

Section 1.

This assignment will examine what is meant by the term ‘inclusive leadership’ and why it is important within early years settings. Exploring the challenges and opportunities an inclusive leader will encounter and in turn, the impact it has on the children and parents of the setting as well as the wider community.

According to Siraj–Blatchford and Hallet (2014) hierarchical leadership where a single person has the authority to lead is changing, and in its place, a more collaborative, relational and interdependent style of leadership is emerging. Therefore, people today are working together to reach goals and complete tasks instead of it being the responsibility of one person. While Bortini *et al.* (2018) and Ferdman, Prime and Reggio (2021) states how an inclusive leadership style is breaking down barriers of equality and diversity instead celebrating everyone’s unique individual contributions. Furthermore, Bortini *et al.* (2018) go on to say, the purpose of inclusive leadership is to innovate change whilst at the same time considering the needs of everyone. Ferdman (2021) states inclusion is key to the outcomes of diverse groups. When diverse groups experience inclusion they feel valued and accepted to fully contribute to society being their authentic self. Historically, special education/ALN was the focus of inclusion in education and therefore inclusive leadership (Reza, 2021 and Bešić, 2020). However, the term inclusion now requires practitioners to tackle marginalisation, inequalities and exclusion that prohibit participation and access to learning. To ensure settings become inclusive Booyesen (2014) and Randel *et al.* (2018) point out settings need to work together respectfully that allows individuals to be fully involved and able to contribute towards the shared common goals whilst also facilitating belongingness, encourages uniqueness and diverse contributions and ensures equity and justice. Furthermore, Childhood Education International (2021) and Bourke and Titus (2020) state building an inclusive setting requires practitioners to become role models. Demonstrating an open mindset of different cultures and needs of others without prejudice and instead showing curiosity and empathy, while focusing on empowering others and team cohesion. In addition, Bortini *et al.* (2018) suggests inclusive leadership goes further than the setting and its users to positively impacting the eco system therefore creating sustainable changes in the community and beyond.

The following scenario was witnessed by a practitioner who then used the inclusive leadership style to create an environment whereby everyone is and feels welcome, respected, valued and an important member of the early years setting (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). A refugee

family have joined a predominately white nursery halfway through the year. The girl, Uzma has settled well and seems happy, but has no English therefore, finding communicating with her peers a challenge. Uzma's dad has limited English while mum only speaks Arabic. They stand alone and are quick to leave during drop off and pickup times and do not interact with members of staff. The practitioner has also noticed some hostility by the other parents towards the family.

Freud (no date) and Education Endowment Foundation (2018) discuss the importance of how practitioners and parents play an important role in the success of a child academic achievements, and when parents and practitioners work together the child's outcome is far greater. Parental involvement not only contributes to children's academic achievements but also their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and overall wellbeing when parents and practitioners work closely together (Ntekane, 2018; Hakyemez-Paul, Pihlaja and Silvennoinen, 2018 and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), 2016). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) children are influenced by their interactions with their close and wider surroundings. Meaning when healthy relationships form around the child such as parent and teacher collaboration the greater the positive impact on the child (MacBlain, 2018). For that reason, it is important that an inclusive practitioner communicates effectively with the parents to support and develop a strong relationship with the setting that in turn will support the child's learning and wellbeing (Sheridan, 2016).

However, Hornby and Blackwell (2018) say there is a declining uptake of parental involvement and collaboration within settings. Suggesting parents' opinions, views, and ethnicity are some of the factors attributed to the decline. Evans *et al.* (2016) reported that practitioners often make false assumptions regarding the lack of parental engagement. While Rodriguez-Brown (2009) states that linguistic minority parents hold practitioners and the education system in high regard, however, they can sometimes feel concern over their own level of education. Furthermore, Evans *et al.* (2016) research also found linguistic minority parents encountered a number of challenges that prevented them in support their child particularly if they had limited English or were new to the U.K. Challenges such as lack of information and understanding of the system and their child's learning.

Despite this Randel *et al.* (2018) and Korkmaz *et al.* (2022) indicate that an inclusive leader will use their influence to encourage parental involvement and collaboration that will enable parents to feel a sense of belonging. The Welsh Government (2017) say the purpose of

parenting support should be adaptive to meet the requirements of individual needs and circumstances. Therefore, support could be provided through informal one-to-one or group sessions or targeted programme. Wood (2022), Iruka, Cabrera and Páez (2022) suggest coffee mornings, stay and play sessions, parents' evenings and workshops are examples of how to effectively engage parents. Capture (no date) state how coffee mornings and stay and play sessions can be an informal opportunity for parents to meet other parents and staff in a relax environment. Not only are they good for networking but a way to start a dialogue between the home and nursery. However, Cheung and Kam (2019) discuss that some practitioners find communicating with parents difficult especially parents from minority groups due to practitioners lacking the confidence to do so.

Packman (2022) suggests how suitable parental engagement training and ongoing continuous professional development can help practitioner to overcome their lack of confidence. Furthermore, Graham-Clay (no date) points out how cultural differences can be a challenge; therefore, it is important that practitioners understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of their children and their families.

Additionally, in addressing the hostility shown by the other parents, Show Racism the Red Card (2020) claim almost three quarters of practitioners have not received any form of training regarding racism and say practitioners feel challenged by parents who hold prejudiced attitudes. Training from Show Racism the Red Card (no date) can help empower practitioners with the confidence to tackle racist attitudes. Thus, supporting the Welsh Government (2022) newly released plan to create a 'zero tolerance of racism' in Wales by 2030. The plan discusses the need for change and how people in influencing positions can make a difference. According to Ferdman, Prime and Reggio (2021), an inclusive practitioner requires the skills and attitude to notice, engage and deal with diversity. It requires them to change the negative mindset of people in order to close the gap, moving forward in a way that focuses on the value of diversity and creating positive mindsets.

For that reason, it is important to ensure all practitioners are adequately trained to support practitioners to deliver an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome and valued and prevents exclusion (Ferdman, 2014; Bortini *et al.* 2016). Estyn (2020) believe training helps develop mutual respect and effective communication between practitioners and parents strengthening collaborative work and support.

Early Years Alliance (no date) suggests signposting the family to additional support services within the area such as community groups, English classes, family learning groups and the local Hub centres are ways in which a practitioner can help the family to settle. This is supported by NALDIC (2022) who say signposting families to other services supports the family's integration into the local community. Organisations such as Welsh Refugee Council (2022) can help families improve their language skills, help them access benefits, jobs and other support needed to ensure the families can contribute fully to society.

Article 22 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Unicef, no date) states a child even if they are a refugee has the same rights as any other child in the country. Teaching Assistant (no date), Zwane and Malale, (2018) and Yuan (2017) say practitioners need the right skills and training in inclusion and diversity, where training is not provided this can cause disparity toward minority and disadvantage children. Practitioners require specialist training to offer the linguistic, cultural, social, psychological and pedagogic support they will need (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2019; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016; Shields, 2010). In addition, children will need the correct educational resources together with the support of different agencies to help them to benefit from their education (DeMatthews, Edwards & Rincones, 2016).

However, The Early Years Foundation Stage Team (2011) suggest not all refugee children will need specialist intervention and practitioners should not make any stereotypical judgements. They state that in most cases, the child will need access to a quality early years provision that will allow them to experience consistency, safety, interaction with peers and welcoming and kind adults who provide meaningful play experiences.

According to Clarke (2015) and Early Years Careers (2016) play provides the vehicle for children's cultural and language learning. Through play experiences children with English as an additional language should be encouraged to communicate verbally and non-verbally if they do not have the confidence to respond back. An inclusive leader will provide stimulating play opportunities to allow for second language acquisition. Through play a practitioner can model language, providing them with the words they need within the context of their play (Herefordshire Council, no date; Oxfordshire Council, 2017). Practitioners playing alongside and modelling language will help scaffold the child's learning and understanding of language (First Discoverers, 2022). Scaffolding is a key element of Vygotsky's (1978) theory zone of

proximal development, where children will have the support of a more knowledgeable other to reach their learning outcomes (Khaliliaqdam (2014); Bodrova and Leong (2015); Kurt, 2020).

However, according to Trzebiatowski (2020), Cummins (2017) and Oxfordshire Council (2017) it is important to encourage parents in continuing the first language of the child at home as this can increase the speed of learning process of a second language. In addition, Nord Anglia Education (2022) states, continuing the child's first language helps the brain to become more flexible enabling them to retain and access information in both languages, simultaneously using both sides of their brain. Kreps (2019) supports this and also states being bilingual helps to develop recall, attention, creativity and problem-solving skills while contributing to long term success. Moreover, Fisk (2019) and Language Kids World (2022) suggests that maintaining a child's first language allows them to stay connected to their cultural heritage, wider family and community. It also allows for them to have a sense of self of who they are and where they came from. However, Harries (2018) points out how an inclusive practitioner will be aware of the cultural differences that may affect how some children will react. An example of this is personal space and lack of eye contact from the child is a sign of respect in the Muslim culture.

According to Warsi (2017), refugee families have rich cultural experiences that early year's settings can learn from and states there are many ways in which a setting can welcome a refugee family. An inclusive leader would invite parents into the setting to share their cultures traditions. An example of this could be discussing their celebrations, clothing, folktales, Music and food. Celebrating different cultures in the setting ensures families do not feel isolated (Warsi, 2017). An inclusive practitioner will celebrate diversity and Miller (2019) states talking and representing different ethnicities in a setting allows children to become curious and ask questions. In environments where diversity is less, conversations are reduced and restricted and can result in allowing prejudice views to form. Diversity should be visible at all times in early years settings as Mirza (2022), Fisk (2019) and Entrust Ed (2020) claim that children's exposure to diversity can be tokenistic due to practitioners planning cultural activities around festivals instead of promoting and embedding diversity into everyday practice. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2019) and Hidalgo (2022) agree, and state education systems need an anti-bias curriculum whereby children can develop a sense of identity, fairness and justice while understanding simultaneously they are the same and different allowing them to think about the world in which they live.

Intersectionality is important when considering different cultures and diversity according to The Black Nursery Manger (2019). Intersectionality is the way in which inequalities such as ethnicity, gender, race, socio-economic background, sexuality, age and other types of discrimination come together to influence and effect a person's everyday life (Vollans, 2020 and Center for Intersectional Justice, no date). A practitioner should consider the theory of intersectionality in order to apply their role as an inclusive leader that will provide equal and inclusive opportunities for the children and their families within the setting (Bešić, 2020).

According to Preemative Love (2022) experiencing other cultures through music, food and celebrations can generate a society of cultural appreciation. An inclusive leader will have cultural appreciation that inspires, reduces stereotypes and unites communities. Furthermore, Hallett (2016) claims that an inclusive leader will take into consideration the children, parents as well as their wider family's cultural heritage, not facilitating such practice hinders a child's learning.

To conclude, an inclusive practitioner needs to be knowledgeable of the families to ensure that they feel valued and a sense of belonging within the setting and the wider community. An inclusive leader will challenge prejudice attitudes and stereotyping to innovate change to create an environment where everyone is respected and welcomed. To ensure practitioners are inclusive they will need relevant and adequate training through continuous professional development opportunities that will empower them to celebrate diversity within their setting and in doing so will educate the next generation.

Section 2

This section will critically evaluate if policies and professional guidance enables inclusive leadership in early years provisions, focusing on the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2022a).

Policy is described by Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) as a detailed intention adopted by practitioners with responsibility that government or organisations have indicated as a course of actions within certain situations. Policies are fundamental in education as they underpin practice and procedures, while maintaining standards of consistency, fairness and accountability (Ulla, 2018 and Vishwaroop, 2022). Typical features of a policy will include – belongingness, commitment, status and specificity (Levin 1999 as cited in Baldock, Fitzgerald

and Kay 2013 p.2). As discussed by Ferdman (2021) policy making is divided into two categories, the macro and micro level. Macro policies come from government, legislation or international level, while micro policies are created by settings or organisations. Furthermore, Ferdman (2021) states both macro and micro level are interlinked and influence each other, that in turn guides the practice of inclusion. However, according to Veinnet and Pont (2017) macro level policy makers fail to take into account the difficulty in implementing policies within settings and therefore should be consulted regarding the implementation process. Nevertheless, all policy making in Wales are underpinned by the United Nation Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) (Welsh Government, 2022b).

Within Wales the ‘co-construction’ is quickly becoming a key word in education (Roberts-Ablett, 2022). The curriculum was designed through a co-construction approach designed by practitioners for practitioners drawing on the opinions of experts in the field of child development (Welsh Government, 2022). The Office of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) commended Wales’ dedication to the co-construction approach working with key stakeholders in laying a solid foundation for the curriculum to succeed, as opposed to past approaches to policy making in Wales using a top-down method (OECD, 2014). Furthermore, stakeholders’ participation promotes ownership of the visions and values, while trusting the process, key elements of design, implementation and long-term success (Viennet and Pond, 2017). The reform will renew Wales’ dedication in building an inclusive education system, build around the four purposes with room for practitioners to develop learning experiences meeting the specific needs of their learners (Welsh Government, 2020 and Knight and Crick, 2021).

However, although dedication is expressed by macro level policies in regard to inclusion, practitioners’ mindsets are a key factor in implementing inclusive practice (Knight *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, a report by OECD (2014) suggested strategies in teaching diversity were underdeveloped, whilst Estyn (2018) identified practitioners understanding of learners’ diverse needs were an area that needed improvement. Participation in continuous professional development, time, expense and effective and relevant continuous professional development are some of the barriers highlighted by Millam (2019) thus impacting on the practice of inclusion.

The pedagogical framework centres around the needs of the child through the developmental pathways that include belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and

wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2022a). Within the belonging pathway it is important to consider the requirements such as ‘I need to see myself and people like me represented in my setting (Welsh Government, 2022a p.28). The Black Nursery Manager (2019) points out the importance of a diverse workforce in early years setting in reflecting the multi diverse society we live in. Furthermore, she states the need for children to see diverse groups working together who look and speak differently, have different religions, abilities and gender identities sharing commonalities that are self-assured and unashamed of their differences, so culturally diverse children do not feel excluded (The Black Nursery Manager, 2019). Hutchinson (2017) agrees and states for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children to feel included and an integral part of society they should see themselves represented within early years settings. Despite the fact the Welsh Government (2021a) stresses the importance of educating children about their own culture and that of others. In Wales it is reported that there is a shortage of BAME practitioners due to lack of representation in education (BBC news, 2021). According to a report conducted by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) (2021), only 1.3% of practitioners recorded their ethnicity as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic in comparison to 91.6% of white practitioner.

Furthermore, With Insight Education (2020) suggests the reason behind the lack of representation is due to universities failing to attract and market themselves to BAME students. To address the problem, Williams (2021) recommends that the Welsh Government must offer specific scholarships to encourage the uptake of initial teacher education for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Therefore, enabling an inclusive environment whereby all children feel valued and have a sense of belonging that also facilitates inclusive leadership (Dallimore, 2019 and British Council, 2010).

The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2022 p28) also states how the environment should ‘provide familiar resources that reflect my cultures and communities’. Gostelow (2018), Lindon (2012) and Gocłowska, Damain and Mor (2018) support this and suggests books, dressing up clothes, toys and a language rich environment are ways in which practitioner can turn their setting into an inclusive environment that supports the diversity of all children in the setting. Furthermore, Entrust Education (2020) points out how cultural resources must be age appropriate to ensure they are meaningful and positive for children to recognise and understand people, families and the communities outside their immediate experiences.

To conclude, there are many ways the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursey Settings policy enable inclusive practice, through recognising and promoting diversity is an important factor in facilitating belongingness. However, there are areas of improvement such as increasing the number of BAME practitioner in education to ensure representation of the different cultures in Wales.

Section 3

English as an additional language (EAL), inclusion and Loris Malaguzzi's 1000 languages

According to Stats Wales the number of children new to English, have early acquisition or developing competency is English within education in Wales is 22,145 (Welsh Government, 2021b). Meaning a large proportion of children in Wales require EAL support therefore, asking the question of how practitioners can support EAL children whilst being inclusive.

Loris Malaguzzi was an educator who had strong links with the Reggio Emilia approach towards early childhood education. Malaguzzi a practitioner himself was influential in establishing an approach to education which is constructed on mutual respect between pupil and practitioner, in addition, creating a learning environment in which represents relationships of equality and justice instead of power where the practitioner is the dominant one who hold all the power (Reggio Emilia Approach, 2022 and Oxford University Press, 2022). Malaguzzi's educational ideas were inspire by a wide range of psychologists, educationalists, philosophers and artists, including key theorists such as Vygotsky, Erikson, Piaget, Dewey and Bruner (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Malaguzzi's Hundred Languages of Children approach is considered as a means to help encourage children explore their environment in various ways using their languages that include communicative, symbolic, imaginative and expressive skills (Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G., 2012). However, implementation of the Hundred Languages of Children approach requires practitioners that acknowledge the importance of communication for children to understand people and the world in which they live through various methods and techniques (Hall, 2013).

The Hundred Languages of Children approach views children as unique individuals who can communicate irrespective of their language, language can be expressed through role play, arts, painting, writing and drawing (Reggio Emilia, no date) thus allowing the inclusion of all children. Play stimulates curiosity and meaningful experiences for all children through which

children that are new to English are encouraged to communicate verbally and non -verbally, practice repetition and start the process of merging new words together (Herefordshire Council, no date and Clarke, 2015).

As stated earlier the expressive arts are another way in which EAL children can express themselves without the use of language through the exploration of art, painting, dance, music and drawing (Welsh Government, 2020b). It provides a natural way for them to communicate their thoughts, feelings and ideas they find difficult to put into words (Wheat institute, no date). Anderson (2017) supports this and states for children to be given the time to express themselves through kinaesthetic, sensory or visual activities it affords a child many ways in which they can connect the concept of language. Therefore, supporting Malaguzzi's Hundred Languages of Children and inclusion within the setting.

Furthermore, when EAL children are given the space to express themselves freely, the easier it will become for them to start using English. Children do not need to be verbal in order to communicate as play alongside peers or adults offers a starting point in which to build language on (Flatman, 2016).

To conclude, it is evident that Wales is a culturally diverse country with numerous languages being spoken. However early year's settings are in a good position to promote inclusion of EAL children in a variety of different ways using Malaguzzi's Hundred Languages of Children theory. Through the exploration of role play, expressive art such as painting, dance and music children can develop second language acquisition.

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