tenby Observer*, November 16, 2023), this area of research could elicit some useful data to support classroom practice in future years.

There is little doubt that TAs provide crucial support, often for vulnerable students in the classroom. As the EEF’s report considering getting the best use out of teaching assistants states, in 2018, teaching assistants outnumbered teachers in early years’ education in England by over 24,000. Similarly, the number of full-time teaching assistants has trebled in number over the last quarter of a century (Sharples, Blatchford and Webster, 2018, p. 5). This data proves not only what a valuable asset TAs are in the classroom, but also how reliant the teaching workforce has become on their constant presence. The lack of targeted training afforded to TAs is an affront upon the bespoke provision so many offer on a daily basis. According to the data resulting from this study, none of the TAs in either of the schools was offered training courses. During one INSET session, TAs in School A were instructed to watch the recordings of meetings previously held with teachers and county staff, but as these were all in Welsh, they found them impossible to follow, whilst one of the TAs in School B stated that, ‘no-one had explained what the new curriculum was about’.

When one considers the millions spent on the conferences attended by senior leaders and teaching professionals, this oversight is not just insensitive, it’s extremely disrespectful to key staff who are a crucial part of students’ access to education and learning. With 66% of respondents to a survey carried out by UNISON maintaining that they had “not received enough training to deliver the curriculum” (*Tenby Observer*, November 16, 2023) speaks

volumes for the contemptible way in which TAs are treated. Moreover, as Rebecca Ring, a teaching assistant from Ceredigion stated, “If the Curriculum for Wales is to be successful, then the role of teaching assistants and our learning needs must be addressed” (Ibid., November 16, 2023). That these staff – two of whom had supported students for more than fifty years between them, and another who had been a TA for seventeen years – were not provided with training on what the curriculum would look like for their charges in the classroom in poor enough, but failure to provide these staff with even so much as an overview of CfW is deplorable.

A further impact following on from the lack of training afforded to TAs would be their potential inability to support students due to their own misunderstanding. Whilst one of the TAs in School B believed that discovery learning would mean that learners would need to be ‘a little more independent’ and that there would be ‘an holistic approach to learning’, a TA from School B believed it would mean ‘getting [the students] to try things first before intervening’. Both of these views demonstrate an understanding of discovery learning’s expectations, but this was more through a process of inference than because this information had been shared with or explained to them There was a distinct view from all of the TAs that the less structured nature of CfW would lead to students either being left to fend for themselves or if they could not access the work, the TAs doing it for them. Without more opportunities for ALN and EAL students to receive positive reinforcement, it was felt they would become despondent and inattentive. Whilst this wasn’t an area included in the focus of the research, it is clearly a resultant outcome due to the introduction of more experiential learning expectations in the classroom.

There was a feeling that a lack of 'correct' answers may leave the EAL and ALN learners vulnerable as they would be less able to demonstrate their ability due to a lack of skills or linguistic understanding. Lacking the ability to access mainstream learning would mean that rewards in terms of achievement would be smaller and less weighted with expectation. Therefore, following a curriculum predicated on self-discovery, with less knowledge content would mean fewer opportunities to be 'right'. As ALN/EAL learners may not have the capacity or the language requirements to be able to embrace discovery learning, all of the TAs acknowledged that they would need more support as without it, "they would not be able to do [the work]" which would go against the premise of discovery learning. Additionally, being unable to access 'quick wins' more readily associated with a knowledge-based curriculum could lead to lower engagement and greater apathy.

What the new information gleaned from the research suggested was that whilst CfW offered much in terms of promise, what it lacked was consideration for those students who would be unable to access the curriculum without support. Taking this to its logical conclusion: if support for teaching assistants is not forthcoming and they do not understand their own expectations, these ALN/EAL students will invariably fail. This in turn could also lead to more behaviour management issues as students react to being excluded from learning due to a lack of tailored support and understanding.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

The narrow scale of the research undertaken due to the small sample of practitioners and students included would be the central limitation of this study. Due to the inclusion of just two secondary schools and its associated ALNCos, TAs and students, the findings would not be generalisable nor would they be representative of other schools. As originally stated in

the introduction, an approach was made to a school where the proportion of EAL students was greater than the two school with which I worked. Unfortunately, the headteacher was reluctant to provide access to their teaching staff due to a perceived stigma; this may have provided greater insight into the support required for EAL students in the classroom. However, whilst the study may not generalisable in its application to a wider population, there is an element of transferability as a similar study could be carried out in a similar context. Widening the sampling frame to include students from a junior school setting may have provided more reliable data with which to work, though this in turn may have skewed the data collected due to the differences in levels of linguistic ability and understanding of expectations.

A further limitation may have been the fact that the ALNCos and TAs were all known to me, thus resulting in response bias. Whilst I had worked with half of the participants previously, those from the second school were sourced through a mutual work colleague. Despite knowing half of the adult participants, rather than divulging information and responding to questions as they felt I would like, they were in fact more open and transparent due to our previous working relationship. The resultant qualitative data was therefore rich in nature as the responses were in-depth, providing detailed insight into the respondents' classroom experiences. This was helped by the fact that the participants' right to anonymity was ensured and that no information was shared with the headteachers at either school, ensuring an avoidance of harm. Additionally, the fact that the two schools involved were based in different counties, were of markedly different sizes and of different linguistic backgrounds meant that a valid cross-section was considered.

The use of questionnaires with the EAL students could also have proved difficult to administer due to their potential lack of understanding of the questions. As these students' views were fundamental to the study's focus, it was important that they understood what was being asked. This concern was addressed by using TAs known to the students providing them with explanations where necessary. The TAs signed forms agreeing not to influence the students' views but merely to provide clarity where required. In order to further counteract any concerns with validity from these questionnaires, a focus group setting could have been arranged. The students could have been split into two groups to ensure the sizes were manageable, with these being held online with the TAs present to ensure the students felt comfortable and understanding was clear.

6.4 Considerations for Future Research

One aspect which could be considered for further research would be the successful implementation of CfW in junior schools. This would be interesting due to the structure of curricula in junior school settings and the way in which teaching traditionally takes place thematically (often a curriculum planning tool called Cornerstones is used). Cross-curricula links therefore take place more readily. However, concerns may arise should existing curriculum themes be 'shoe-horned' into CfW's structure rather than concepts befitting of 21st century learning be considered. Additionally, with a greater number of TAs supporting students with ALN and EAL in junior school settings, this may mask issues with understanding which may arise due to support expectations.

With the changes to expectations for the way in which students learn within CfW: more independence and embracing of discovery learning, the way in which TAs are expected to support students in the classroom is bound to change. Further research could be conducted

into training provided for TAs (similar to the consultation which took place into teacher training instigated by the 2015 Furlong report) to develop their skills accordingly. As discussed in this paper, TAs are a vital part of the support system across the educational system, and a failure to consider their need for training is a failure to support our learners. As the pandemic had an impact on the data collection aspect: the questionnaires presented to the students were conducted by TAs rather than personally as planned, it would be useful to carry out further in-person research. Being able to visit classrooms to witness the implementation of CfW first hand using non-participatory observations would provide greater insight into aspects such as discovery learning and how the 4Ps are embraced in practice within the classroom. Additionally, in terms of considering what type of support is provided for EAL and ALN learners, along with how much scaffolding is provided would provide a clearer insight into CfW's translation from planning into reality. It would be interesting to see whether lessons which are more heavily-reliant on language such as science (especially biology) or humanities would lend themselves less readily to embracing the tenets of CfW than those subjects which are more practical and therefore less reliant on written outcomes.

Perhaps the world is just not ready for 'new curricula' which expects so much more of both its practitioners and its learners. One thing which is absolutely certain, without more support for our most vulnerable students; without focused training and skills development of our TAs on the ground; without those planners and educational influencers such as Donaldson being made aware of the huge omission from CfW's development, we will never succeed in bringing our marginalised learners into the mainstream. As Nuno Crato writes about the changes to Portugal's curriculum, where there has been a real effort to return to more 'traditional' teaching and learning methods,

> the essentials are not teachers' salaries, school buildings, or computer equipment. The essentials are students' learning, students'

> skills development, and students' ethical growth. In a word: students. (Crato, 2019, para.8)

A sentiment which would clearly be indisputable.

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Appendices

Appendix i: **Pre-prepared ALNCo interview questions, along with supplementary questions asked and links with Vygotsky's social constructivism**

Initial Research Questions	Supplementary Questions	Link with Social Constructivism
Do you think EAL students are able/will be able to access the new curriculum?	What specifically do you think EAL students would struggle with in that context?	Language playing a central role in development
What do you think effective support for EAL students accessing the new curriculum looks like?	Do you believe the support that a teacher is going to offer is going to be the same or similar to what a teaching assistant would offer?	Greater skills developed with adult guidance
What do you think effective support for ALN students accessing the new curriculum looks like?	Do you feel that this kind of idea supports the fact we not expected to differentiate now?	Providing support for the zone of proximal development: a student solving problems independently or with support
Do all EAL learners have the language skills to be able to understand what's expected with the 4Ps?	Do you feel then that that is almost like a catch all, that it's up to the teachers to make sure that certain things happens or do you think it's too big an expectation? Do you think that there's going to be a discrepancy between the recognition of students being an ambitious, capable learner or an ethically informed citizen?	Language is seen as the most important tool for acquiring knowledge
Do all ALN learners have the cognitive ability to be able to understand what's expected with the 4Ps?	Do you feel that support staff have a good understanding of what that means as being central to the new curriculum?	Promote students/teacher and teacher student interactions
Do all EAL learners have the language skills to be able to develop discovery-based learning?	So really the teacher should be having that dialogue of discovery: that the TA should know what's going on in that classroom. If they	Thought and language co-existing

	don't, then how can they assist?	
Do all ALN learners have the cognitive ability to be able to develop discovery-based learning?	So you would say that differentiation would need to continue?	Students should be guided in their discovery
Are support staff aware that the 4Ps underpin the new curriculum?		
How able do you think support staff feel in assisting ALN/EAL learners to access the 4Ps?	How do you encourage students to have high expectations in others if they don't have them in themselves?	Students developing their own knowledge independently
What do you think being a 21st century learner looks like for EAL/ALN students?	Do you think that there would be any similarity between the way that we would see 21st century learners within EAL and ALN students and how they would see themselves?	Provide authentic learning experiences
What key differences do you foresee with the way support staff will need to adapt to supporting EAL/ALN students to embrace the 4Ps?	Can we expect these children to come in and get on with it?	Students being active participants in their learning

Appendix ii: **Pre-prepared TA interview questions, along with supplementary questions asked and links with Vygotsky's social constructivism**

Initial Research Questions	**Supplementary Questions**	**Link with Social Constructivism**
<u>Supporting Learners</u> What kind of learners do you support?	What does it entail? Do you tend to stay with the same students on a daily or weekly basis?	Guided learning through verbal prompts
For how long have you supported EAL/ALN learners?	Do you carry out testing with the students or is this done by the ALNCo? So when you say tailoring the lesson, does it look different for an EAL student to what it looks like for an ALN student? Would you say that it's falling more to you to actually complete the resources rather than being given resources which have already been simplified or differentiated?	Tailoring lessons to link with students' zone of proximal development
<u>Understanding of CfW</u> Are you aware of what the 4Purposes are?	Would you be able to say what they are? Do you know what any of the four purposes are? Do you feel it's to make the students more independent and to provide a more holistic way of learning?	Teachers use prompts to increase independence in learning
Are you aware of discovery-based learning?		Student as an active agent in their learning
What does discovery-based learning mean to you?	So when you say play to their strengths in terms of the fact that they have that freedom of choice, is that what you meant? Do you think then that there will be more support	Promote teacher and child interactions

	required for the new curriculum?	
<u>Learning under the new curriculum</u> How do you think learning under the new curriculum differs from previous classroom activity?	So watching clips, having that discourse, having that discussion, how does that differ from what was used before? What do you think that new learning would look like?	Considering what the student wants to construct Using technology to construct
Do you believe that EAL students will be able to embrace the 4Ps?	Would that be the same though with any student? Or do you feel that EAL students perhaps would struggle to embrace them? So they're expected to be ambitious, capable learners, enterprising creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals. Do you think that they would be able to achieve that?	Setting the climate alongside goals and interaction
<u>Supporting students with CfW</u> What does it mean to support students to become ethically informed citizens?	Do you think that would be something which ALN or EAL students would be able to factor into their learning this idea of being ethically informed? Do you think they are going to be able to do that, to embrace that? Do you think then that there's a difference between being ethical and being informed?	Students constructing knowledge based on culture and context
What does it mean to support students to become ambitious capable learners?	In what way do you think things would be different in the classroom for you now to what they were like previously? What's your support going to look like now compared to what it would have looked like?	Interactive learning and peer-to-peer collaboration

In what ways do you think you will be able to support learners to become 21st century citizens?	Before perhaps, would you say that you saw your role as just sitting down and explaining scaffolding, whereas now you have to have more of an understanding in order to be able to give students a key or a cue to get into that lesson? Do you feel then that ALN learners and EAL learners will be able to become 21st century citizens?	Scaffolding and modelling to facilitate students' learning (Jerome Bruner) https://www.simplypsychology.org/bruner.html

Appendix iii: Questionnaire distributed to Year 7 student participants.

Learner Questionnaire

Please answer the questions on your own and only ask your teacher if you do not understand the question. It is important that your answers come from you.

Does someone support you in the classroom at the moment? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No Sometimes

Link with social constructivism Knowledge is shared and cultural understanding is mutually constructed

Do you know that a new curriculum is being introduced in Wales? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No

Link with social constructivism Development is linked with cultural context

Are you aware that subjects will be grouped together rather than being taught separately? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No

Link with social constructivism Creation of learning groups

Do your teachers refer to the 4 Purposes in the classroom? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No Sometimes

Link with social constructivism Use prompts and increase independence of learning

Are you aware of what the 4 Purposes are? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No Maybe

Link with social constructivism Interaction regarding the direction of study/learning

Please list those 4 Purposes you know

……..
……..
……..
……

Link with social constructivism Creating own meaning

Do you work as part of a group in lessons to find answers/solutions? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No Sometimes

Link with social constructivism Peer to peer collaboration

Are you able to complete work without your teacher guiding you? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No Sometimes

Link with social constructivism
Teachers model and then step back to facilitate learning

Do you learn how to look after yourself and stay healthy? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No

Link with social constructivism
Students' knowledge acquisition is facilitated

Do you understand what it means to be 'ethical' and 'informed'? ***Please circle your chosen answer***

Yes No

Link with social constructivism
Student as an active participant in their learning

What do you think being 'ambitious' and 'capable' means?

……
……
……
……

Link with social constructivism
Student as an active participant in their learning

https://www.google.com/search?q=social+constructivism+vygotskyandrlz=1C1CHBF_en-gbGB1019GB1019andoq=sociaandgs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBggAEEUYOzIGCAAQRRg7MgYIARBFGDsyBggCEEUYOzIGCAMQRRhAMgYIBBBFGDkyBggFEEUYPDIGCAYQRRg8MgYIBxBFGEHSAQgyMzE1ajBqN6gCCLACAQandsourceid=chromeandie=UTF-8#vhid=vcwlq-E0rObUtMandvssid=l