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**Childhood poverty in Wales and its implications for schools - a survey of trainee teachers' perceptions**

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**Abstract**

With a third of all pupils in Wales in poverty it is essential that trainee teachers in the principality understand the nature of poverty and develop a practical understanding of how best to deal with its negative effects. In order to explore trainee teachers' perceptions of these issues a detailed questionnaire was completed by 94 of the 96 third year trainee teachers on a BA in Primary Education with QTS programme at a university in Wales. The data revealed a mature understanding of the main issues. Childhood poverty was seen by the respondents as a state of material, educational and emotional deprivation which prevents children and young people from developing their potential as individuals and from developing into fully active members of society. The respondents felt that schools had a central role to play in tackling the negative effects of poverty and that there were a range of positive measures that all schools needed to take in order to achieve this. The data also revealed that there were some practical areas related to combating childhood poverty which the respondents were yet to gain full confidence in tackling. The survey has significant implications for all those concerned with childhood poverty and initial teacher education in Wales and beyond.

**Key words**

Childhood; trainee teachers; poverty; outcomes; under-achievement; primary schools.

**Introduction – childhood poverty in Wales and its significance**

Almost one third of children in Wales live in poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2018). This is a higher proportion than in any other nation in the UK and equates to almost 200,000 children (Save the Children, 2017). Although there are country and regional differences, there is a core set of factors that underlie and are used to define child poverty in developed countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2011; TARKI, 2010). These are the various circumstances and stressors experienced by children or their family members that tend to co-occur with or exacerbate existing childhood poverty. The core set of factors includes: unemployment or economic inactivity; in-work poverty; lone parenthood; low parental education attainment; teenage parenthood; lack of affordable and accessible childcare; lack of qualifications among young people; poor health; problem behaviour; abuse and neglect and residence in deprived neighbourhoods or in substandard housing.

Childhood poverty is highly significant because it can have a major and permanent impact on the lives of individuals in ways which are different to those of adults. A child brought up in poverty is more likely to suffer from the effects of malnutrition, poor quality housing, overcrowding, poorer health, family tensions, stigma (due to visible signs of poverty) and have less access to a wide range of social and cultural activities (Ridge, 2014). Childhood poverty can have negative effects on social development. Through the effects of poverty and inadequate space and resources, poorer children can often find it difficult to sustain friendship and engage in social interaction and can, therefore, be exposed to bullying and experience exclusion (Pahl, 2000). Bullying can often occur when children 'do not belong to the proper race, religion, social class, or, even do not wear 'appropriate clothing', do not belong to the 'in' groups and do not share in the values and pastimes of their peers' (Ambert, 1995: 186). It has also been reported that children from deprived backgrounds have much worse levels

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of health and wellbeing than other children (Roberts and Bell, 2015). They are also significantly more likely to be overweight or obese and there is also a strong link between deprivation and childhood mortality (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), 2017).

### **Reducing the poverty attainment gap in Wales**

The strong correlation between child poverty and poor educational outcomes is well documented (Economic and Social Research Council, 2011; Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), 2015). In the UK, arguably one of the most unequal societies in the developed world, research shows that educational inequalities surface in the preschool years (Sylva et al., 2004), but continue to grow in primary (elementary) and secondary (high) school years (Connelly, et al., 2014). At all key stages in Wales, learners who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) tend to perform significantly less successfully in a range of performance indicators than those not eFSM (Estyn, 2014) (Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales). However, it has been noted recently that since 2010, children from lower-income backgrounds have been catching up with those from better-off backgrounds on educational attainment (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2018). Despite this, disadvantaged learners tend to have weaker language and communication skills, significant difficulties in basic literacy and numeracy skills and are more likely to experience frequent behaviour difficulties (Sutton Trust, 2010). Children and young people from families in poverty participate in fewer organised out-of-school activities than their more affluent peers and therefore are denied important learning experiences, which may affect their levels of engagement in more formal learning activities in school (Egan, 2007). Yet not all pupils from impoverished backgrounds fail and there is research evidence to suggest both that good teachers make a difference and that negative stereotypes about impoverished children based on deficit assumptions can perpetuate inequality (Cummings et al., 2012).

Reducing the attainment gap associated with poverty is a high-profile policy issue in Wales. Following the historic pledge to end child poverty by 2020 a range of anti-poverty measures has been introduced by the Welsh government, focusing not only on a route out of poverty but also on education and the role of schools. Amongst these anti-poverty measures are initiatives such as Communities First (Welsh Government Social Research (WGSR), 2011); Flying Start (Morris & Willis, 2014); Pupil Deprivation Grant (Welsh Government, 2013); and Schools Challenge Cymru (Welsh Government, 2014). Despite the fact that it is difficult to assess the impact of these initiatives on raising academic standards it is clear that they have resulted in gains in student participation and engagement (Egan, 2013). When schools are making effective use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) (recently renamed as the Pupil Development Grant) (Welsh Government, 2013) to broaden disadvantaged pupils' experiences of extra-curricular activities (for example, by organising trips to places and events, such as museums, orchestral and theatrical performances) evidence has shown that these pupils are likely to have a 'more positive attitude to school and to education' (Welsh Government, 2015a: 21). Furthermore, the PDG has also been used effectively when using an arts or culture experience as a springboard to improve literacy skills (Education Endowment Foundation, 2014). However, there have been some allegations that some schools are mispending the school funding allocated by the government intended to increase educational standards for poor students, for example, the use of funds to buy tablet computers instead of raising educational attainment (OECD, 2014). Despite this, there is also a clear evidence that schools can lessen the impact of deprivation on children's progress and that the quality of school teaching and leadership are critical drivers (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2003; Wales Centre for Equity in Education (WCEE), 2014a).

Recently the government has decided to double the PDG for their youngest learners, 'so that every child has the opportunity to reach their potential' (Williams, 2017). Regular and effective use of approaches such as classroom observations, learner, teacher and parent surveys, scrutiny of learners' book, learning walks, communication with parents/carers, discussions with learners, and reflective

questioning techniques, are being used by schools attempting to combat the effect of poverty on learners (WCEE, 2014b). Where these are good, disadvantaged children benefit the most because their starting points are behind their more affluent peers. Over a year, disadvantaged pupils can gain the equivalent of 15 years of schooling when taught by good teachers compared with half a year's progress with underperforming teachers (Sutton Trust, 2011). It has also been noted that teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards their pupils can have a powerful influence on children's academic motivation and progress (Cox, 2000). Young people have strong notions about what constitutes a good teacher, and a common complaint about poorer teachers is that they are perceived to be 'unfair' (Ruddock et al., 1996). Raising standards and closing the gap is at the heart of the new reformed curriculum in Wales which has recommended that schools should work with a wide range of partners to develop a breadth of opportunities and activities that 'will ignite interest and raise individuals' aspirations and ambitions' (Welsh Government, 2016: 8). The national mission for education in Wales is to 'ensure success and well-being of every learner, regardless of background or personal circumstances' and 'deprivation or childhood experiences should not prevent them from reaching their potential' (Welsh Government, 2017a: 2).

### Method

ITE programmes are expected to prepare trainee teachers to meet the needs of all learners, including those living in poverty. In order to ascertain the level of understanding of trainee teachers of childhood poverty at a university in Wales, a questionnaire was completed by a cohort of 96 students at the end of the final practice and respondents had regular input (equivalent to 20 hours) during three years, 94 questionnaires were returned, making a response rate of 97%. The questionnaire contained a range of questions which were designed to elicit information from the respondents about their perceptions of the nature of childhood poverty, its effects and practical implications. Respondents were invited to add any additional comments which they felt relevant at the end of the questionnaire. The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package, employing the reliability, Pearson correlation and partial correlation routines. Prior to completing the questionnaire, the respondents, had received twenty hours input on issues relating to poverty and educational attainment which included exploring and analysing case-studies. To ensure validity and reliability care was taken to ensure that the questionnaires were completed anonymously and independently. The activity was undertaken purely for research purposes and was not used as part of the student mentoring progress.

### Results

**Table 1.** Childhood poverty is when children experience.

	<b>% agree</b>
hunger and starvation	100
a struggle to stay alive	98
a lack of money	96
a lack of clean water	95
lack of shelter	94
a poor quality of life	93
deprivation and going without something	93
a life where they live one day at a time	89
parents unemployed	88
being sick and not being able to see a doctor	84
not having access to school	81
not knowing how to read	80
not being able to have access to essential knowledge	80
a lack of sufficient clothing or medicines	65
sadness and unhappiness	50

Table 1 explores the respondents' views about the key features of childhood poverty. The first key feature of childhood poverty according to the respondents is *material deprivation* which can include: hunger and starvation (100%); a struggle to stay alive (98%); a lack of money (96%); a lack of clean water (95%); a lack of shelter (94%); going without essentials (93%); and being sick and not being able to see a doctor (84%). This state of material deprivation can lead to a poor quality of life (93%); can mean that children are forced to live one day at the time (89%) in order to survive; and have parents who are unemployed (88%). The second key feature of childhood poverty according to the respondents is *educational deprivation* which can mean, for example, not having access to school (81%); not knowing how to read (80%) or not having access to essential knowledge (80%). The third key feature of childhood poverty according to the respondents is *emotional deprivation*. This can be characterized, for example, by general feelings of inadequacy (55%); sadness and unhappiness (50%); and a fear for the future (44%).

**Table 2.** Child Poverty is when parents:

	<b>% Agree</b>
have little or no money	100
are unable to buy food for their child	100
are unable to send children on educational trips	98
are not able to buy a computer/iPad for their child	94
are not able to send children to a birthday party	90
are unable to allow their children to participate in recreational activities	88

Table 2 focuses further on the respondents' views about some of the *material deprivation* and *educational deprivation* aspect of childhood poverty. The respondents felt that children were poor if their parents had little money or were unable to buy food for their children (100%); were unable to send their children on educational trips (98%), to birthday parties (90%) or on recreational activities (88%). Of particular note was the finding that 94% felt that children should be considered poor if their parents were unable to buy them computers or iPads. Indeed, personal access to such equipment was given higher priority than access to recreational activities (94% compared to 88% respectively).

**Table 3.** Schools can help to reduce the negative effects of poverty by:

	<b>% Agree</b>
making tackling the effects of poverty a key part of their mission where relevant	100
being centres of community life	100
forging strong links with communities and community-based programmes	99
placing a strong emphasis on rewarding and celebrating achievement	99
placing a strong emphasis in promoting well-being and pastoral care	98
providing suitable sanctions where necessary	97
adopting a whole-school, strategic approach to disadvantage	95
ensuring that all pupils feel valued and cared for	93
providing pupils with learning experiences which are relevant and motivating	92
using data to track attendance and achievement	90
providing regular feedback to pupils on how they can improve their academic performance	88

encouraging strong parental engagement in their children's learning	87
regularly listening to the needs and views of disadvantaged pupils	86
tailoring the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learner	86
providing pupils with a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips	86
helping pupils to understand the importance of exercise and healthy eating	86
putting a strong emphasis on promoting the disadvantaged learners' literacy and learning skills	85
sharing good practice	80
providing free meals for children in poverty	78
providing breakfast clubs	78
buying laptops/IPads for children in poverty	73
providing after school clubs/homework clubs	70

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Table 3 examines the respondents' views about ways schools can combat the effects of childhood poverty. Every single respondent (100%) felt that for schools to function effectively they needed to make tackling the effects of poverty a key part of their mission. The majority (95%) felt that schools should adopt a whole-school, strategic approach to poverty. It was felt that schools should be centres of community life (100%) and that they should forge strong links with communities and community-based programmes (99%). Eighty-seven per cent emphasised the need for encouraging strong parental engagement in their children's learning. Almost all of the respondents felt that creating a positive psychosocial environment could help schools reduce the impact of poverty. They felt that this should involve putting a strong emphasis on rewarding and celebrating achievement (99%) and on promoting well-being and providing effective pastoral care (98%). Furthermore, the respondents noted that ensuring that all pupils felt valued and cared for was essential (93%) as was regularly listening to their needs and views (86%). Schools should also provide pupils with learning experiences which were relevant and motivating (92%) and tailor the curriculum to the needs of the disadvantaged learner (86%). The vast majority (85%) emphasised the need to place a high priority on developing disadvantaged learners' literacy and life skills. To quote one respondent:

Without the ability to read and write effectively and the ability to respond effectively to life's opportunities I fear that poorer children will remain stuck in a culture of low expectations. Literacy and life skills are essential for a decent start in life.

Most respondents felt that schools could help reduce some of the negative effects of poverty by providing pupils with a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips (86%) and providing after school clubs/homework clubs (70%). They also noted helping pupils to understand the importance of exercise and healthy eating was a very important way of reducing the impact of poverty (86%). Nine out of ten (90%) felt that data should be used to track both attendance and achievement. A similar figure (88%) highlighted the importance of providing pupils with regular feedback on how they could improve performance. One respondent expressed this view in the following way:

We need to establish a close relationship of trust with pupils, one which enables them to know that we have high expectations of them, always want the best for them and will continually be there to show them how to improve in everything they do. Not easy when you have a large class but it is something we should all aim at.

**Table 4.** As a trainee teacher I feel confident about my ability to:

	<b>% Agree</b>
plan and deliver exciting and engaging lessons	98
provide regular feedback to pupils on how they can improve their academic performance	95
plan and deliver after school clubs	88
promote well-being and pastoral care	81
tailoring the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learner	55
ensure that the PDG is used effectively	54
make effective use of data from the results of Flying Start	42
promote/create a 'growth mind-set' and resilience in their classrooms	40
develop strong parent engagement in their children's learning	35

Table 4 reveals respondents' knowledge and understanding, and possible confidence, of some of the approaches and dispositions they, as trainee teachers, can use to try and combat the effects of poverty on pupils in primary school. The vast majority felt that they had a clear awareness of how to plan and deliver exciting and engaging lessons (98%). While the overwhelming majority (95%) felt that they knew how to provide regular feedback to pupils on how they can improve their academic performance (98%) only 55% felt confidence in tailoring the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learners. While over four fifths (81%) noted they knew how to promote wellbeing and pastoral care for their learners only forty percent stated they felt confident in their own ability to promote growth mind-set culture in their classrooms and develop resilient learners. Furthermore, while over half the respondents (54%) stated that they knew how to make effective use of the PDG only 42% knew how to make effective use of the results of the Flying Start initiative when tailoring the curriculum to the needs of disadvantaged learners. Flying Start is an Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales providing: free quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 years old; an enhanced health visiting service; access to parenting programmes; ongoing access to an appropriate language and play group (Morris & Willis, 2014).

### Discussion

The results reveal understanding amongst the respondents that childhood poverty is more complex and wide-ranging than the idea of young children 'not having enough'. Taking Table 1 as a whole, it can be seen that the term is understood as being a state in which children or young people are deprived of the material, educational and emotional resources needed to enable them to achieve their potential as full and active members of society in the twenty-first century. The figures imply that the respondents feel that *emotional deprivation* in itself does not equate to poverty but when combined with *educational deprivation* and, particularly, *material deprivation*, it puts children in a state of real disadvantage which prevents them from accessing the resources which would enable them to realize their potential. As one perceptive respondent added:

In my opinion, poverty is what prevents people from being able to fully participate in what more affluent people in the western world take for granted and which enable them to make a success of their lives. Although poverty in Wales is different to that in the developing world it is only different in degrees. Essentially, for me, it means being in a state of disadvantage which is so ingrained that it potentially keeps people in this state for the rest of their lives. This is why good education is so important – it can help children to access the resources and levels of confidence necessary for a happy, successful life.

The figures in Table 2 show that the respondents make a clear link between childhood poverty and the inability of parents to provide their children with the material goods and varied opportunities that are commonly taken for granted by many children in the UK in the twenty-first century. This view is in line with the set core of factors used to define child poverty in developed countries (OECD, 2011) noted above. Thus, the respondents felt that children were poor if their parents had little money or were unable to buy food for their children, were unable to send their children on educational trips, to birthday parties or on recreational activities. These results seem to reflect the 'structural model' of the theory of poverty. Material goods which would have been considered luxuries only a few years ago were considered by the sample as essential 'must-haves' for children and any child not having access to them was considered deprived. What is clear from both this table and Table 1 is that access to information and the means to successfully communicate information with people is considered essential for a fulfilling, satisfying and successful life in the twenty-first century. While the view that not having personal access to IT equipment contributes significantly to child poverty may appear surprising at first glance to older generations, the finding illustrates the fact that, in this research, young people who are currently being trained as teachers consider digital literacy to be an essential skill for the twenty-first century. The view is in line with those of UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) which defined child poverty in *The State of the Worlds' Children (2002)* as those who experienced deprivation of the resources:

needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.

Trainee teachers feel that there are a number of different ways in which the education system can help to reduce the negative effects of poverty. The most important of these is providing a positive ethos which places the school: at the heart of the life of the community; values and cares for each individual; acknowledges the potential of everyone; places a strong emphasis on parental as well as pupil engagement; and provides relevant, motivating learning experiences which enrich the different aspects of the lives of all its pupils. Implicit in the figures is the understanding that poverty can hold people back in so many different ways. Every single respondent felt that for schools to function effectively they needed to make tackling the effects of poverty a key part of their mission. Some emphasised that this should also be part of each teacher's personal mission. One respondent noted:

I think tackling the effects of poverty should not only be part of a school's mission but also the personal mission of each individual working within the school. We're never going to have a completely equal society but we owe it to our children to try to ensure that they are given every opportunity to achieve their full potential whatever their background.

The overwhelming majority felt that schools should adopt a whole-school, strategic approach to poverty, as suggested in the Welsh Government aims in its implementation of the School Effective Framework (Welsh Government, 2008). Implicit in the figures was the strong belief that schools had a vital role to play within disadvantaged communities. It was felt that schools should be centres of community life and that they should forge strong links with communities and community-based programmes. Good communication and co-operation was essential and part of this involved working closely with parents. This supports the findings of some studies which noted that according to teachers, parent involvement in education and the educational aspirations of students are the most important contributors to student academic success and not poverty itself (National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2013).

Schools should be welcoming places which encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning. Engagement with local communities as well as those beyond was essential to combat disadvantage according to the respondents as was encouraging members of the community to play a



full and active part within school life. This indicates strongly that the respondents welcome the development of numerous programmes by Welsh Government to assist disadvantaged children, families and communities, for instance Communities First (Welsh Government, 2017b); Flying Start and Families First (Welsh Government, 2017c). Almost all of the respondents felt that creating a positive psychosocial environment could help schools reduce the impact of poverty. They felt that this should involve putting a strong emphasis on rewarding and celebrating achievement and on promoting well-being and providing effective pastoral care.

The suggestion in the results is that the respondents feel that children should be given every opportunity to feel valued, to succeed, to feel good about themselves and to believe in themselves and in their future. Without appropriate attention to promoting their well-being and promoting a sense of self-efficacy, children from poorer backgrounds were thought unlikely to progress as well as their counterparts from more prosperous homes. This view is in line with previous research findings noted above (Ridge, 2014). Poverty, as we have seen, can lead to negative self-perceptions and underachievement which can often be compounded as pupils grow older. For the respondents, promoting positive self-perceptions and aspirational thinking should be a key aspect of what schools do from the outset to help pupils from poorer backgrounds to achieve their potential. This also suggests that the respondents value the aims and objectives of the Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015b) and its implications for education, for instance encouraging the teaching of mindfulness and 'growth mind-set' in primary schools.

The trainee teachers in this sample also had strong views about the kind of education that schools should offer to help reduce the negative effects of poverty. Highest priority was given to providing pupils with learning experiences which were relevant and motivating and tailoring the curriculum to the needs of the disadvantaged learner. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach was seen as unsuitable. One respondent explained:

My two school placements were in very different schools. The first was in a reasonably affluent area while the second had a high percentage of pupils who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the fact that pupils in both schools were of similar ages and abilities, their achievement levels were very different. I kept thinking how much the pupils from poorer homes could have benefited so much from a culture-rich, extra-curricular provision.

Most respondents felt that schools could help reduce some of the negative effects of poverty by providing pupils with a varied menu of clubs, activities and cultural and educational trips (and providing after school clubs/homework clubs. This data supports the findings of previous research (Egan, 2013; Education Endowment Foundation, 2014) that when schools are making effective use of the PDG to broaden disadvantaged pupils' experience of extra-curricular activities, these pupils are likely to have a more positive attitude to school and to education.

Promoting healthy living in school was also given high priority by the respondents. It was noted above that the respondents felt that poverty was often linked to an unhealthy lifestyle and lower life expectancy. Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (86%) felt that an important way to respond to this was helping pupils to understand the importance of exercise and healthy eating. This is also at the heart of the reformed curriculum in Wales with Health and Wellbeing noted as one of the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) (Donaldson, 2015).

The importance of using data effectively to combat the impact of poverty was highlighted by almost all the respondents. Nine out of ten (90%) felt that data should be used to track both attendance and achievement. A similar figure (88%) highlighted the importance of providing pupils with regular

feedback on how they could improve performance. One respondent expressed this view in the following way:

We need to establish a close relationship of trust with pupils, one which enables them to know that we have high expectations of them, always want the best for them and will continually be there to show them how to improve in everything they do. Not easy when you have a large class but it is something we should all aim at.

There were also a number of practical ways in which the respondents felt that schools could have a positive impact on the lives of poorer children. These included providing free meals and free breakfast clubs. An empty stomach was seen as a major barrier to pupil progress. Three-quarters (73%) felt that schools should also provide laptops and iPads for pupils. As was noted above there was a strong feeling that access to modern technology and the internet could enable all pupils, regardless of background, to access information and communicate in ways which would have, traditionally, been impossible. To quote one respondent, ICT was potentially a 'great leveller of opportunity'. Such was the high regard for the use of modern technology that a high percentage of young people in this sample felt that it should be made accessible to all, and providing poorer children with free laptops or iPads then it was money well-spent.

It was quite clear from the response of the trainee teachers that while they had numerous ideas about ways to combat the effects of poverty they also willingly acknowledged that there were no easy or instant answers. 'Tackling poverty is more a 'marathon' than a 'sprint'' commented one respondent. Four-fifths of the sample (80%) emphasised the need for schools to learn from each other and to share good practice in this area. One respondent emphasised that poverty was not the sole cause of underachievement amongst children:

We are rightly concerned about the effects of poverty on achievement but we should also be mindful that there are many other factors which can contribute to underachievement (such as parental disinterest and lack of motivation). Our goal as teachers should be to motivate our pupils to achieve their best whatever their starting point.

The results in Table 4 provide revealing insights into the respondents' confidence about their ability to respond to negative effects of poverty. Although the data reveal a high level of confidence in the more general aspects of this work (such as delivering exciting lessons; providing appropriate feedback; delivering after-school clubs; and promoting well-being) they suggest a significantly lower level of confidence in some of the more specific areas. While Table 3 demonstrated that respondents had a good understanding of the ways in which the curriculum could be tailored to the needs of disadvantaged learners, Table 4 suggests that only just over half (55%) felt confident in their ability to do this to maximum effect. Given their relative inexperience and the challenges involved, this is not totally unexpected. However, the figures highlight the need for all ITT (Initial Teacher Training) institutions to pay due heed to ensuring that all trainee teachers have sufficient opportunities to develop a good working understanding of the practicalities of ensuring that the educational provision fully matches the needs of pupils in poverty.

As noted earlier, the Welsh Government has developed several initiatives to help disadvantaged learners. Two such initiatives are the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and the Flying Start initiative. The figures reveal that only 54% of the respondents felt confidently in their ability to use the PDG effectively and only 42% felt confident that they would be able to make effective use of the data from the results of Flying Start. Again, the figures highlight the differences between knowing about initiatives and having the ability and confidence to implement them successfully. The clear message here for all ITT institutions is that if they are to successfully train future teachers to provide for the

needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds there needs to be more than a theoretical discussion about government initiatives. Trainees need to be given practical examples (and where possible, practical experiences) of how such initiatives can be implemented to best effects so that they can develop full confidence in their ability in these areas.

Table 4 also reveals that only a minority felt confident in their ability to promote a 'growth mind-set' and resilience in their classrooms (40%) and develop strong parental engagement in their children's learning (35%). While the trainees' relative inexperience (and possible sense of modesty) might explain these figures, for children in poverty to develop their potential it is essential that future teachers become fully competent in these areas. Educational research has shown time and time again that developing a 'growth mind-set' and sense of resilience is essential for pupils if they are to maximise their potential. It has also demonstrated unequivocally that pupils who receive strong parental support are more likely to make good progress in the different aspects of their development than their counterparts who do not. The evidence in Table 4 strongly suggests that developing a practical understanding of, and confidence in this area needs to be given a high priority in all ITT courses.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations of the questionnaire approach to educational research, the above data clearly show that the majority of the respondents displayed a mature understanding of the nature of childhood poverty and of the theoretical ways in which schools should combat this very serious issue. There is a clear recognition here of the seriousness of the problem and of the need for schools to take positive action in response to it. The data also suggest that, as trainee teachers, the respondents felt a strong feeling of personal responsibility in this area. They had already developed a sound understanding of the main issues and were keen to develop this further.

However, the data also suggest that a significant percentage did not feel completely confident about their own current personal ability to: tailor their teaching to the needs of disadvantaged learners; ensure that the PDG is used effectively; ensure the effective use of data; promote a 'growth mind-set' and resilience amongst pupils; and develop strong parental engagement in children's learning. While this is understandable given the respondents were not yet fully qualified teachers and their relative lack of experience meant that many may not have encountered some of the practical issues discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, there is an important message here for all of those concerned with ITT, namely, that the seriousness of childhood poverty is such that everyone leaving an ITT institution should leave feeling confident and competent in responding to all the issues involved. By implication, this means that all ITT students should experience practical examples of how different initiatives designed to combat the negative effects of childhood poverty have been successfully implemented. Enabling trainee teachers to develop confidence in this area should be a key aspect of those training to be teachers.

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