

Section 1

This section aims to critically evaluate the importance of inclusive leadership (IL) within Early Years (EY) provision, highlighting the barriers, opportunities and the potential impact on children, professionals, families, and the community, challenging the effectiveness of the role of an inclusive leader.

IL is defined as a form of leadership that promotes opportunities of inclusion, allowing a collective of directions, ideas, and contributions from all individuals with the focus to facilitate social justice and equity (Ferdman, 2021). Wesson and Maxwell (2021) define IL as the recognition of individuality, understanding pupils' individual needs and not treating all pupils the same. Additionally, Bourke and Titus (2019) state the role of IL requires leaders to show attentiveness towards their colleagues and to encourage the progression of professional development. Similarly, PACEY (2022) highlights effective inclusive provision provides individuals with fairness of their choices such as culture, gender, language, socio-economic, and ethnic background. Following this, Ferdman (2017) agrees IL supports inclusive practice, enabling pupils and individuals of the community to feel a sense of belonging and comfort to become unique in their individual, authentic selves. However, Booysen (2014) states it is important to highlight whilst supporting multiple identities that it does not change or adapt who they are. This suggests the benefit of inclusive practice provides individuals to feel respected and a part of the environment through encouragement (Ninan and Essandoh, 2020), enhancing autonomy without feeling failure when mistakes are made or needing to fit in (Bowers, Robertson and Parchman, 2012; Sinar and Wooll, 2021).

Ponciano and Shabazian (2012) discuss the need for effective IL to promote pupils' development further through diversity and the awareness of the multicultural society. Similarly, Hudson (2012) states practitioners are important professionals which understand pupils needs and must ensure the learning environments are inclusive and respectful to individuals' values. Conversely, staff who feel they are not employed within an inclusive environment may lead to insufficient contributions and lack in participation (Wroblewski, 2019). Booysen (2014) highlights the significance of IL. She states that individuals who fail to encounter IL within provision may lead to feelings of lack of appreciation, acceptance and valued. This results in professionals not

performing to their best, low staff morale and the pupils feeling a sense of unsafety (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

The scenario discussed relates to a single parent who has overcome alcohol addiction. She has been assessed and regained full parental responsibility and care for her daughter. Mum often stands alone on the playground during drop off and pick up times, avoiding contact and conversation with other parents. The other parents notice mum withdrawn from sociable situations but do not invite her to conversation. The daughter is achieving academically however, she is very quiet and prefers to be alone during play times. She communicates when spoken to by a key practitioner but appears to show difficulty in expressing language and forming friendships.

The scenario conveys lack of accurate IL, opening negative opportunities for the child to display feelings such as isolation. Although the child is an important individual within the environment, it is important to recognise the parent as the child's first teacher (Price, 2017) and in the scenario they demonstrate an anxious feeling around additional adults. NHS (2020) state children pick up parents' emotions and behaviours very quickly, leading the child to react to situations in similar ways. For example, the parent indicates feeling nervous during drop off and collection times, therefore the child associates play times on the yard as uncomfortable due to mum feeling the same way. This can instantly create challenges for the child. Similarly, Katz (2022) highlight children often rely on guidance from adults to acknowledge how to react in situations, increasing the possibility of children displaying similar emotions to role models. Therefore, this implies that the pupil may be withdrawn from communicating with professionals and peers during playtimes, imitating the parents nervous and reserved manner.

No Isolation (2021a) states social relationships are paramount to one's well-being as well as social interaction being essential to childhood development. However, Tillinghast (2017) and No Isolation (2021b) highlight the exclusion of social interaction and relationships has shown to create barriers to pupils' development in multiple ways, leading to the child being socially withdrawn, affecting the healthy development of the child's brain. Mental Health (2022) describe poor IL neglects the pupil's right to inclusion, creating instant challenges which can make them feel excluded, damaging

their self-esteem. The child appears to play alone during play times, indicating signs of loneliness and forming friendships challenging. Therefore, the child feeling lonely and lacking in confidence to form friendships creates concerning barriers to the child's social skills and mental health.

Childhood Education International (2021) state building relationships is the key component to valuable IL, however, to do this, you must build trust. The practitioner must include an informal chat with the child to provide opportunities to build positive relationships and to reassurance. Additionally, it is important to ensure an informal chat is arranged with the parent to ensure they are comfortable with their child's learning environment, the staff and that both individuals feel supported and welcome within the provision, at levels that meet their individual factors. UNICEF (2016) highlights the child's right to be listened to and providing the opportunities for the child to express their feelings and views under Article 13. Conversely, if professionals do not allow opportunities for the child to have a voice, Lekh (no date) states it is evident children's opinions and beliefs are not valued. Therefore, the child could view the key professionals as not inclusive and do not respect their views. For this to become effective, practitioners must be approachable and ensure they listen and adhere to the child's needs and feelings, to facilitate a sense of belonging (Murray, 2019).

Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2021) state an effective leader must recognise individual's interests, be able to identify how they are feeling and address these in an appropriate manner that suits the individual. Referring to the scenario, the focus is to ensure the child feels comfortable within the setting, to be able to express her feelings and her likes/dislikes. To ensure the pupil feels supported, daily check ins could provide them with opportunity to express how they feel or if they would just like a conversation with whom they feel valued by. However, challenges may occur when practitioners incorporate diversity. As stated within the scenario, the pupil has difficulty with expressing emotions and communicating with others. Additionally, the pupils age could be a barrier to this method. As the age is not stated in the scenario, the pupil could be at an age where the understanding of emotions and the ability to verbally describe feelings is additionally challenging. Therefore, to support this, the practitioner could provide feeling boards to promote the pupil's language and understanding of each feeling that they may encounter. Sword (2021) demonstrates the child's difficulty

in being able to express feelings and interests, visual prompts could be an effective tool used to support her sentence structures. This is an effective first method to be able to form positive social relationships with the child and parent (Freud, 2020). In the long-term opportunities such as free play within the class would enhance the opportunity for the child to associate and communicate with peers and professionals through play (Obiweluzo and Melefa, 2014).

The positive key word within the scenario is overcome. The parent has overcome their alcohol addiction, making positive changes to their lifestyle and their child's home environment. Despite this, it suggests mum is not receiving the positive effects of IL. The mum appears to be withdrawn and nervous around teachers and other parents on the yard. MacKey (2020) states recovering from addiction should be seen as a celebration however, the mum could be still feeling a sense of guilt or shame, which can be a common self-conscious emotion for individuals who are recovering from the experiences. Similarly, Julle-Danière *et al.* (2020) states the individual can often adjourn away from building any social relationships. This could be a reason why mum does not communicate with her child's practitioners and feels nervous that she may say or do wrong. This creates a barrier towards IL, as the parent feels they are not comfortable with communicating with the professionals or they may be judged.

However, overcoming this barrier, teachers need to be mindful of their professional skills. Ofted (2011) state the educational provision and practitioners should adapt their use of communications skills to meet the individual's circumstances. For example, in this scenario, practitioners can witness the parent distant towards the school and parents. To support this challenge, practitioners must ensure they have an approachable manner, provide opportunities for the parent to have an open and positive conversation, and to be listened to. Similarly, IL must signify an open mindset, understand, and observe with no objective (Bourke and Titus, 2019). This could lead to mum becoming more open and willing to share her past, allowing the practitioner to gain more of an understanding to support her and the child. Additionally, this will support the mum to recognise overcoming the past as a celebration rather than an enclosed matter of guilt and embarrassment. Juergens (2021) highlights practitioners who are aware and have a full understanding of how to approach the parent, equally supports the parent and allows relationships to build in an effective way for the child.

Rodd (2013) believes it is important to have a positive relationship between the practitioners and child's parent. It evidently provides success through enriching the child's social skills and emotional well-being. Following this means IL would be effectively incorporated within the environment and relationship, promoting positive outcomes.

To ensure the setting and practitioners are providing inclusivity, practitioners must ensure mum of the open-door policy and provide daily check ins. This enhances the opportunity for mum to discuss any concerns she may have, or reassurance from familiar key workers. This can allow the mum to feel included within the community and recognised as an individual. Waterford (2018) states encouraging parents with opportunities to engage with the community is a positive first milestone and an effective use of IL. Conversely, challenges may occur when practitioners are encouraging the parent to participate. The mum may feel comfortable with not communicating with other parents on the yard and prefers to be alone in fear of doing or saying something incorrect and questioning the child's care. However, mum may not identify this is affecting the child's learning experience. Additionally, mum may have challenges with communicating and expressive language like her daughter. Reading Rockets (2022) discuss parents often become hesitant to be involved with children's parents and the school due to difficulty with communication or do not have English as a first language. This can cause an instant barrier to the mum as she or the parents may not acknowledge additional methods to support a conversation. Additionally, it could be considered to provide parent and child days within the learning environment to promote communication between the parents as well as the children. This could encourage mum to meet more parents and new individuals.

It is evident to see within each area discussed, practitioners are key professionals within the multi-agency team. They are embedded throughout, highlighting the importance and the power they obtain to ensure IL is incorporated. Turner-Cmucha and Óskarsdóttir (2020) state leadership within the school is highlighted as a significant factor to ensure the achievement of inclusive educational provision. Additionally, Seyram Agbenyega and Klibthong (2022) explain the role of IL stems from EY professionals, enacting leadership as a team, inclusively working with EY practitioners who understand each pupil ensuring diversity is achieved. Similarly,

Ferdman (2021) believes IL requires professionals to have an open outlook and equipped skills to create an environment which caters for multiple factors of diversity. However, O'Sullivan (2015) highlights that miscommunication is a significant issue to understanding inclusive practice. Therefore, it is important for leaders and professionals in the multi-agency team to communicate effectively to enhance the understanding of what is needed to fulfil individuals needs as well as the provision to support inclusion.

Ferdman and Deane (2014) state although individuals are known to first identify inclusion as the definition to participate and feel a sense of belonging, Ferdman (2014) describes the term as a joint form of simple and complex. In line with Ferdman's *micro* and *macro* system of inclusion, the operation of each level may be interpreted differently by multiple individuals whose experiences in similar situations differ. Nevertheless, with the success of multi-agency teams' co-operation, individuals are still granted to encounter inclusion and diversity, allowing individuals to feel a sense of belonging, trust, and acceptance within the authentic environment (Vatel, 2018). Ferdman (2016) further states the values from society can impact how organisations address inclusion and understand the meaning of inclusive. This is where the importance of the community supports inclusion.

In relation to the scenario, it is evident professionals are not providing inclusive practice. It shows the daughter living with challenges in communicating. Victoria State Government (2021) describes pupils showing delays with expressive language demonstrate challenges to expressing themselves through gestures, writing and speech. To support the pupil's difficulties, the Welsh Government (2020) highlights the benefits to providing speech and language therapy (SLT) to those who show difficulty in expression. Additionally, Walker (2019) states SLT provides positive enhancements to the pupil's ability to express their feelings and thoughts, promoting inclusion to communicate with others freely and improve the access to academic learning and the curriculum. To overcome any potential barriers to SLT, professionals must qualify in training, ensuring appropriate strategies are utilised to support the pupil effectively. It is important to acknowledge that first speech and language therapists must facilitate effective partnerships with the pupil and family to withdraw any potential uncertainty, encouraging the individuals to feel worthy (Mroz, 2006).

Haines *et al.* (2015) state families, staff and the community have a shared responsibility for the achievement of all pupils' development. Additionally, the Welsh Government (2016) share that families and communities have more influence on pupils' achievements than individuals acknowledge. It is proven practices that promote IL, encourage engagement and communication with families and the community in partnership and promote the standards of positive improvements to the pupils' development and well-being, in line with the five Every Child Matters outcomes. However, for this to be effective the education professionals must equip a full understanding of IL and can perform within the profession (Bourke and Titus, 2019). Moreover, Reina *et al.* (2013) shares the pupil's engagement is equally an important factor that facilitates the successfulness of the pupil's educational attainment. Referring to the scenario, it states the pupil's engagement is only evident when the practitioners have first facilitated the conversation. This implies that IL has not previously been successful following the pupil's and parent's actions.

To support the pupil and parent, there are many community groups that could provide support and discourage the feeling of undervalued or exclusion due to their own personal challenges. Adfam (2020) state there are many peer support Al-Anon groups within the community that can support the parent to feel proud of the experiences they have overcome and not ashamed. Peer support groups are known to be an effective and empowering strategy to benefit the individual's mental health and well-being (Tracy and Wallace, 2016). Additionally, Coghlan (2021) highlights social clubs and groups for children can offer many benefits to the child, facilitating the child to practise social skills, foster feelings, and form friendships. This could immediately empower the daughter's self-esteem and confidence.

Nevertheless, Aubrey (2011) highlights challenges can occur when ensuring the IL encourages the community and families to work in partnership. When working in collaboration with the community, many individuals may be involved. This can cause challenges due to multiple individuals having differences in agenda due to their cultures, beliefs, or values. To prevent this, it is important to acknowledge schools working in partnership with the community, are trained professionals who can sympathise with the individuals, preventing any personal bias opinions or views

(Suttie, 2016). Therefore, trusting collaboration with the community support the lives of the child and their family (Swift Education Centre, 2022).

To conclude, within the scenario provides opportunities for professionals to provide inclusion and diversity, should effective IL be implemented. The scenario implies IL is not taking place, however, allows practitioners to promote IL, enabling the child and parent to feel included, valued and belonging to the school and community. When partnerships are formed, an empowering multi-agency team can be established, enhancing the pupils' achievement in successful progression steps in their education (Welsh Government, 2022).

Section 2

This section will focus on the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* as macro-level and an inclusion policy written by Boulton (2018) from Little Swans Nursery, in line with the micro-level (Liddicoat, 2015). Each policy will critically evaluate how they enable IL in the EY provision.

Pollack Porter, Rutkow and McGinty (2018) describe policies as a statement which underpins guidance for a course of action. Brighton and Hove Childminding Team (2018) states policies should be set out clearly, to inform the child, parents and community what is expected of professionals within the provision. Although, the term policy can vary in different situations and organisations, it is important to acknowledge that there are common elements within all policies that aim to promote outcomes of belongingness, commitment, status, and specificity (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013). Therefore, Liddicoat (2015) highlights macro and micro policies as significant legal documentation which facilitates action, consider values, and provide structure to support actions within settings should professionals adopt the role as IL effectively (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Social Care Wales (2017) state the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* was introduced in 2016 with the aim to distribute legal framework to support the improvement of individuals well-being that require care and support. Additionally, the Welsh Government (2019) highlights the purpose of the Act, imposing responsibilities on the health boards, local authorities (LA) and Welsh Ministers that require the professionals to effectively promote the well-being of all individuals who are in need for support to encourage inclusivity. Furthermore, WCVA (2021) describes the legislation as the advocate to encourage individuals to become independent, facilitating the definitions of *well-being, healthy, happy and comfortable with their life*. Similarly, Caerphilly County Borough Council (2022) claims the Act promotes individuals to be heard, having the right to control their own life choices. This supports Article 12 in line with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, facilitating inclusive practice through a collaborative approach. Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (2017) conveys individuals have the right to be taken seriously, listened to and to be included throughout their life.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 demonstrates vocabulary that supports and benefits IL. Within the document, words such as ‘co-operation’ and ‘partnership’ are evident. The words that are used in the correct context provides legal requirements, implying positive outcomes can be met for inclusion following from all individuals working in collaboration effectively. Additionally, the use of *imposes* demonstrates a strong, meaningful requirement that must be carried out (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022a). It highlights the need to work inclusively with other employees to ensure everyone’s well-being and needs are supported through inclusive practice.

However, when evaluating the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* further, limitations become evident throughout sections of the legislation. The Act is developed with the use of very technical terminology setting a very high standard for professionals and individuals to understand and expectant of professionals to have fully equipped knowledge of language. I’d Rather Be Writing (2022) describes material of high complexity can become incomprehensible. This is due to the professionals expected to read the unfamiliar terminology, providing potential challenges for the individuals to make sense of what is expected. Similarly, Mayra León Translation Services (2020) states today important documents are developed with the use of more complex language, highlighting the importance of professionals understanding the terminology. Furthermore, they express the use of good language incorporated into legal documents provides clarity and decreases ambiguity. This highlights the terminology selected and used in policies as an important factor in the quality of outcomes in IL.

In comparison, the micro-level Little Swans Inclusion Policy (2018) is written by professionals in partnership with the parents, demonstrating their interpretation at an easier understanding of what is expected of the setting to ensure inclusion. Providing a less complex document supports the readers of society and not just professionals who are trained to understand higher terminology. This immediately demonstrates IL is incorporated into the setting stating that the policy has been written with the support of parents, individuals who know their children best (Eekelaar, 2020). Similarly, the language is much less formal, enhancing the possibility of accurate understanding and implementation of IL. Additionally, language such as ‘committed to’, ‘we will’, ‘need’ and ‘responsibility’ are embedded throughout the policy, outlining the importance of

what the setting currently implements, what is expected of them as professionals and the duties that must be followed through to ensure inclusive practice (Naraian, 2017).

However, although language has been identified that secures inclusivity, additional vocabulary evident such as 'should be' contradicts this. Initially, this may cause confusion leading practitioners to be reading the document, thinking the actions are important however, are not a definite requirement to promote IL. Cambridge Dictionary (2022b) defines *should* as a 'suggested' action or the 'best thing to do'. Therefore, this suggests potential actions may possibility be taken, however, are not a must to be actioned. This may cause uncertainty for professionals when carrying out possible actions, providing limitations when ensuring inclusion and diversity. Nevertheless, with the uncertainty, professionals may miss out important information and actions needed to ensure each individual feels belongingness. To prevent confusion and reduce barriers, Merriam-Webster (2022) defines *must* as actions and responsibilities that are considered to be high importance and compulsory.

Therefore, this implies the terminology used must be chosen and incorporated into the legal documents with care to ensure all professionals are provided with a full understanding of the actions and what is needed to be carried out by the professionals to ensure IL can take place for the staff and pupils (Gabriel-Petit, 2017 and Purdue University, 2020). Enaohwo (2020) highlights that failing to provide efficient language within the documents can provide barriers to effective IL implemented in practice. To overcome the implementation of IL being impacted, the policies could include glossaries with embedded definitions to enhance the professionals understanding in areas where may become challenging to comprehend (Mayra León Translation Services, 2020). This in effect would promote inclusive practice as professionals' awareness of the actions needed to be undertaken are enhanced, to ensure the community, child, and parents are experiencing inclusive support.

To conclude, the evaluation has shown that the macro-policy, *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* does not always advocate IL. This is due to the legal implications embedded throughout the legal document. Providing documents with complex language does not always support EY settings to provide purposeful micro-policies within their setting. However, with the support from the community, parents

and additional guideline documents, settings can develop successful setting policies to support all individuals appropriately within an inclusive and diverse environment. Although professionals must follow the guidelines, they must be mindful of the language used within their own micro-policy to ensure no terminology requires individuals to be misled, failing to adhere to individuals needs and the importance of pursuing actions to promote IL.

Section 3

How can we promote inclusive learning when transitioning children into education?

Through experience as an EY practitioner, parents and carers want to ensure their child feels supported throughout their learning experience, by the professionals understanding their child needs fully as well as the parents themselves. UNICEF (no date) supports this, highlighting that every pupil has the right to a quality, inclusive education and learning environment.

When pupils start in an educational setting, a school prospectus and starter pack is distributed to the parents and carers to complete and disclose information. Settings request to know pupils' names, date of birth, address, and emergency contacts. Additionally, schools require pupils' dietary requirements, allergies, health conditions and consent for the local area, online access, and photos. However, it is not a requirement for parents to disclose any religions or beliefs of the child or family and the child's interests. Foundation Years (2012) express for practitioners to appropriately respond to pupils and their needs, observations must take place. Practitioners are required to independently carry out observations to identify the pupil's likes and dislikes. This does not support IL and practice, as it demonstrates key information potentially being anonymous, failing to fully include the pupil. Prior to children starting school, the setting must always request all information about each pupil. This is to implement inclusive practice (Scanlan and Johnson, 2015).

To identify further information about the pupil, one-page profiles (OPP) are a useful document to provide person-centred strategies to support learning, thus not only being pupils with additional learning needs. An OPP allows practitioners and the multi-agency team to document important information to ensure learning is personalised for each pupil (Sanderson, Smith and Wilson, 2010).

Norfolk County Council (2022) state practitioners must involve pupils with the development of their individual OPPs. By including the pupil and family when developing an OPP provides greater accuracy about the pupil and promotes the practitioners understanding of the pupil and can quickly identify appropriate ways to facilitate inclusion (Guillen, 2019). OPPs benefit pupils learning due to the parents,

pupil and professionals working in partnership to acknowledge how best to implement the IL approach to support all areas of the pupils learning. This supports the pupils to become self-aware and familiar with their learning and environment, eliminating any worries the pupils may have due to acknowledging the pupils needs and interests and encouraging the feelings of valued, appreciated and included from the start through the development of early OPPs (Hardy, 2018).

In today's education, it can be difficult to ensure each pupil in the classroom is heard and that their individual needs are met (Erwin and Sanderson, 2016). If professionals cannot focus on each pupil as an individual, practitioners cannot meet their needs. If practitioners cannot meet their needs, they are not learning effectively (Sanderson, 2012). OPPs are beneficial, ever-changing documents that are edited annually to suit to the pupils' views, needs and interests (Pembrokeshire County Council, 2021).

To conclude, effective IL within the practice is key to effective inclusive provision for every individual with personal factors. It is evident that the first protocol to inclusion and diversity is to form positive relationships with the pupil and family and to get to know the individuals fully to implement inclusive support. Schools' ethos is to ensure each individual feels valued, recognised, and supported. This continues to clarify the importance of OPPs to ensure the pupil's voice and beliefs are heard and understood clearly. However, to be successful and eliminate barriers, practitioners must work with the pupil, parents, and professionals to develop an accurate OPP to promote the pupil's development and well-being throughout their educational years.

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