

According to Ferdman (2017); Randel *et al.* (2018) inclusive leadership is a collection of constructive behaviours that help people feel they belong in the workplace while preserving their individuality as they actively participate in its procedures and results. According to Douglass (2019) leaders that demonstrate pro-diversity attitudes, humility, and cognitive complexity are thought to be more likely to display inclusive leadership practices. One important aspect of maintaining and improving quality in the early years is leadership.

Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio (2020) have emphasised that inclusive leadership requires a mentality and the capacity to identify, engage with, and create solutions for all aspects of diversity. Workman-Stark (2019) and Gerritsen (2020) have also noted that inclusive leadership is a relational and interactive responsibility that seeks to involve every individual in the early years. Teams under the direction of inclusive leaders tend to perform better in areas where other leadership philosophies fall short. Because there are benefits for both parties involved, the concept of working with employees rather than for them is the cause.

Additionally, leaders that take steps to recognise and value the contributions of others are exhibiting inclusive leadership. This is supported by Nishii and Leroy (2022) who states that inclusive leadership is about the leader's ability to listen to their needs and make people feel as though they are a priority. However, even though inclusive leadership is often characterised as being straightforward to attain, there is limited understanding of the barriers and facilitators that managers encounter when attempting to achieve it. Some of the well-studied barriers associated with inclusive leadership include manager's lack of commitment to diversity and inclusion, organisational procedures and policies, including work schedules, conventional career pathways, and promotion procedures (Gerritsen, 2020).

Moreso, by fostering an inclusive atmosphere inclusive leadership may empower team members to collaborate effectively. This is supported by Jin, Lee, and Lee's (2017) observation that earlier research on diversity practices has failed to acknowledge the contributions of people who engage in these acts (Gerritsen, 2020; Jin, Lee and Lee, 2017). However, bias and time restraints are some potential barriers to inclusive leadership that we should be aware of. As mentioned by Marmerchant (2023) time constraints may have significant impacts on a leader's capacity to guide their team. Effective inclusive leadership is frequently hindered by some of these key problems (Gerritsen, 2020).

Moreover, inclusive leadership requires a change of mindsets, behaviours, and collective practices, and values to fully engage and mutually benefit from our many differences. According to Ferdman (2017) inclusive leadership promotes a sense of community and values individuality. Early leadership has been shown to have a substantial impact on children's social, health, and educational results. With this, developing excellent care and leadership is an important aspect of providing early childhood and family services (Klevering and McNae, 2019; Siraj and Hallet, 2014).

Óskarsdóttir, Donnelly, and Turner-Cmucha (2019) have argued that the objectives of inclusive leadership, which tackles inequality, are community building and engagement. Establishing an inclusive culture that celebrates diversity, encourages collaboration amongst all involved, and ensures

that every child, particularly the most vulnerable ones, receives excellent support and education. However, as stated by Klevering and McNae (2019) in the early years the idea of developing and exhibiting strong leadership skills is still a big issue of discussion. The topic of leadership in the early years of education has lately started to get sustained and in-depth study, despite decades of extensive leadership research in educational contexts.

Scenario

A child has recently started attending a nursery setting and has been determined as having an additional learning need showing traits of autism spectrum disorder by the school's head psychiatrist and the additional learning needs co-coordinator (ALNCO). The early year's inclusion team report was discussed at a meeting with the child's family and the school ALNCO. However, the family is not happy with the outcome, and they have become very withdrawn and will not communicate with the school. Additionally, they are refusing to accept any form of support that may be provided for the child and the family including the child's individual development plan and they are refusing to engage with any parental engagement.

Children

It is generally known how important it is for young children to feel like they belong, but the right to belonging is not granted to every child. While belonging is perceived as a neutral process and frequently linked to healthy growth and well-being, it is highly politicised and frequently racialized (Souto-Manning *et al.* 2021). As noted by Murray (2019) children are entitled to the freedom of speech and the opportunity to be heard. This is also supported by the UNCRU article 12 every child has the right to voice their opinions, thoughts, and desires on any issue that affects them (UNICEF, 2019).

Additionally, in the early years, children need to be accepted, respected and listened to within a framework of rules and expectations to be able to learn (Hallet, 2016). As noted by Lacoé (2016); Porter *et al.* (2021) positive results for young children have been linked to a sense of belonging at school. Feeling protected and a member of the school are two essential components. Academic success, as well as emotional and physical health, are all associated with belonging. Furthermore, the most effective ways to boost school belonging are for inclusive leaders to build relationships with parents, encourage prosocial behaviour, and foster positive relationships between children and staff. Therefore, as noted by Allen (2022) parental involvement is also important for school belonging. Parents need to know how important it is for their children to feel like they belong in the school community.

Moreover, as mentioned by Childhood Education International (n.d) effective leaders in the early years take the time to talk and listen to everyone involved, children, parents and people of the community. Inclusive leaders are dedicated to fairness and giving every child access to excellent educational opportunities. As highlighted by Johansson and Puroila (2021); Slee (2019), all children should have a sense of belonging and should be treated equally and with respect, regardless of their

unique needs or backgrounds. Children can feel welcome and included in the community in educational settings, which offer a friendly and accepting atmosphere.

Furthermore, research by Guo and Dalli (2016); Johansson and Puroila (2021); Over (2016) show that children's feeling of belonging influences their overall well-being, development, and ability to take on new identities.

As noted by the Welsh Government (2023b), a child's sense of inclusion is determined by how much they feel that teachers care about them, that they pay attention to what they have to say, and that they take the time to get to know them. To boost children's involvement, schools must foster a welcoming and inclusive mindset and culture. It is pointed out by Elliot and Dweck (2017) children who have a sense of belonging exhibit higher levels of motivation inside the classroom and engage with others in ways that promote long-lasting development.

However, it is important to keep in mind that developing a sense of school belonging in children is a continuous process. Since each child is unique, the factors influencing their sense of belonging might change daily.

Early childhood environments require inclusive leaders who are capable of communicating to children the importance of feeling like they belong in the school and who can implement strategies that support them in doing so. A school belonging policy should also be taken into consideration (Allen, 2022).

However, inclusive leaders must be mindful of some of the possible difficulties, such as bullying, isolation as a form of discipline, and loneliness, which can have a detrimental impact on children's mental health and self-esteem in addition to reducing their sense of belonging (National Children's Bureau, 2024).

Families

As a result of the school inclusion team report the family is experiencing stigma and finding it challenging to engage with any parental engagement. Quality learning environments need strong relationships between early childhood service providers and families. Research regularly indicates that strong family involvement in their children's education leads to improved success levels as well as more positive attitudes and behaviours in the children (Rodd, 2013). As pointed out by Broady, Stoyles and Morse (2015) the quality of life for children and their families can be hugely impacted by stigma. The development of appropriate interventions to lessen parenting stress and empower parents of children with additional learning needs requires an understanding of what parents go through to help them access social support resources and provide coping mechanisms for stigmatisation.

Furthermore, the level of stigma that parents anticipate affects the social and emotional consequences for both them and their child (Broady, Stoyles and Morse, 2015). As mentioned by Veroni (2019) a major barrier to stigma is when a person's stigma keeps them from completely engaging in the social and economic life of the community, they may experience loss of status and other interconnected power imbalances that the family is currently experiencing. Therefore, to support the family practitioners will build on developing an effective partnership as it is essential to appreciate

a family's point of view and how they are feeling. It is evident by Brodie and Savage (2015) how practitioners and the family will know and understand the child better than anyone else and have a unique awareness of how inclusion will affect the family. As a result, it is important to set aside time to build trust and good connections with the family. The child and their family will benefit from the early years setting's procedures for supporting parents, which include listening to them and showing respect (Brodie and Savage, 2015).

Moreso, as highlighted by the Welsh Government (2017) parents are important contributors to children's outcomes. We are aware that when parents raise their children with positive direction and care in accordance with the values outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children are more likely to achieve better outcomes.

As family life can be so diverse, a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be effective. Parents need access to information, support, and guidance that is specifically suited to their needs. To ensure you are offering sufficient support and being inclusive while working with parents, practitioners must have the required knowledge and expertise (Welsh Government, 2017).

Inclusive leaders should think about how well and inclusively they communicate with parents. Are all parents extended an invitation to engage in meaningful ways with the school, are there simple means for parents to express concerns to the practitioners and is there good communication regarding the children (Allen, 2022). By reflecting on this we can create effective inclusive leadership.

Professionals

As Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers (2020) mention inclusive leadership is necessary in workplaces with a varied workforce to facilitate the full recognition and involvement of various people (Welsh Government, 2016). Ashikali, Groeneveld, and Kuipers (2020); Dwertmann and Boehm (2016) empathise how practitioners must create an atmosphere that fosters inclusivity, enables a range of people to feel valued and accepted for who they are, and enables them to benefit and learn from the diversity of their team members in order to ensure inclusive leadership.

Moreover, within the early years the team around the family (TAF) is a multidisciplinary team that collaborates with families to provide a comprehensive support plan. Inclusive leaders need to ensure that the family's needs are fulfilled and addressed early on before they become an issue that might have a negative impact on the child, while also reducing overlap and inconsistency in the services received. TAF partners include social workers, school nurses, health visitors, and other experts depending on the requirements that have been identified (Welsh Government, 2016). As noted by the Welsh Government (2023) they provide support for families dealing with a variety of issues while allowing the school to have its distinct focus on learning objectives.

Moreso, as emphasised by Crutchley (2018) the main goal of the multi-agency approach is for all professionals who work with children who have additional learning needs to cooperate and pursue shared goals to enhance the quality of life for the children and their families. The importance of integrated working was highlighted by the Every Child Matters framework, and chances for multi-

professional collaboration were further reinforced by initiatives such as the Common Assessment Framework and the implementation of the Integrated Workforce (Crutchley, 2018).

Cheminais (2008) points out how working with other professionals has many advantages, such as improving children's outcomes through a range of coordinated services, making advice and support easily available, helping practitioners better understand the services of multi-agency practitioners, and letting them know about resources to refer children to, all of which allow them to concentrate on their primary responsibility of teaching. It also fosters consensus, strengthens partnership voice, dissolves professional boundaries and parochial attitudes, and raises levels of trust between partners and providers. Furthermore, according to Crutchley (2018) collaborating with professionals and multiagency staff benefits children and their families by lowering stress, boosting self-esteem, and providing more chances for participation in decision-making.

However, we need to consider some of the potential barriers that professionals could encounter while collaborating with other professionals which include professionals struggling to work together because of a range of problems, the type and scope of present professional alliances among different early childhood service sectors, as well as the number and diversity of professionals involved, mostly from the education and health sectors (Aubrey, 2011).

Additionally, inclusive leaders must be conscious of any personal hurdles they may have, such as prejudice and stereotyping. When dealing with other professionals, removing these potential barriers will contribute to the development of a more inclusive leadership style (Gerritsen, 2020). Moreover, a leader's responsibility in promoting inclusive practices is to ensure that they, together with their team, foster an atmosphere in which all individuals are treated with dignity, acceptance, and respect (Hallet, 2016).

Communities

To facilitate a more inclusive approach parental and community involvement is seen as one of the most important school reform strategies for improving children's wellbeing and academic success. Priorities include using school facilities for the greater good of the community, working together, and encouraging family and community involvement (Welsh Government, 2023). Several Estyn reports emphasised the value of collaborating with families, the community and other professionals. These consist of the HMCI Annual Report (2012/13) and the 2012 report on successful practices in addressing poverty and disadvantage in schools (Estyn, 2020a).

Furthermore, the intrinsic connections between the educational environment, agencies, services, and the community promote children and family's social choices, health, and academic success. This makes participation in Every Child Matters essential. Collaboration between educational settings and other agencies as well as outside professionals is still encouraged by the government (Cheminais, 2009).

Moreover, one of the most important aspects of 21st-century leadership is the capacity to promote and maintain an inclusive culture in organisations, departments, and communities. As noted by Ferdman (2017) leadership that is both successful and effective in the organisations and societies of

the present and the future has to have a solid grasp of how to create and stimulate opportunities that allow people of all backgrounds to benefit from one another's abilities as well as their own.

Furthermore, Rodd (2013) emphasizes how instead of being thought of as hierarchical institutions, the early years are seen as inclusive learning communities. It is important that the community values each and every child (Foreman and Arthur-kelly, 2017).

To conclude inclusive leadership is a collection of constructive behaviours that help people feel they belong in the workplace (Ferdman 2017; Randel *et al.* 2018). As noted by Nutbrown Review, inclusive leadership is the duty of all those who work in educational environments. This perspective fosters the growth of long-lasting leadership and backs system leadership models for the children in the early years (Siraj and Hallet, 2014). Practitioners of all experience levels need access to training opportunities on how to incorporate more inclusive practices into their lesson plans and pedagogy. It is important to give practitioners and staff the support systems and training they need to handle the ongoing changes in education. Early years settings must be adjusted to better fit the needs of all children and provide an inclusive environment for all children in their care (Childhood Education International, n.d.).

Part 2

According to UNESCO (2022), curricular policies, which are composed of a single document, are frequently used as guidelines for implementing particular educational plan components. It ensures consistency of the curriculum by processing and organising information in an organised manner. A thoughtful process needs to be committed to while creating a suitable educational framework.

As noted by OECD (2015); Viennet and Pont (2017) education policies address a range of topics, including equity, the overall standard of learning outcomes and school and learning environments, the system's ability to prepare children for the future, funding, effective leadership, and evaluation and assessment procedures among others.

In addition to this following on from the 2014 OECD study, The Welsh Government leaders decided to change the curriculum and the way the education system is defined. A new curriculum, a thorough overhaul of initial teacher education, and the founding of the National Academy for Educational Leadership were examples of new horizons. Important reforms were implemented, outlined as a bold and revolutionary national mission. However, there is little evidence to back up the belief that school reforms are successful since educational results are hard to measure and hardly examined. Even when reforms do have an impact, stakeholders are usually not satisfied with the outcomes and often hold managers accountable for them (Viennet and Pont, 2017). With this, the new curriculum for Wales was the first co-constructive policy (Jones, Giorgio Ostinelli and Crescentini, 2023).

The Welsh Government (2017b) noted that by seeing the new curriculum as a collaborative effort to improve education in Wales, co-construction may encourage stakeholders to become actively involved in educational reform. Working with others, however, can present a number of difficulties,

including perceived power imbalances across schools, the additional workload resulting from the joint effort, and difficulties establishing shared objectives (Armstrong, 2015).

According to Viennet and Pont (2017), the first step in enhancing collaboration is to ensure that each stakeholder understands their own position and duties and upholds them with others. Therefore, to collaborate on the process and ensure that policies are successful in enhancing education, stakeholders and policymakers must have a shared knowledge of how to carry out policies (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

It is also noted by Chapman *et al.* (2023) how co-construction, in conjunction with strategic leadership and support from the Welsh Government, can assist in cultivating the collaboration and confidence that education stakeholders require to guarantee the new curriculum's sustainability over time. However, since the majority of policies are designed to change the way that education is provided, putting them into practice involves overcoming a number of barriers. Among these are difficulties with coordination and communication, concerns with organisational resources, and the ability and compliance of policy objectives and operators (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Moreover, additional research examines the impact of these adjustments on female leadership in particular as well as the ways in which a new management will alter organisational culture and leadership practices in the educational sector. Finally, it was discovered that market-driven decision views, which view children and parents as an opportunity to optimise profit and, therefore, encourage racial inequality through uneven access to schools, influence the behaviour and thought processes of educators (Lemke and Zhu, 2018; Jabbar *et al.* 2016).

Furthermore, as mentioned by the Welsh Government (2017b) the new curriculum for Wales policy was co-constructed from the start, enabling the curriculum to effectively draw on the expertise of experts, the experience of pioneer schools, and information from practitioners.

The curriculum reform in Wales incorporates stakeholders in the design process by using a unique approach to co-construction and curriculum design (Welsh Government, 2017b). Within this, to create a genuine sense of belonging, the new curriculum has also changed to incorporate a co-construction approach with children. Children are required to develop in their understanding of the environment and identity (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Moreover, one of the main objectives of the global political agenda is inclusion, which is becoming more widely acknowledged as an important factor behind educational change (Azorín and Ainscow, 2018). While acknowledging that children's experiences vary and that the new curriculum might not be able to address every obstacle to inclusion and belonging, it can offer chances for children to investigate their identities in connection to national identity.

Although, the new curriculum gives children the chance to explore who they are, there may be obstacles to inclusion and a sense of belonging (Crick, Thomas and Beauchamp, 2023).

A sense of belonging is framed as a component of a learner's identity development in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). This is in line with the idea of the economy of identity (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014), which acknowledges the basis of identity that children create for themselves.

Expanding upon the idea of funds of knowledge, which recognises the role of families and communities in children's education, funds of identity acknowledge the complex relationship between children's unique characteristics and the resources of their families and communities (Chapman *et al.* 2023; Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014).

Furthermore, with in the policy happiness and overall well-being are dependent upon feeling a sense of belonging. It influences a child's perception of their identity and potential, and it should be fundamental to the culture of any environment. Children start to have an understanding of their place in the many communities and groups they are a part of, as well as their importance within them. Since solid and stable connections are essential to a strong feeling of belonging for all children, settings ought to promote an ethos that supports them (Welsh Government, 2023c).

Moreover, to ensure the successful implementation of the Curriculum for Wales, some of the barriers that must be addressed is allowing time for planning. providing opportunities for professional development so that staff members understand the curriculum-designing process and the partnership between pedagogy and curriculum, and fostering more cooperation amongst educational establishments (Estyn, 2021).

Also noted by the Welsh Government (2023d) when developing your own curriculum for your setting, the practitioner's knowledge and understanding of child development are important. The recognised areas of child development must be the primary focus of teaching. Belonging is one of the five development pathways included in the new curriculum.

With in this, in order to understand what a sense of belonging means to the learners, it is important to get their opinions. The argument put forth by Pulkki, Dahlin, and Värri (2016) while primarily addressing environmental education, is relevant to the concept of a sense of belonging. They argue that for children to truly develop an interest and engagement in the world, these elements must undoubtedly originate from within them; they must arise from their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and lived-body awareness (Chapman *et al.* 2023; Pulkki, Dahlin and Varri, 2016).

Section 3

Are parents the building blocks of children's educational outcomes and inclusion?

As emphasised by Welsh Government (2023) parental participation in their children's education has the greatest influence on attainment even while parental involvement is beneficial and may play an important role in a school's development as well as fostering their social, emotional, and intellectual development (Boonk *et al.* (2018).

Parental engagement has a significant impact on children's educational achievement, as noted by Baker *et al.* (2016) and Barr and Saltmarsh (2014). Studies have shown that increased parental involvement is associated with quantifiable improvements in academic attainment. Gadsden, Ford, and Breiner (2016) discuss the relationship between changes in behaviour, literacy, and socioemotional health and parent involvement in early childhood education.

As noted by Garvis *et al.* (2021) numerous studies demonstrate the value of parent involvement in early education in fostering a child's learning and growth. It is evident by Boonk *et al.* (2018) how researchers have been primarily interested in the association between academic accomplishment and parental participation for a long time. With this, teachers and policymakers have acknowledged the importance of parental participation on children's academic progress (Boonk *et al.* 2018; Martin, Bowl and Banks 2023). It is evident from Boonk *et al.* (2018) how parental involvement is an important component of new educational reforms and initiatives. As highlighted by Welsh Government (2023) within the new curriculum for Wales children will receive the best education and be better prepared for the future if everyone works together at home and in the classroom.

However, despite the widespread belief that parental involvement is important for children's academic success, as noted by Boonk *et al.* (2018) there are many issues with the research on this topic. The degree of uncertainty around results on parental engagement and its relevance to children's academic achievement is perhaps the most concerning aspect of current research.

Bierman and Sheridan (2022) argue how early children's growth depends heavily on their interactions. Close relationships facilitate healthy growth and development throughout life. It is evident by Dereli and Turk-kurtca (2022) how the child, parents, and practitioners all benefit tremendously from parent involvement. However, parents feel that school professional's attitudes, communication techniques, and leadership styles have an important impact on establishing and maintaining relationships between parents and schools (Barr and Saltmarsh, 2014).

Research has revealed a variety of relationships between parental participation and academic success, including positive, negative, and non-existent relationships. With this, it has become unclear exactly what is meant by the idea of parental participation since it has been operationalized, quantified, and used in many different ways (Boonk *et al.* 2018).

Hackworth *et al.* (2018) highlight some of the barriers related to parent engagement. We need to be aware of the correlations between various parent sociodemographic characteristics and parent participation. For example, mothers attend parent engagement considerably more frequently than

fathers. It is less likely for parents from various cultural and linguistic origins, low-income families, and families with poor educational attainment to engage in parental engagement and apply the skills taught inside. This demonstrates how family situations can lead to exclusion rather than inclusion. Together, let's encourage inclusion through parental involvement and lay the foundations for children to be inclusive and capable leaders.

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