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Inclusive Leadership: working together to support families.

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Section 1.

This assignment will discuss the concept of partnerships and critically evaluate the significance of inclusive leadership in an Early Years setting. To evaluate and explore the importance of family in relation to social, cultural, health and interventions and draw upon barriers, challenges, and opportunities Early Years Practitioners (EYP) experience to develop a partnership approach.

According to Rodd, (2013) early childhood has been developing leadership over a decade, linking important connections, dialogue, and communities as its principles. The definition of Inclusive Leadership is described as having the ability to be inclusive, which is seen as an essential component of modern-day leadership. Furthermore, specific skills required include creating an environment where everyone feels safe and belonged, having the ability to value colleagues' worth, and create opportunities for all types of diversity to succeed. It is important that participation is facilitated, involving equality and fairness. Equally important is positive self-esteem and strong relationships with work colleagues. Inclusive Leadership does not include practitioners who seek perfection, assert power over others, control and divide the workplace, but working in collaboration and having reciprocal relationships with Early Years Practitioners.

However, EYP's are mostly women, there are perceptions regarding women as leaders, consequently many EYP's lack confidence to become leaders due to lack of training, and access to a role model to observe good practice are seen as obstacles to becoming a leader. Moreover, leaders who seek perfection is described as a barrier. (Ferdman *et al*, 2020 and Rodd 2013).

Subsequently, inclusion is described as complex and difficult, each situation is unique and EYP's must identify and develop understanding and strategies that are appropriate. Leadership is recognised as significant in raising standards, increase the quality of outcomes for children and families. Understanding of leadership is an evolving area, to develop quality provision for children and their families. Inclusive practice is central to quality childcare settings where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and respected. (Brodie, 2015, Newstead, S. and Isles-Buck, E. 2012 and Siraj and Hallet 2014).

The scenario is that of a three-year-old girl, Jasmine. She lives with her mother, father and two older sisters, they are from China. Jasmine has recently started nursery and has significant additional learning needs. Her development has been discussed and an Individual Learning Plan has been put in place. It has been mentioned that Jasmine is going to be assessed for Autism, her parents are

struggling with coming to terms with this information. In addition to this, their english is limited and they live in a deprived area, they both do not work.

Child.

UNICEF (No date) state Governments must give parents support by creating support services for the child and giving parents the help, they need to raise their children as they share a responsibility to raise their child, Article 18. Furthermore, Holland (2017) states all children and young people must have an equal chance to become the best they can be and recognises too many children live in poverty and not receiving the right support.

The evidence suggest society is rapidly changing, increasing diverse nature we live in today. Culture is described as traditions and aspects of a lifestyle shared by a group of members of a society, it is essential for Inclusive Leaders to understand families' ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Inclusive leaders must consider the learning environment for children with learning difficulties and disabilities, additionally the curriculum. Research recognises boys outnumber girls with special educational needs (SEN) in England, moreover children and families with low socioeconomic status outnumber those from a more affluent background. More importantly, IL must deliver high quality provision to meet the needs of the individual child, furthermore high-quality teaching must be essential to recognise and identify children with SEN and include differentiating activities, implementing additional support and intervention, It is recognised there has been an increase for all children, including children with disabilities, to have the right to inclusive education. however, this has created a mounted tension and concerns for Inclusive Leaders and EYP's, with practitioners unable to meet the unique needs of the child and their families due to the lack of knowledge and understanding and practices to support children in inclusive early education settings. While this is the case, for Inclusive Leaders to achieve positive outcomes for children, especially with autism, there is much need for them to have a comprehensive approach and build capacity with EYP's, to create autism-friendly cultures and environments and deliver evidence-based strategies (Fredrickson and Cline 2015 and Roberts and Webster 2022).

Inclusive Leadership includes identifying inequalities in a setting and having the knowledge and understanding of the influences surrounding the communities, working with others, engaging with families and communities holistically, to understand their culture is key to becoming a successful Inclusive Leader in the EY. Demographically, communities are developing and growing more diverse by race and ethnicity. Erikson 2007 states children to do not leave their cultural identity to belong to an educational community, it is the responsibility of all EYP's to stand with others, provide support, and build positive trusting relationships. Ensure open-access and universal offer of services are available and families are aware of support (Scalon & Johnson 2021).

Parents.

Welsh Government, (2017) identify a significant part of Flying Start is the specific entitlement to parenting support, as research suggests good parenting is essential to the development of children's outcomes. Moreover, guidance and support are given explaining different services available to the families to further support their challenges and difficulties. The parenting offer, which must be offered annually, can strengthen families understanding of their child to meet their needs, it improves relationships with parent and child, and most importantly, build their confidence as a parent. It is the responsibility of the Local Authorities (LA) or individuals working with children and their families to be accountable for outcomes that affect children's lives (Holland 2017). Furthermore, the support offered is from pre-natal to four years old, it covers each stage of a child's development, from health visitors, childcare settings, and family support worker. The Welsh Government have a commitment to the UNCRC and support for parents reflect the rights of the child. Parenting support services must be inclusive and accessible, respect for the diversity of families is required and consideration of their ethnic, culture and religion beliefs. It is important not to assume parents will be able to locate services needed to support their situations. Vulnerable families are at increased risk due to poverty being an adverse circumstance. Due to barriers of culture and language with Jasmine and her family, she did not attend Flying Start, missing the opportunity for the family to receive the support they needed a lot sooner.

Freud, A (2021) describes Inclusive Leaders and EYP's are experts at working with parents and carers, continually providing opportunities to engage with them every day is recognised as good practice. A systematic approach to work more closely with young children is more effective and result in children reaching their full potential. In addition to this, a differentiated approach for parental engagement can be positive, creating a strategy when required, for working with more complex needs of a child. Inclusive Leaders must ensure the school ethos includes engaging families in decision making and creating opportunities for families to attend events, but also it is to value the importance of the child and family environment, situation, and relationship. An open-door policy can build positive relationships and encourage conversations. Inclusive Leaders must acknowledge personal and cultural beliefs and how this can impact on how families engage with practitioners, have awareness of difficulties facing families based on race and culture. It is important for families to feel they belong.

Furthermore, Welsh Government, (2017) state deprivation and poverty are linked to educational outcomes, parents' attitudes and well-being play a significant part when determining children's outcomes. However, parents found Flying Start to be beneficial to the community and felt positive about the provisions received, additionally parents felt less isolated and recognised improvements in their local areas. However, a critical factor in improvement of children's outcomes are the relationships between schools, providers, support services and most importantly the parents. Estyn, (2020) recognise the importance of partnership with parents, to

involve and engage parents is essential to children's achievements and best outcomes for the child. Involving parents with their child's development and learning, sharing valuable information supports to identify different preferences and meet the needs of the child and their families.

Professionals.

Inclusive Leaders and EYP's are all responsible for the care of children in Wales and Regional Partnership Boards are required, by law, to bring all services together for children who have complex needs. It gives opportunities to prioritise integration of services and plan together to give better experiences for the child and family when they need additional support. Inclusive Leadership includes providing support to fit around the family as early as possible to prevent circumstances escalating.

However, for families, it is described as a complicated system to navigate when asking for the right support and waiting lists are forever growing in every sector of the Local Authority. Complimentary to this, it is recognised by families, there is a lack of integrated services for children with complex needs, furthermore the children are moving between different services, families waiting to be seen then being informed it is the wrong service (Holland 2020).

Swansea Council, (2023) has designed an approach to support all families who are experiencing difficulties, 'Right Support at the Right Time'. This approach is consistently linked to the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 that focus on working with families, in partnership, to prevent situations escalating. Support workers are encouraged to have 'What matters' conversations, set out in SS&WB (Wales) Act 2014, to understand what is important to the child and their family, and a referral can be made, with the consent of the family.

Community.

According to, Welsh Government, (2016) development of community partnerships, working with local people and businesses and multi-agencies, can support and strengthen family engagement and make a positive contribution to community life. It is essential Inclusive Leaders understand the importance of this, it is an area inspected by Estyn and a part of the school development plan. Community partnership can support positive engagement from families, which will only strengthen the setting. Furthermore, involving parents and carers in their child's education can result in less barriers to learning, improve children's attitudes to school, raise standards and improve children's overall health and wellbeing. It is important to understand what happens in the family home between the child and their parents can influence the attitude towards learning. Parents who have a good positive relationship with EYP's are more likely to attend events in school, encourage learning at home and make children feel more at ease attending the setting. If parents have a concern, they will have the confidence to address and explain their situation, often looking for support. Building good relationships with parents and their families lead to significant improvements in children's attainment and behaviour,

furthermore Inclusive leadership lead to better morale between staff and a good reputation in the community.

However, it can be difficult to engage families and the community, many families do not engage with their child's educational setting unless necessary, especially if they have had bad experiences themselves or have additional learning needs. For some families, living in poverty, are under stress and

Schools rarely find family engagement to be a level playing field – some families tend to interact with the school less frequently, some families have needs that are harder to accommodate. There will be parents/carers who themselves have additional learning needs; parents/carers who are under stress, for example through poverty; parents/carers who have had bad experiences at school themselves and are disaffected with education. There are also those who just see their children's learning as being the sole responsibility of the school and feel 'it's nothing to do with me'. It is critical that schools find a way of overcoming these barriers to reach the families of those learners from deprived backgrounds, the families of learners who are currently underperforming, and the families who are providing little support for their child's learning. This issue is discussed further under Themes 3 and 4 of this toolkit.

Lechuga-Peña, S. and Brisson, D. (2018) suggests parents involved in their child's education can lead to positive academic outcomes, positive outcomes, and behaviours, especially for children living in poverty. In addition, a recent study on low-income mothers and the experience of barriers were explored and one was cultural and language differences.

Gibson and Blandford (2005) describe a door pattern for involvement in the community. The closed door pattern can manage children's development and individual learning, however community involvement is restricted or non-existent. Therefore, Inclusive Leaders will have limited knowledge of changes happening outside of the setting, restricting support offered for families in need. The open door pattern enables parents and EYP's to share valuable information and can be a prominent factor in the life of the community, it benefits children learning experiences and enables positive outcomes for the child and family. The balanced door pattern is described as a mixture of distance and closeness, however, if a setting has too much distance there is the need to attempt to bring back the closeness. On the other hand, if there are too much closeness settings must close the door. Open door policy can promote effective partnership with families and the community, however for new practitioner this can feel uncomfortable, feelings of being inadequate and being judged by parents can affect confidence (Stevens, 2003). Monnow Primary School, (no date) identified open door policy as a positive part of their practice as it can encourage parents to open communication, discussions, and important feedback to improve good practice. Parents feel confident to discuss important concerns and worries, allowing purposeful issues to be resolved. Furthermore, community connections give children a sense of belonging and place in their community, it enables opportunities to learn about

others, build confidence that lead to new friendships. Children feel safe and secure in their community because they are familiar with the people where they live (Raising Children, Australia 2022).

Policy – Flying Start Programme.

According to StDenny, a policy is described as an intention, stated by the Welsh Government by those with responsibility, to develop approaches and address needs and issues regarding communities. Moreover, those with power and responsibility must act to design services and programmes to reflect requirements, values and beliefs needed in the Welsh communities. However, there are believed to be constraints on policy making in Wales, with limits of devolution meaning policies created are identified not as a rule. And yet, powers in Wales are forever growing and Welsh Government are actively finding new ways to achieve policy objectives. Baldcock, Fitzgerald and Kay describe a policy in the Early Years as a positive thing, it can make a difference to how practitioners work and it is important to recognise when a policy is created, it always has a common goal and purpose, giving a genuine reason for the policy and understanding the reason for the policy is good practice. Furthermore, policies will always include elements of belonging, commitment, status, and specificity. It is essential that Inclusive Leaders are aware of policies and ensure all EYP's have good knowledge and understanding, this will support them in the practice to deliver excellent childcare and enable children to develop their skills and learning.

Welsh Government (2017) introduced a Flying Start Programme in 2006. The key aspect of the programme was the specific aim to make a difference to children's lives and enable opportunities to have better life chances. It is targeted geographically, to the most deprived area in Wales, universally open to families with children nought to three years old living in those specific areas. It has four key services that aim to improve child outcomes. The key service entitlements are speech and language, an enhanced health visiting service, with access to a multi-disciplinary team for support, parenting courses, and free childcare for children two to three years of age. The focus of these services is early identification of additional support needed for the child and family. It is important to acknowledge that some of these services are available without the Flying Start entitlement, although there is more intense support to promote in entitled areas. In addition to targeting families of deprivation, it recognises children and families living in poverty have links to poor life choices and poor health in their young lives.

Latest figures show 34% of children are living in poverty in Wales, especially with families having an income below 60% of the median income. poverty can have a negative effect on a child's development and education, their emotional health and wellbeing. As a result, families are now at a critical level, having to make difficult choices in how best to support their family (Children in Wales 2022).

The Flying Start Programme offers intense support, identifying families in need of additional support, to meet the needs of the child and family. Interventions are provided to ensure children are happy, healthy and reach their full potential, additionally families can manage and cope. It is important to recognise the health visitor interventions are linked to the Healthy Child Wales Programme (HCWP), and is fundamental to promoting the health and wellbeing of families. However, there is difference between generic health visitors and Flying Start Health Team, as they can refer to a multi-disciplinary team of professionals to work collaboratively to meet the needs of the child and family (Welsh Government 2017).

Another essential point, the Flying Start programme is introduced to all families eligible through the Flying Start Health team to ensure the health, wellbeing, and welfare of all children. Families identified needing additional support have interventions offered through an assessment of need, the levels included are universal, enhanced, and intensive support, identified through assessment process.

The universal level is a minimum programme of intervention support offered, enhanced offers a universal programme of intervention to meet additional needs identified through the assessment and finally the intensive programme, this is for families with a greater need for support, a multi-agency team will be involved to support and provide specialist interventions (Welsh Government 2017).

There is limited evidence to suggest there is a significant difference since inception of the Flying Start Programme in Wales when matched to other families in different areas of Wales. A survey was conducted with 3, 591 families, randomly chosen, all with children under the age of two using Child Benefit records. Of that number, most of the families were not living in a Flying Start area and therefore not entitled to receive the promoted service entitlement. Subsequently, concerns have been raised surrounding the geographical targeting and has been described as a 'post-code lottery' by stakeholders and Assembly members, thus creating inequality and not reaching a high proportion of children living in poverty. The evidence suggests that two thirds of families are living with income deprivation, however they live outside the areas defined by the Welsh Government as deprived areas. In addition, there is still limited data to suggest families living in these areas have better outcomes and the lack of baseline data to assume starting points for children in disadvantaged areas are lower than those of other areas. In conclusion, Flying Start is recognised as a positive source of support for families, however the full impact of the programme can only be measured as children grow up in education and life. Change is needed to reach out to all children and families living in poverty who need it the most (Welsh Government 2017, Welsh Government 2016, and Thomas 2022).

Blog – School Avoidance.

Welsh Government (2016) describe inclusive education as all pupils having access to opportunities, specific to their needs, feeling they belong to the school and

community. To deliver an inclusive curriculum and ensure all staff are aware of equality issues and inclusive learning.

So why are more children not accessing education and learning at school? Is it the parents' choice or the children?

Welsh Government (2022) state 9:8 of every 1,000 children is home schooled and the rate of elective home schooling is rising every year, alarmingly quickly. For parents who choose this path, there can be numerous factors, including religion, values, and beliefs. Advantages for parents are they can personalise what they teach their child, building around the child's interests and learning style as there is no curriculum to follow. However, this will lead to children not sitting exams when they of age, instead going down a route of vocational qualifications. In comparison, some parents must give up their job and have an added responsibility and pressure to teach their child, so they reach their full potential, their balance of home and school life can be difficult. When does school finish and home life begin? Furthermore, there is extraordinarily little support available. Children who are home schooled miss out of social gatherings or events at school, this can impact their social skills, and have limited friends and their view on the world may be obscure to others (Sword 2022).

School avoidance is on the rise in Wales, and one reason for this is the fear of going to school. It is important to recognise that the response to fear is anxiety, and young children are suffering with anxiety. More young children have severe difficulties attending school due to anxiety, their perception of school and experience of negative feelings and thoughts than ever before. Buttery, M (2023) describe school avoidance as a complex issue which is a result of varied factors. The long-term effect of social isolation due to Covid-19 being one of them, has had a negative effect on young children's mental health and wellbeing. Since the pandemic, more young children are struggling with mental health issues and school refusal has been intricately linked to anxiety. There is a need for more specialist therapy to be offered to our young children to address these critical issues.

Anxiety in young children may not be down to the pandemic, however their progress and motivation has been affected and disrupted their valuable education over the past few years. National Assembly for Wales has recognised there has been limited support offered to those affected in Wales. Although there have been some improvements in the mental health service for children, it is not good enough, there has been an absence of services because some children do not meet the threshold.

So, what happens to them?

To address school avoidance positively, early intervention is the key. All services must be offered for these children to receive the support they need, forget thresholds, if a child a suffering with anxiety it must be addressed.

How can we put a level on how much anxiety a child is experiencing and think it is acceptable?

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