

ECEY6004/C **Reflective Portfolio**

Scenario: ‘ A family that are new to the area have recently started their 4 year old daughter Ellie in the schools nursery class. Ellie lives with her two Mums (Megan and Layla). Ellies Mum Megan has explained to Miss Jones on settling in sessions that they have been opposed to negativity due to the fact they are a same sex couple and worry that Ellie may experience bullying as she grows up. The are hopeful that more information can be shared about same sex parents and Ellies Mum Layla would be more than happy to support as she works for a LGBTQ+ organisation.’

Section 1

Leadership is argued to be a strong driver in supporting changes and promoting inclusion in early years settings. With Inclusion increasingly being seen as an integrated aspect of leadership. (Ryan, 2007). According to (Rous, 2004) leadership is regarded as a determining factor in supporting the implementation of effective inclusive instructional practices. The increase in diversity of children in early childhood education summons the use of effective inclusive practice in settings which are headed with strong leaders who are able to mitigate the adverse effects of children’s development vulnerabilities. Guralnick & Bruder (2016). Inclusive education requires inclusive leaders who can welcome diversity, focus on identifying and eliminating barriers to all types of learning and development as well as increase participation and respond to each child’s unique learning journey. Agbenyega & Klibthong (2022). The adoption of national policies that set out to promote diversity and inclusive values help to implement inclusive practices within early years settings. Ring et al (2019).

Inclusivity is a key aspect to early years provisions and is an excellent anchor in supporting children and families. According to Arndt & McGuire-Schwartz (2008) communicating with families regularly is vital in helping early years educators to recognise the variety of backgrounds and experiences each child has. Working in partnership with other professionals through multi agency and interdisciplinary approaches can help to lead support and encourage positive action. Inclusive practice is crucial to promoting equality, fostering positive teaching and learning environments as well as supporting children holistically and preparing them for the real world. As the UK is becoming a more diverse and it is vital that early years settings incorporate and celebrate the differences that make each and every one of us individual. According to Devarakonda (2021) promoting inclusion alongside diversity means acknowledging and respecting differences, nurtured through having a mutual respect for people and the experiences that make them different and building bridges which eliminate all forms of discrimination. With reference to the scenario the importance of having an open mind is vital as early years education becomes a lot more diverse. It is seen from recent statistics that hate crimes against those who are or perceive to be part of the LGBTQ+ community are continuously rising. Alston, Fraynd and Hernandez. (2021). An FBI annual report on hate crimes in 2017 founded that hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community had risen by 17%

and it is also argued that some educational environments are not inclusive of LGBTQ+ students and their families where leaders struggle to discuss LGBTQ+ issues openly due to the lack of knowledge and some personal discomfort leading support for students, staff and families becoming difficult, leaving individuals to feel isolated. An inclusive leader should consider the implication of discrimination on families that are part of the LGBTQ+ community and offer staff training that can assist them in providing inclusive practice to all. They should also promote diversity through the setting to ensure everyone feels equal and included, celebrating differences and enhancing knowledge. According to Time for Inclusion Education within early years settings LGBT inclusive education should primarily focus on ensuring that all children and families are able to participate in the learning environments provided. Within Primary education this can be achieved through the use of storybooks that feature same sex parents, gender stereotypes being addressed through play and settings participating in yearly pride celebrations to promote inclusivity. Early years practitioners and settings alongside communities should support these ideas by educating themselves and teach these learning themes in practice whatever way best suits their children and families.

Manning- Morton (2021) states that inclusivity should be promoted by working in partnership with parents and carers making every effort to include and represent lesbian and gay families in early years settings. However with regards to early years policies this topic is given far less weight in discussions of diversity than some other topics of inclusive practice, but with this being said whether it is conscious or unconscious such acts of omission contribute to heterosexist bias which in the 21st century should be widely addressed. Heterosexism can be argued to go unchallenged and in some cases this can be due to the fact that sexual identity goes physically unseen whereas with most disabilities and ethnicities it can be seen. The importance of being inclusive, treating everyone with respect and practitioners being educated on such topics can lead to these presumptions being avoided. It is vital that same sex families much like the one in the above scenario are treated exactly like any other heterosexual family unit. With the use of forms that ask for a mothers and fathers name being removed can help to ensure same sex families do not feel prejudice and this all begins with early years settings eliminating the assumptions of heterosexuality in policies, practice and provisions.

There are many ways that LGBTQ+ individuals start families but one of the most important things is the quality of relationships within each family with research showing that what matters for children is their health and wellbeing Golombok (2000). For children to fully achieve a sense of belonging they require to see that their parents are being treated and respected regardless of their family dynamic. The EYFS (2021) seeks to provide equality of anti-discriminatory practice ensuring that every child is included and supported. This requires early years settings to adapt legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010. Creating a welcoming environment can help support both parents and their children especially if they are just starting at the setting. This starts with an inclusive leader who is able to view the families' strengths, understand them in-depth and cater practice to be inclusive to all. For example embracing the use of 'Dear families' in practice as well as communicating with them, asking questions specific to the family 'what does your child call you?' 'How would you like me to respond to questions

about your family?’ and ‘how would you like me to describe your family to others?’. This clearly shows the emphasis on inclusive practice and ensures that family feels welcomed. Offering professional development to employees can help to develop knowledge on this topic, cultural awareness training should be included in staff development sessions and training staff on what to do if or when a colleague or parent uses derogatory language/ acts in a discriminatory manner towards those who identify as LGBTQ+. Furthermore, something else to consider as a inclusive setting is putting funds aside for conferences that are related to working with LGBTQ+ headed families. However, it is understood that with funding issues this may not be a first priority but it is important for leaders to consider this when possible.

Collaborating and connecting with parents and families of children who are beginning their journeys at a setting is important for a number of reasons. Strong partnerships support the child’s transition from home to education and helps practitioners to understand the child’s background, culture and interests. Murphy (2023) founded from research that early year’s settings diverse conscious provisions can be seen to be more concerned with language, race and disability than sexual orientation or family status. Some settings acknowledge a broader sense of family and when discussing diversity mention blended or single parent families however same sex parents were rarely considered until the setting themselves faced the experience of welcoming in a child with lesbian parents which lead them to reconsider and make vital changes to their individual setting policies, representation and inclusion. According to the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) family diversity should be clearly visible within settings. Exposing children within their early years when their brains are ripe for development and learning is a vital time to express the various norms of sexuality in order to encourage a future society which is inclusive to all. Instilling values of inclusivity in practitioners towards same sex families is important as they have the abilities to become good role models who are potential leaders of tomorrow.

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales proclaims that within early years schools need to have clear policies that challenge bullying and homophobic language and practitioners should be taught how to challenge prejudice to overcome barriers. Primary schools are strongly encouraged and enabled to teach about different types of families including families with same sex parents, as from September 2020 all primary schools have a duty to discuss this as part of mandatory relationship education, Draeger (2019). The Equality Act (2010) states in section 3.24 that schools need to make sure that children of gay, lesbian or bisexual parents are not singled out for different or less favourable treatment from that given to other children and practice should adhere to this. Some same sex parents fear for their children’s future because of discrimination and prejudice, with research by Stonewall who campaigns for LGBTQ+ rights showing that nearly half lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans students face bullying within schools with one in eight having tried taking their own lives. Therefore, educating children from a young age about inclusivity and diversity can help to transform the lives of young people. Teaching children to be accepting of each other gives a huge sense of belonging and an opportunity to educate children that families come in all shapes and sizes can sends messages to LGBTQ+ parents that their family is as much a part of society as everyone else’s.

Prior to 2020 there was no obligation for early years settings to provide any form of relationship education let alone LGBTQ+ training with Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 forbidding schools from the promotion of homosexuality and even though this was revoked in 2003 many schools continue to shy away from LGBTQ+ matters, this can be due to negative views and opinions however government guidelines make it clear that settings that these topics should not be overlooked. Some ways that these topics can be embedded into early years curricula is through reading books that include different types of families, normalising LGBTQ+ families by using them as examples in teaching as well as including LGBTQ+ role models. A surefire way to involve early years settings in LGBTQ+ celebrations like the yearly Pride festival can be through setting events and wall displays. Pride month takes place every year typically in June to honour the 1969 Stonewall uprising and educating the next generation on these important historical events is important to inclusivity. This can be done successfully through settings creating 'Rainbow weeks' where children are encouraged to dress colourfully and take part in a number of rainbow themed activities, where they are able to learn about the importance of the rainbow in this sense and a great opportunity to celebrate individuality. Moreover, this encourages parents who are part of the LGBTQ+ community to get involved and feel a sense of pride and belonging. Their knowledge and understanding can also educate the settings practitioners further and offers first-hand experience of prejudice that we can all learn from. ESTYN (2020) maintains that the impact of leadership plays a key role in establishing a culture of inclusion and a strong moral purpose drives leaders and practitioners to celebrate diversity.

According to Rae (2017) part of being an inclusive setting is maintaining an open dialogue with families, celebrating differences and challenging gender stereotypes. It is important that families are aware of the commitment the setting has to promoting diversity and individuality. The leadership team should have a clear picture of the settings ethos on inclusion and staff should be supported to feel confident when answering questions or facing challenges about inclusion. The communication between LGBTQ+ families and the wider community is important in making sure they feel included and that their concerns are carefully listening to, the use of multiagency working can help to support families who are facing challenges. Engaging families as partners in inclusion work has a powerful positive reinforcing effect in supporting every child to be themselves and this begins at getting to know the family on a personal level. The setting can do this by fostering trusting relationships which encourage families to share information, ensuring that the 'All About Me' forms do not assume every child has a mother and father. Questions like 'Who are the people special to Ellie?' are helpful in taking an inclusive approach so that assumptions are avoided. Furthermore settings being able to make their environment open where everyone feels welcome is crucial and helps to build genuine relationships. Practitioners reflecting on what it feels like for a child in a same sex family as well as displaying photos of every family around the setting can support the idea of diversity and helps other families be more inclusive themselves. The use of LGBTQ+ posters and the rainbow being presented around the setting also sends a clear message that everyone is welcome and acts as a prompt for discussion in older children.

Attitudes towards gender and sexual orientation can limit children and create inequality. The early years of a child's life is critical in shaping attitudes and dispositions and the environments they endure can be influential.

A manager that presents themselves as non-inclusive and a setting that does not incorporate the values of inclusivity does not value diversity. This can be seen to be damaging and not potentially leads to discrimination against certain groups of children and their families. A non-inclusive practice can also present itself in the environment creating a hostile and unwelcoming atmosphere. Which contributes to children's lack of self-esteem, social isolation and discrimination. A non-inclusive leader can aid the setting to becoming a toxic and uninviting environment where children may be reluctant to attend and parents or carers feeling as though they cannot communicate effectively which as a result places a barrier between home life and education. The use of one size fits all approaches to teaching and failing to support adequate support to children and their families can be detrimental. Cologon (2014) suggests that barriers to inclusive practice can include stigma and negative attitudes surrounding differences and disabilities. More over the lack of professional development or inadequate education on such topics can potentially lead to systematic barriers however research widely supports inclusive education which benefits social, academic, cognitive and physical development regardless of any labels.

Unconscious bias and automatic stereotyping or judgements can pose huge barriers within early years practice with a report from the Equality Human Rights Commission that 46% of LGBTQ+ people reported that they had personally experienced prejudice based on their sexual orientation. Early years settings play a crucial role in offering support to the every child and their families regardless of their background and the diverse experience children face in their early years are trajectory for a child's life outcomes, this is evidential through the Effective Provisions for Pre School education (EPPE) research. Sylva et al (2004). Therefore early years settings should be proactive at addressing barriers to inclusion such as negativity, conscious and unconscious bias and harmful stereotyping and should be confident, committed and competent in their abilities to be equal. This takes an inclusive leader and a whole group approach to develop positive attitudes, implement clear strategies and nurture collaborative work, looking beyond policies and legislation to develop inclusive attitudes and positive anti discriminatory practice.

Section 2

According to the Curriculum for Wales inclusive practice respects and responds to the unique experiences of children and their families, ensuring that every child receives appropriate support to fully participate in all types of learning experiences regardless of any differences. All schools and early years educational settings across Wales are using, designing and refining their curriculum to ensure that all children are supported in achieving their full potential. Welsh Government (2024). Policies and procedures help and guide settings and their leaders to ensure and endorse the wellbeing of all families, practitioners and children, ensuring the best standards of care and safeguarding for all children.

Sally Holland the Children's Commissioner for Wales is committed to ensuring that within Wales we recognise children and young people as active citizens who have important contributions to our world. This is achieved through the Children's Rights Approach framework which actively enables the development of inclusive practice and challenges inclusive leaders, working with children based on their rights under the UNCRC, assisting public bodies in integrating children's rights into every aspects of decision making, policies and practices. Empowering children and enhancing their capabilities as individuals. The principles of the Right Way framework ensure that settings place children's rights at the forefront of early years planning by making links to the UNCRC rights of the child into their planning, as well as ensuring that leaders and employees that good knowledge of children's rights. These principles are embedding children's rights, equality and non-discrimination, empowering children, participation and accountability. Placing children at the centre, understanding their individual rights and assessing whether early years settings are fit for purpose.

It is important that setting promote diversity ensuring children get equal opportunities to grow and learn in a safe environment with The Right Way framework encouraging settings to constantly review and renew policies and procedures in line with the Equality Act and train staff regularly in line with children's rights. Organisations should prioritise children's rights within their work, give all children the opportunities to make the most out of their potential as well as giving them access to information and resources that enable to take full advantage of their rights as children. Children should also be provided with meaningful opportunities to have their say on decisions about their lives and authorities should be made accountable to children for decisions that affect their lives. This is all under the Right Way guide assisting settings and individuals in providing services that are child centred and constantly have the best interests of children.

Leaders can develop a children's human rights approach in their setting using the framework tools. The self-assessment tool is helpful in reflecting on progress and guiding leaders on what aspects of their setting need developing to lead to improvements and standards being met.

According to a survey the Right Way framework provides a consistent and common approach to children's rights and allows opportunities to collaborate and argue that children's rights should be at the core of planning and the UNCRC needs to be integrated into every aspect of decision making through procedures and provisions. The best interests of children should always be a primary consideration in any decisions that involve them. Prioritising training in children's rights and developing strategies that intend to ensure that children's rights are upheld, the guidance is an effective tool to plan, reflect and develop practice ensuring that settings can maintain inclusivity and equality.

Early years settings should take accountability for children's rights by providing them with information and granting access to procedures which enables them to question and challenge their rights. Investing in children's rights has real benefits for early years organisations and the approach has positive impacts on how Wales responds to and safeguards the long-term needs of children. Matching the principles of our laws and policies with action can improve outcomes for children and young people, challenging bad practice and enforcing improvements which lead to beneficial

outcomes for children and their rights. An inclusive early years setting will use this type of framework to ensure that children's rights are upheld, supporting them in adapting their settings to become more inclusive and developing practitioners skill sets to support them in delivering excellence. Supporting every child in knowing their voices are heard and their opinions matter as well as providing safe environments for them to flourish regardless of differences or difficulties.

Section 3 - Blog

Creating a safe, supportive and inclusive environment within the early years begins with leaders. An inclusive leader should promote safety and predictability through routines which help to enable children to feel safe, loved and cared for, with the key support of practitioners who have the knowledge and understanding to integrate these concepts into provisions. Alongside the use of policies and procedures to effectively encourage diversity and inclusivity overall.

Leadership commitment plays a crucial role in driving inclusion agendas where leaders who are inclusive actively set policies, promote the importance of inclusion and what it means to the setting as well as establishing a culture that promotes diversity, acceptance and support. By demonstrating their commitment leaders can inspire and empower their staff to embrace inclusive practice both inside and outside of settings.

According to Nutbrown (no date) to be inclusive the use of policies, practices, attitudes and values need to be carefully scrutinised so that everyone can feel safe and comfortable. This requires both leaders and practitioners working alongside each other to ensure that every child's needs are met, under the UNCRC convention on the rights of the child and their individuality nurtured and heritages respected. Under Article 4 of the UNCRC it declares that governments require to pass laws that promote and protect children's rights. This includes the development of inclusive practice policies and procedures that actively respect children's rights. Welsh Government (2016) expressing that to become an inclusive setting leaders should give clear strategies that listen to the views of children Section 12 of the UNCRC in order to best meet their needs and effectively collaborating with parents/cares and partner agencies to achieve this.

An effective leader within early years needs to drive forward inclusion and a good place to begin is celebrating differences. According to Payne (2021) practitioners have a duty to promote diversity and having an understanding of different cultures helps tolerance and respect to be developed alongside promoting cohesion encouraging settings to reflect a multicultural Britain. Furthering on from this the University of Warwick state that promoting quality inclusion within the early years involves developing a shared understanding of high-quality practice with practitioners demonstrating that they value diversity and children's strengths in order to work to ensure all children have equitable access to education given their differences in culture, gender, family structure, language and or abilities and disabilities. In agreement to this premise, high quality inclusive practices should be equitable practices for each child individually. Brooks et al (2022).

The implications of inclusive education reaches far beyond the classroom, the right to inclusive education for all provides idea conditions for creating an overall inclusive society. With early years practitioners holding challenging yet rewarding roles in shaping the lives of the next generation Cologon (2014).

Wilshire (2023) argues that inclusivity within early years is creating a supportive environment using various materials and teaching methods that cater for different learning styles and is crucial for the development of well rounded, accepting and kind individuals. Supporting those whom may need additional support such as learning difficulties or disabilities actively removing barriers to their learning such as discrimination and prejudice meaning that each and every child is able to achieve their full potential. Building self-esteem and sense of belonging is all part of settings playing their role in inclusivity, give every child the best start in life. Inclusivity should be at the centre of early years education and the use of this in practice can hold many benefits which outweigh the barriers. It enables children to achieve their potential in an environment that is imbedded with wholesome learning opportunities alongside practitioners with the correct knowledge and understanding to support and encourage children to achieve all that they can.

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