

Inclusive leadership

Section 1 - What is Inclusive Leadership?

“Responsible leadership is a relational and ethical phenomenon which occurs in social processes of interaction with those who affect or are affected by leadership and have a stake in the purpose and vision of the leadership”

Booyesen (2020)

Booyesen (2020) suggests inclusive leadership is based on relational leadership. Booyesen asserts the responsibility of each individual as a collective is the key to good relational leadership, meaning it is a shared responsibility of everyone involved in the system. Everyone should have an understanding of the vision, appreciate the rules support procedures in the process (Booyesen (2020). Similarly, Rodd, (2013) states inclusive leadership is the demonstration of reciprocal relationships between the leader and others. A good leader will have commitment to equality and appreciation of diversity through recognising all individual needs. Greenleaf (2003) cited in Hallet (2014) highlights a similar concept that ‘true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a desire to help other’. The early years settings present a culture created by practitioners, children, families and others. Hallet (2016) asserts the importance of practices established within the classroom following curriculum, and ensuring the best interest of the child is the forefront of their developmental learning, this aligns with the UNCRC article 3 prioritising the best interest of the child (UNICEF, no date). To what Hallet (2016) claims is essential for children to feel a sense of belonging and valued within the setting and towards the staff, which meets a key aspect of children’s basic needs and supporting Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs of the child needing to be met in order for them to meet their maximum potential (Yahaya, 2014). Additionally, inclusive leaders will deliver provisions to support the needs of each child, targeting all areas of development including academic achievement and social maturity with the aim

that all children are given equal opportunity to reach their full potential (Hallet, 2016 and Yahaya, 2014).

Whilst the current curriculum for Wales is evolving and moving towards more support for children and practitioners to develop in an inclusive manner, there are barriers that practitioners face today. Ferdman (2017) states working towards inclusion with diverse societies and people of various individualities is an inclusive process and practice that may exceed boundaries and comfort for all involved, resulting in challenges to overcome. Similarly, the work of Knippenberg, Nishii and Dwermann (2020) draw on recent studies that view diversity and inclusion as a fundamental aspect of the workforce today. As stated, society today has become more increasingly distinct with more people disclosing their LGBTQ status and disabilities. Furthermore, Knippenberg suggests that organisations need better practices to improve the possibility of achieving collaboration in diversity and maintaining an equivalent and non-discriminatory workforce (Knippenberg, Nishii and Dwermann, 2020). Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) define intersectionality as the interconnected nature of social categorisation such as gender, social class, different backgrounds and race. Emphasising on the importance of intersectionality, and how it is emerging today since being coined in the late 1980's. Similarly, Coaston (2019) states there is a large issue of discrimination towards people from different background, specifically that of white woman and black woman, for example.

Scenario

I will be reflecting on a scenario based upon a single mother with two young children. One son is seven years old and is currently in remission from rhabdomyosarcoma, he also has a speech disorder and struggles with nutrition and also in the process of an autism diagnosis, he often misses school days due to his health. The second son is five years old, has been diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) and is in the process of an epilepsy diagnosis. The mother is a single parent who has low mental health struggling with depression and high anxiety. She appears to be nervous

around the teachers and other parents, and is sometimes difficult to communicate with. The family are supported by the grandmother and grandfather who pick the children up from school once a week and are fully involved in the care of the children.

Children, Family, Professionals and Community

According to Mental Health Foundation (2022) '75% of children and young people who experience a mental health problem aren't getting the help they need'. In the case of the older child, he has been through a highly traumatic event in his life, which can trigger mental health problem, and is showing clear signs of struggle with his well-being and vulnerability. In this scenario, the child has been refraining from social activities and is withdrawn displaying feelings of isolation, it appears that inclusive leadership is not being applied effectively. Bortini et al (2016) claims that in order to achieve inclusive leadership, all parties hold a 'power' that must share the same vision. Leaders must use their knowledge and skills to build strategy for implementation, and utilise necessary resources to support all equally in a 'problem solving' manner. Moreover, Bortini asserts the importance of taking action of managing the execution of goals to reach results, whilst considering the risk of exclusion within the team (Bortini et al, 2016). Suggesting, the teacher should build the relationship between the child, all members of staff in the classroom and the child. Spending more time with the child, such as one-to-one sessions, will enhance their feelings of belonging and being listened to making them feel valued. Moreover, the teacher can create a plan of what the end goal is and where the child is now in their development and share these visions with the family and all professionals involved to ensure all have clear communications and not only that but will give the teacher more insight into what the child's interests and behaviours are. As it is the leader and their vision that leads, this will support everyone working together to achieve the end goal (Bortini et al, 2016).

During 2022 the Welsh Government launched professional learning resources for practitioners in the early years aligning with the Welsh Curriculum. The resources are designed to assist practitioner to create provisions in keeping with a holistic learning

and development (HWB, 2022). However, Siraj (2014) identified issues focusing on leadership which resulted in recommendations for improvement. One being the training of theory and practice of appropriate pedagogy availability to all practitioners in the early years. Whilst the teachers have a vision of what they want to achieve, they are not always supported by the school due to curriculum or financial issues (Siraj and Hallet, 2014). This barrier will not only hinder the opportunity to develop and move forward, but the child will become more isolated and more possibility of experiencing mental health problems (Mental Health Foundation, 2022). Furthermore, the mother and family will feel less supported by the school, creating greater feelings of anxiousness and discord which goes against the promotion of engagement and inclusion, which in turn is likely to lead to more difficulties (Rodd, 2013).

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (1989) cited in Murray (2019) states 'Children have the right to freedom of expression' and the 'right to be heard'. Murray asserts the importance of listening to children's voices as this can have an impact on their well-being and development. A significant issue that we face today is the understanding for listening to the children's 'voice' as it can be construed as all children share one point of view, whereas it is suggested that children's voice is to be recognised as children's feeling, thoughts, attitudes or preferences. Therefore, provisions can be developed by practitioners, to optimise each child's learning and development responsively to their interests and needs (Murray, 2019).

Additionally, Kourkoutas, Stavrou and Plecousakis (2018) states that 'disruptive behaviour and conduct problems among children have a significant effects' in school classrooms for all children, affecting the quality of interactions with teachers and consequently teachers face great difficulties that results in inadequate support for children and their learning. Considering this statement in regards to the younger boy who has a diagnosis of ADHD, this will impact his learning. The Donaldson report (2015) considers all children as individuals with unique personalities, talents and interests which characterises them. The Curriculum for Wales (2020) and Donaldson report (2015) values this as we shift from 7 areas of development into a more holistic

approach to children's learning and development, promoting open-ended opportunities and free exploration. However, the work of Kourkoutas, Stavrou and Plecousakis (2018) suggests that children with conduct and risk problems in schools have not learned alternative ways to deal with interpersonal challenges that inflict strong emotional and negative reactions to situations, which in turn creates negative reactions from their peers and frustration for their teachers. Moreover, children with ADHD difficulties can be labelled as the 'problem child' which stimulates feelings of being not good and problematic for the child, putting up barriers for the 'child's voice' being heard and devalues their opinion when they are using their voice to communicate their feelings, emotions or opinions (Kourkoutas, Stavrou and Plecousakis (2018). The research of Nicholls et al (2018) suggests there is a correlation of children with intellectual disabilities and significant association with challenging behaviour in schools. There are communication struggles for teachers that have children with behavioural and social difficulties. However, there is a requirement of the teacher to be patient, encouraging and empathetic when working with the children and hear their voice, in order to achieve inclusive leadership (Murray, 2019).

The mother in this scenario is not only struggling with her own mental health, but is also carrying the sole responsibility of raising her two young children that are subject to mental health and ongoing remission that require constant attention and medical care. Social care Wales (2020) claims that good understanding of parent's desire of the best for their children must be favourable by services and practitioners. However, parents are often preconceptionally judged as irresponsible and inadequate by practitioners if there is a lack of communication (Cottle and Alexander, 2014). In this scenario this is not the case, the mother shows up daily and is eager to speak with the teachers to discuss updates on the children's behaviours, learning, nutrition and social interactions with peers.

“A range of different services which have some overlapping or shared interests and objectives, brought together to work collaboratively towards some common purpose.”

(Wigfall and Moss, 2001, cited in Martin, 2017)

According to Watkins (2021) there is facility for schools to provide families with support through multi-agency work by making referrals to organisations specific to the family's needs and collaboration in working partnerships. At this time in the scenario, multiagency collaboration is present as a multiagency conference was called within the school where the mother and grandmother attended. The result of this was to that the eldest child was to receive further support with their daily learning with a one-to-one supporting assistant, ongoing recordings of their progression in development and learning and speech and language therapy. This aligns with the recommendations of Volkmar (2014) that states the importance of early intervention and the implementation of innovative approaches such as performance-based methods for young people. Moreover, a health visitor will be working with the family to discuss all health relating matters and concerns, in order to support and implement an action plan moving forward. This promotes inclusive leadership as staff and practitioners will gain shared respect for the family, facilitating consistency in communication between the family, school and multiagency professionals with the intention of removing challenges and barriers with the children's best interest at forefront (Estyn, 2020).

Nicholson *et al* (2018) reviews many challenging factors that obstruct the collaborations between the professional groups and agencies. One being 'the sheer complexity of the social problems that practitioners may encounter'. Aubrey defines these as what is real, and what is being perceived, while Aubrey has focus on what the practitioner perceives, what the family are experiencing may be different to what is 'real', for example if there are long periods of time between meetings or actions, this may viewed as 'nothing being done'. This is why clear and often communication between all agencies, professionals and families is important (Aubrey, 2011 cited in Nicholson *et al* (2018)).

Considering the eldest child is over five years, according to NHS (2019) the referral for an autism diagnosis must be processed by their doctor. The waiting list for this can take up to six months for the child's first appointment (The Guardian, 2022). This goes against the work of Volkmar (2014) that asserts that it is evidential that when early identification and developmentally informed treatment is applied, intervention will lessen autism symptomatology and have significant impact on developmental gains. In this case, the inclusive leadership is challenged as six months of a child at the age of seven is imperative (Donaldson, 2015).

As the children require full care by their mother, this puts her in a position where she is not able to work and so the family receive beneficial finances. Manstead (2018) argues that the conditions in which people live in influences the way that they think and feel about their personal and social identities, resulting in a lower sense of personal control. However, the studies on Manstead (2018) shows measures of higher empathy and likelihood to help others in distress, meanwhile, those of higher education prompt prejudgment towards these groups therefore carry an economic threat. As practitioners we need to break these barriers by promoting inclusive leadership and support for the family, by overseeing these preconceptions and demonstrating equality and commitment (Rodd, 2013).

Section 2 – Legislations and Policies in Wales

This section with critically evaluate Policy and it looks like for Practitioners working in Early Years settings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020).

What is policy and why is it important?

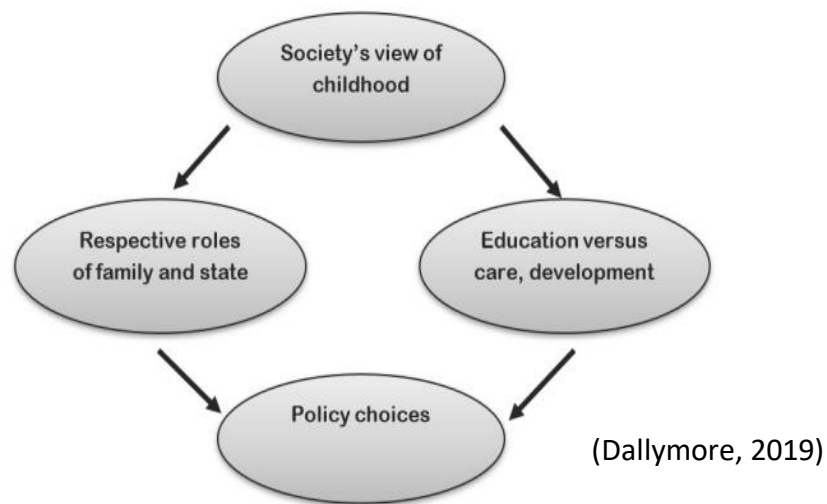
Baldock et al (2013) states policy as an intentional action taken by those with responsibility, an indication on a course of action and an organisational and administrative practice and claims the four common elements of policy as belongingness (organisation), commitment, status (of policy within the organisation) and

specificity (behaviours and issues). Similarly, Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez (2018) discusses the commitment from leadership to foster inclusion that influences the organisations decisions and performance. Moreover, the role of senior leadership and the necessity of training their practitioners and managers to develop skills of best practices that supports behaviours that are critical to enhance inclusion, providing organisations with boundaries and rules that are foundation for respect and inclusivity. Hallet (2014) states policy is the efforts of employees of an organization to think and perform in a coherent manner in committed towards shared outcomes. Furthermore, the importance of the collaborations and cooperation of the professional groups working in the early years, there are also expectations assigned to practitioners that encourages the coordinating an intergraded practice and inclusion (Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez, 2018 and Hallet, 2014). Additionally, the policies in an early year's setting can differ depending on the set policy level. These are divided into two levels, one of macro level and the other micro level (Ferdman, 2021).

The guidance of new curriculum for Wales aims to support educational settings in Wales to develop an understanding of the curriculum framework, and to have ambition for every child, as a starting point when producing their own curriculum (Welsh Government, 2020). The curriculum guidelines encourage practitioners to have a more integrated approach to children's learning so all learners are having equal opportunity to learn, aligning with article 28 of the UNCRC that every child has a right to education (UNICEF, no date). Secondly, assessment and progressions of learners are the fundamental to the settings curriculum. As stated in (Davies and Hamilton, 2018) the Consultation document (department for education and skills, 2014) expressed concerns in the Foundation Phase, and that some assessment arrangements had conflicting philosophy. Donaldson (2015) reviewed these concerns and implemented a more inclusive approach towards every child's learning for leaders. New curriculum for Wales (2020) consequently supports practitioners in creating appropriate progression phases for their learners, in turn, will construct opportunities for each child and their individual needs to create the best possible outcome. (Welsh Government, 2020).

According to the Welsh Government (2020) The new curriculum encourages Early years settings to demonstrate inclusive leadership across all areas of their settings, from practitioners, to learners, to general staff and families. The Welsh policy guidance (2020) intends to recognise and celebrate people from all backgrounds, for example, people of different ethnicities, diverse cultures and people that have physical or mental disabilities. The purpose of this particular guidance is to promote equality with an increase of interconnecting of the world in order to create ethical informed citizens (Welsh Government, 2020 and Donaldson, 2015). Welsh Government (2021) state that a demonstration of inclusivity and diversity is valued through environments in the settings, depending on the quality of the interactions we have and the experiences our learners have by the environments we create. They created the five developmental pathways; belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being. (Welsh Government, 2021).

Baldock et al (2013) states policy is adopted by those in power and inspires the way in which practitioners work and behave. However, there are significance effects on the understanding of each policy is by the practitioners and the way they are implemented within the organisation (Baldock et al, 2013 and Dallimore, 2019). The development of promotional policy is fundamental for inclusivity, inclusive leaders may interconnect learners, their families and the community during everyday activities, the aim is to achieve a more inclusive setting by considering various cultural values and individuality of everyone (Welsh Government, 2020).



The diagram above shows underlying determinants of Early Childhood Education and Care in Wales policy (Dallimore, 2019).

The challenge that policy faces today is the specific wording that they use within each policy, and that it may be interpreted or read in various ways depending on the setting, the community in which the setting is situated and whether the policy has value and to what extent. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) act (WCVA) (2015) discusses the collaborative difficulties that organisations and authorities face when working together to develop projects. The structure of the organisation and personal relationships may influence decisions made in a negative way, cultural mismatches, power differentials or lack of agreed shared positions and visions. The Act recognises that decisions they make will have impact on people living in Wales in the future, and therefore, it is the organisations leader that will essentially finalise decisions with the guidance of the WCVA that created five ways of working: thinking for the long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement (WCVA, 2015).

Doucet (2021) states there is a gap between education policy and practice that prevents progression in education, and asserts the importance of practitioners and education policy makers gaining an understanding of what it is like to be in schools or settings before creating policies or guidelines. The vocabulary and understanding to which policy

administrators, leaders, parents, learners and community speak is not the same, Doucet (2021) claims that community and educators are 'speaking *at* each other, not *with* each other'.

"The person must – in so far reasonably practicable, ascertain and have regard to the individual's views, wishes and feelings,"

(Social Services and Well-being (wales) Act, 2014, Section 6 (2) (a))

According to Gov (2021) 'so far reasonably practicable involves weighing the risk against the trouble, time and money needed to control it'. But who is the one to make that judgment? How does their judgment differ from others? For example, there is a child within a classroom and they are demanding they would rather do something other than the activity planned, however, this will have an immediate effect on the other children in the classroom and their learning. Do we give the child what they want as it is their wish, or do we consider all the other learner's feelings in the classroom.

The policy aligns with article 12 of the UNCRC (date) that states 'every child has the right to express their view, feelings and wishes' but that would only be the case for either the one child, or for the rest of the children in the classroom.

Murray (2019) asserts the importance of hearing children's voices and making every child feel included by practitioners to ensure inclusivity. This supports practitioners with opportunities to develop a rapport with each child as individuals. However, Murray (2019) identifies practitioners often feel pressurised to meet targets and complete tasks which takes time, this take away from them having open opportunities to speak patiently with the children and for them to be fully heard.

In conclusion, the new curriculum for Wales (2020) and Donaldson (2015) has a range of opportunity for inclusivity within educations settings and their practice that supports inclusive leaders in the early years. However, this is considering that the policy guidelines are followed by practitioners as they are intended by the curriculum in Wales.

As evidentially, policies are not always consistently straight forward in their language which can be seen as a barrier for inclusive leadership.

Section 3 – How can Early Years Practitioners display inclusive practice?

In this section I will be discussing in what way practitioners within early years settings can promote inclusivity for all children, families and staff. As Rodd (2013) states inclusive leadership is a fundamental element of collaboration, co-production and partnership that breaks down barriers of diversity that supports equality within the environment, and therefore, creates a sense of belonging for everyone

The work of Murray (2019) discusses the topic of the children's 'voice' and the importance of this when children are communicating with their teachers or peers. Evidentially, when children are listened to and when their thoughts and feelings are valued it promotes feelings of belonging in the environment, and above belonging is one of the key aspects of promoting inclusive leadership. This aligns with article 13 of the UNCRC that states children have the freedom to express their thoughts and opinions (UNICEF, no date). It is the responsibility of the practitioner to be patient when children are speaking, and to be engaged in meaningful conversations with them, and this can be done in various ways, for example, allowing them to finish their sentences without interruption, the use of body language and looking the children in the eyes and also responding with questions (AvanceNational, 2013). This encourages positive adult and child interactions between practitioner and learner supporting inclusivity.

According to Welsh Government (2019) in schools today, 12% of the children from the age range of five in schools come from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, there is variation within the regions, while in the Anglesey schools there is 4.1%, within the schools in Cardiff there are 34.4% of children that are black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME).

These statistics show that there is cause for concern, and as a practitioner myself, I have not had informative preparation in order to work with children from this background. Similarly, in Wales there is no educational training or workshop

opportunities for professional practitioners to become knowledgeable, specifically to the daily needs of these children which means their basic needs may not be met, and considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs, cited in (Yahaya, 2014), therefore disrupts these children's ability to progress to their full potential. Welsh Government (2019) states the stakeholders are currently working on addressing the issues regarding ethnic diversity in schools, consequently, it is the responsibility of the practitioners and leaders to include inclusivity by educating themselves if they were to have BAME children in their class. Ferdman (2017) asserts the success of communicating with the children and families in order to gain knowledge of their cultural needs and requirements. This means practitioners will have specific guidance of those individual children and in turn, enhance inclusive leadership within the setting, furthermore, produce opportunities for those children to develop to their maximal potential.

The Donaldson (2015) report and new curriculum for Wales (2020) supports inclusive leadership within the guidelines. However, there are flaws in the interpretation of the guidance depending on many elements, such as, the practitioners, the setting and how it is run, the communal area in which the setting is situated and the children and families, and their needs. Wales is evolving; however, the responsibility of daily inclusivity relies on the practitioners that work face to face with the children and their families in collaboration with all multiagency. It is important for practitioners to be sensitive towards families that may suffer with health issues and do all we can to make them feel welcome. Inclusive leadership is imperative as it enhances feelings of belonging for the children and their families, thus, enhancing their emotional wellbeing.

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