Section 1

Inclusive leadership appreciates diversity and tackles the barriers of discrimination and exclusion (Bortini *et al*, 2016). Being inclusive in the workplace and in communities is an essential trait to leadership in the 21st century, this form of leadership promotes equality and fairness, ensuring individuals can belong, feel safe and appreciated (Ferdman, 2020). Inclusive leadership is fundamental when providing good quality in early years settings, staff and children should feel valued, respected and welcomed (Randal *et al.,* 2018 and Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). Moreover, the commitment towards valuing diversity and addressing any type of discrimination is fundamental in early years practice (Birth to 5 matters, no date). Inclusive leadership consists of noting down and addressing inequality and inequity, this involves challenging individuals and organisations to improve systems and outcomes (Ferdman, 2021 and Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). Furthermore, Ferdman (2020) mentions that the systems of inclusion framework aim to create, strengthen and sustain inclusion. The framework varies from the micro levels which are the inclusion of the individual to the macro which involves societies, policies and ideologies (Ferdman, 2020). However, inclusion is complex and multifaceted, inclusion at more macro levels is complex because of how it is tackled and experienced relates to the type of group involved (Brown, 2016). For example, inclusion of individuals with disabilities may have a different focus in comparison to inclusion with race (Ferdman, 2017).

The scenario discussed relates to a six-year-old boy named Bill. Bill lives with his mother who has full parental responsibility. The mother has suffered with her mental health and has recently accessed support for her mental health. You notice Bill is doing well in school however prefers to be alone and does not like to engage in group activities especially when children talk about family time with their mum and dad. Bills mother also seems quiet. Mum has recently started dating another woman but chooses to come alone to drop off and pick bill up. She avoids engaging with other parents and is rarely spoken to by others. She also avoids communicating with teachers at meetings such as parents' evenings. Bill and his mother are surrounded

by a close-knit community, however both mum and Bill struggle to connect with others and feel welcomed.

Inclusion is ever changing and always moving on, there is no such thing as a perfect inclusive setting (Brown, 2016). Inclusive leaders need to tackle discrimination and stereotypes that come up in setting (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). No child or family should experience discrimination based on their sex, race, sexuality or disability (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019 and Welsh Government, 2015). professionals need to ensure that all children are included, children are all unique and develop at different rates, they should be treated differently in accommodation to their individual needs (PACEY, 2023 and Brown, 2016). Similarly, Professionals need to respect all children's differences (Early years matters,2011). However, Ferdman (2017) mentions that having a one-sided view can lead to issues of exclusion of inclusivity. To overcome this, he states that having a paradoxical approach is a sign of strong inclusive leadership. Recognising that individuals should be treated differently but also be treated the same encourages a sense of belonging (Ferdman, 2017 and Birth to 5 matters, no date). Furthermore, Randel *et al* (2018) states that leaders and professionals need to encourage diversity, justice and equality, share decision making and facilitate the sense of belonging.

Inclusive education is recognised as an individual's right (Thomas, Heng and walker, 2022). In the scenario, it is perceived that mum is disengaging towards communication with professionals. Inclusive leaders need to be aware and offer opportunities to families that are in different situations and take action to lessen the issues they face (Birth to 5 matters, no date and Ferdman, 2017). Additionally, Professionals need to engage with parents on a day-to-day basis to build positive bonds and relationships (Welsh Government, 2016a). By building positive connections, family's confidence and communication improves and concerns can be addressed and resolved quicker (Welsh Government,2016a and PACEY, 2023). However, Epstein (2018), Cottle and Alexander (2014) and Lopez-Lopez *et al* (2021) believe that practitioners can sometimes judge family's lifestyle choices and label them as being difficult because they do not want to communicate. Moreover, Scanlan and Johnson (2020) mention that trying too hard to encourage conversations with parents can result in the reverse effect. Furthermore, Practitioners who believe that

parents are difficult to reach are usually more difficult to engage with (Wheeler and Connor, 2009, cited in Lindon and Lindon, 2011).

Bill and his mum are in the process of seeing multiple agencies to support their mental health and well-being. Professionals need to work in partnerships with other agencies to get the best outcomes for the child and their family (Birth to 5 matters, no date). The five levels of multi-agency work and collaboration consist of communication, cooperation, coordination, integration and coalition (Solomon, 2019). Working together improves the chances of meeting the needs of families and children with specific needs (Walker, 2018 and Solomon, 2019). Moreover, children and families will need support and a variety of services throughout the child's life, professionals work together to get a holistic view of the situation and put plans in place to support them (NSPCCa,2023 and PACEY, 2023). However, there is evidence that the workforce has become more unstable as the years have gone on, there is few people to replace the professionals that have left (Gov.uk, 2020). In addition to this, The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2023) and Walker (2018) state that personal relationships, attitudes, time, different perceptions and structures of organisations can be seen as a barrier to collaborative multi-agency work. To overcome this, inclusive leaders need to transform different behaviours, views and values of different professionals to strengthen the engagement between different lifestyles, identities and beliefs (Ferdman, prime and Riggio, 2020).

Until recently, mum has been a single parent with little support and struggles with her mental health and wellbeing. It is evidenced that, most single parent households are run by women, this means that parents are more likely to experience lower levels of income to provide for their family (Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado, 2018). In addition to this, Mum has multiple social identities that overlap due to being a homosexual parent who raises her child alone and has issues with her mental health. United nations network (2022) states that Intersectionality is a concept and theoretical framework that recognises the complexity where social identities overlap, this framework shows awareness that individuals are more likely to potentially face discrimination and negative experiences due to social inequalities and experiences (United nations network, 2022).

Single parents are more likely to experience mental health issues and conscious or unconscious discrimination (Harkness, 2016 and NSPCC, 2021). Single parents and parents who suffer with mental health are likely to be stigmatised, this makes it harder for families to communicate with others and ask for help (Reutter *et al*, 2009 and NSPCC, 2021). Research suggests that parents with mental health issues have potentially faced multiple challenges since becoming a parent, making it difficult for the parent to provide a safe and loving environment due to feelings of isolation (NSPCC, 2021). Welsh Government (2016a) agrees with this and states that some families have less interactions with settings due to issues of self-esteem. Inclusive leaders should overcome these barriers to form bonds with families to encourage communication and openness (Welsh Government, 2016a). Furthermore, Lopez-Lopez (2021) states that inclusive leaders should strengthen the relationships and bonds between families through meeting the needs of families they work with, this will encourage families to feel a sense of belonging

LGBTQI families are also at risk of stigmatisation (Lopez-Lopez, 2021). The discrimination theory suggests that same sex parents are more likely to get questioned on their parenting skills and roles, for example schools are less interactive with homosexual parents (mazrekaj, De Witte and Cabus, 2020). In addition to this, Newstead and Isles-Buck (2019) suggests that awareness of inclusion and challenging discrimination is important. Awareness of inclusion is important because not all professionals and families have experience in socialising with individuals from different backgrounds, abilities and cultures (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019 and Ferdman, 2020). When individuals are not informed and educated, they can form assumptions due to prejudices that are not correct (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). Furthermore, Inclusive leaders should ensure that appropriate action is taken if they encounter discrimination towards sexual orientation (Lopez-Lopez, 2021). However, Birth to 5 matters (No date) mentions that humans are subjected to misconceptions and lack of understanding on what they do not often see, often challenging individuals who have a lack of understanding towards someone's background has little to no outcome long term.

In the scenario, Bill is known to be a quiet, shy child who prefers to play by himself and Bills father is absent. Consequently, he is faced with multiple risks of exclusion. Children who only see one parent experience lower levels of well-being, cognitive development and performance in school (Chapple, 2013, cited in Thomas, Heng and Walker, 2021). Effective inclusive leadership can encourage children to feel valued, have a higher level of self-esteem and belonging (Birth to 5 matters, no date). Children deserve to learn and participate an inclusive environment (Thomas, Heng and Walker, 2021). In addition to this, Birth to 5 matters (no date) mentions that Children can develop effectively through exploring and discovering the world around them, inclusive practice involves understanding children's backgrounds and providing a setting that educates other children to understand different experiences and lifestyles (Birth to 5 matters, no date). Furthermore, Inclusive practice should involve children and respect their right to a voice (UNICEF,2019). Without involvement, children can face barriers to their learning and mental health (Hallet, 2016). However, young children may struggle to voice their thoughts at such a young age, inclusive leaders should step in to avoid missed opportunities to support the child (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018 and Archard and Uniacke, 2020).

Bills mum has recently got into a relationship with a woman. Inclusive leaders need to ensure that protected characteristics are not discriminated against (Welsh Government, 2015). However, research suggests Children of same-sex households are significantly more likely to experience discrimination due to their parents' sexuality (Perrin *et al*, 2020 and Mclanahan, Tach and Schneider, 2013). Similarly, Mazrekaj, De Witte and Cabus' (2020) study suggests that children who live with same sex families at an older age perform worse in academia due to the additional stress of the separation of their birth parents. Bill mostly sees children who have both mum and dad pick up and drop off. Children need to see representations of life experiences like theirs, such as someone who has a similar family structure or has a similar home life to feel understood and included (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019 and PACEY, 2023). To encourage inclusive leadership, Birth to 5 matters (no date) mentions settings need to ensure the environment has pictures of same sex families, single parents and materials that challenge stereotypes. Children's feelings

about their identity and lives should be central to their development (birth to 5 matters, no date).

Cambridge dictionary (2023a) defines community as people who live in a certain area or a group of individuals that are connected through similar interests and backgrounds. Bill and his mother are surrounding by a close community. Strong communities are created by members having shared goals or individuals that add value to each other, good communities involve individuals knowing each other and connecting with other people's uniqueness and interests (Kanarya, 2017). However, Bell and Newby (2021) mention that there are over 99 definitions of community and a lack of specificity with the words involved, what brings a community together is the input and minds of the members involved in. Additionally, they mention that communities people belong in are no longer linked to community place because most different working classes have begun to mix which results in lack of understanding about each other's backgrounds (Bell and Newby, 2021).

Inclusion applies to all families, each family brings different identities and values which are built over time through taking part in the relationships with their community (birth to 5 matters, no date). Schools that can engage with the community allow a powerful element to raise standards and children's and family's self-esteem. (Welsh Government, 2016b). Furthermore, inclusive practitioners have a responsibility to form bonds with communities and families to strengthen children's wellbeing and feeling of belonging (Welsh Government, 2022a).

Welsh government (2016b) and Scanlan and Johnson (2020) believes that Community engagement is classed as a priority within educational care, an example is family and community engagement (FACE) where inclusive leaders work towards raising awareness with the importance of community and family engagement. FACE can be taught through training to ensure that safeguarding and professional development opportunities are offered (Welsh Government, 2016b and Scanlan and Johnson, 2020). In addition to this, strengthening of family work is a key way to overcome engagement barriers (Welsh Government, 2016b). Community events are used to break down the problems and worries of parents who are nervous about the thought of communication with schools (Welsh Government, 2016b). Moreover, Welsh Government (2016a) and Welsh Government (2016b) state that Community

partnership working helps schools with family engagement work, community partnership gives increased access to multiple services such as social services, speech and language therapists and Psychologists (Welsh Government, 2016a and Welsh Government, 2016b). However, Cooper (2023) discusses the barriers to being inclusive with community engagement and believes that engagement and positive relationships go together, if a parent does not trust the setting, then they are unable to engage or feel a sense of belonging, many individuals also worry about participating with the community in fear of getting things wrong. Similarly, Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2020) and Schwebel (2017, cited in Ferdman, Prime and Riggio, 2020) believe that individuals feel more disconnected now than ever before, individuals are excluded from feeling the sense of belonging and inclusion within their community.

Section 2

A policy is an intended course of action created by an organisation, government or practice which is likely to involve a specific way to deal with an issue, policies can promote belongingness and commitments to a certain topic (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013). Policies have been classed as an effective way to improve practice and knowledge of practitioners and professionals working with children (Brock 2015). However, in regards to inclusive policies, there are still improvements needed, there is an issue with practitioners understanding inclusion (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). Moreover, Miller and Hevey (2016) argue that children's policies are too important to be created by Politician's and governments that do not work closely with children on a day-to-day basis.

The Anti-racist Action plan was designed to implement inclusion and Anti-racist practice for individuals experiencing discrimination and racism due to their ethnicity and race (Welsh Government, 2022b). Anti racism is defined as opposing to or preventing racism when someone is being unfair or harmful to an individual because of their race (Cambridge dictionary 2023b). Wales is not classed as an equal country; the experiences each community's face are all different. Ethnic minorities face racism and discrimination (Welsh Government, 2022b and Knight and Crick, 2021). In preparation of the ant racist Wales Action plan policy document, ethnic minority individuals wanted a meaningful delivery of plans towards anti racist action

due to previous documents not fulfilling the prevention of institutional ad systematic racism (Welsh Government, 2022b). The policy writing began in 2020 however, the death of George Floyd and the pandemic influenced the updates and adaptations to the policy in regards to communities, lived experiences, organisations and education (Welsh Government, 2022b). MacPherson (1999) stated that institutional racism was the result of failure from organisations to provide appropriate services to people with different cultures and ethnicities.

Through policy, practices can provide more opportunities for further training and professional development in specific areas (Brock, 2015). Welsh Government (2022b) states that teachers and early years workers need to understand, embed and take an anti-racist, diverse and inclusive approach to improve practice and experiences of black, Asian and ethnic minority children. To achieve this, Welsh Government (2022b) highlighted the importance of training throughout early years. In relation to this, Show Racism the Red Card (2020) mention that during a study, a quarter of educators mentioned that they had witnessed or been told about an experience regarding discrimination in the past year and a third of pupils admitted to being racist towards another child. Moreover, Newstead and Isles-Buck (2019) discuss the importance of practitioners understanding inclusion, equality and diversity when working with children. Inclusive policies need to specify how the setting will avoid discrimination rather than just mentioning that the setting will not discriminate (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). Furthermore, the policy states that educators are required to have training and stand up to racism and either remove or update systems and policies that are no longer relevant or up to date in line with ethnic minority groups (Welsh Government, 2022b). However, Gov.Uk (2020) believes that there is not enough training provided to professionals due to lack of funding and time, this has been an issue for a significant number of years and results in unrealistic expectations for professionals to promote something that they do not understand. In addition to this, Brock (2015) believes that there is a concern that current policies can lead to narrowing of effective training. Furthermore, Department for Education (2017) mentions that the improvement of practice relates back to the importance that all professionals are given equal chances to attend the same level of training, rather than having the training fed back to them through senior staff.

Welsh Governments (2022b) Anti Racist Wales policy mentions that Communities discussed how they would like a country that engages in shared understanding and tackles racism that has been historically embedded in organisations for centuries. The goal should be to create outcomes that celebrate uniqueness amongst ethnic minority individuals to ensure everyone is united for their differences. Black, Asian and other ethnicities should not carry the emotional impact of racism. Professionals should ensure that fairness is carried out in every day practice (Welsh Government, 2022b). Throughout this policy, the term should Is mentioned consistently. Cambridge dictionary (2023c) states that the term should means that something is desired or ideal however, it is not compulsory. Moreover, Slee (2013) mentions that inclusive educational policy makers vocabulary is flawed. The policy also uses multiple words that are hard to understand and define. Doucet and Pont (2021) mention policies need to use language which is classed as common and simple so that everyone can understand what is expected. Furthermore, practice and policy are two separate things and usually policies, educators and other collaborative agencies are speaking at each other rather than with each other (Doucet and Pont, 2021).

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) study suggested that the attainment throughout primary education varies for individuals from different ethnic communities. Research suggests that Black pupils have shown lower level of attainment during early years care in comparison to white children. (EHRC, 2018). Additionally, in 2020-2021, ChildLine reported 285 counselling sessions in regards to racism and a third were from adults that were worried about racism (NSPCCb, 2023). Welsh Government (2022b) mentions that they are reviewing policies in schools to prevent inequalities in education, they aim to develop a strategy to tackle to impact poverty has on families and children and support children's wellbeing. Moreover, Welsh Government (2022b) believes that developing high quality childcare and leadership will benefit all children. Strengthening the statutory guidance for schools and ensuring there is a variety of interventions to help support the wellbeing of children from ethnic minority communities. However, multiple intervention systems focus on fixing the child to support inclusion rather than the need to stand up to the systemic racism and bias in early years and schools (Boone *et a*l, 2021). Moreover, MacPherson (1999) highlighted the issue with institutional

racism where attitudes, ignorance, thoughtfulness, prejudice and stereotyping left ethnic minority individuals at a disadvantage. In addition to this, more than twenty years later, this still seemed to be an issue according to Anna Freud (2023) and Konstantoni *(2020)* who mention that some early years professionals still believe that children are too young to engage in conversations about race and believe racism will not occur in their setting due to the belief that children cannot be racist at a young age and their setting is more diverse than others.

Promoting inclusion in the Early Years

There is a preexisting issue of a lack of representation through multi-cultural toys available and accessed in early years settings. This blog aims to discuss the importance of using multi-cultural toys to promote inclusion and avoid exclusion in the early years. The blog also looks at the risks of lack of representation and diversity on children's self-esteem, mental health and feeling of belonging.

The Black Nursery Manager (2020) states that practitioners should recognise children’s different ethnicities and cultures in the setting. Practitioners need to encourage diversity in the early years, children become self-aware at a very young age and notice the differences around them (Meadows-Fernandez, 2018 and EYR, no date). Huertas- Abril and Gomez-Parra (2018), Early Education (2020) and meadows-Fernandez (2018), mention that Practitioners need to look beyond just using different skin coloured paint and focus on different clothing, toy food and hair products in their setting. Through playing with toys, children can learn cultural schemas and values, diverse toys can be a simple way to implement the foundations for inclusivity. Moreover, inclusive toys where children can see themselves allow children to promote positive cultural, racial and ethnic identity development (meadows- Fernandez, 2018, and EYR, no date). Similarly, Meadows-Fernandez (2018) mentions that settings with a lack of diverse representational toys can prove harmful to children due to the worry that children will believe people who look like them do not matter. Furthermore, Eason (2021) discuses psychologists Kenneth and Mamie's experiment in 1940 which used black and white dolls to investigate children's racial attitudes, the study concluded that the discrimination and prejudice

towards the black dolls resulted in the feeling of inferiority and low self-esteem amongst African American children (Eason, 2021). Unfortunately, the results from this experiment have continued to stay consistent throughout the years (meadows-Fernandez, 2018).

The importance and role of toys in early childhood education has been highlighted by Froebel, Montessori and Malaguzzi (Feez, 2010). Additionally, Research shows that children who engage in different types of play, have better outcomes long term (Huertas-Abril and Gomez-Parra, 2018). Socialisation has the capability to connect different generations together (Huertas- Abril and Gomez-Parra, 2018). Furthermore, through object play, children can explore and learn the rules of their communities, individuals make use of cultural tools from previous generations to form relationships and bonds with children who understand their experiences (Eason,2021). Multi-cultural toy play promotes the celebration of other cultures and encourages children's self-identity, esteem and confidence (EYR, no date and Wilkinson, C and Wilkinson, S, 2022). Moreover, Children need to see representations of people that look like them to feel a sense of worth and identity (Birth to 5 matters, no date). Eason (2021) relates to this and talks about her personal experience with her son where he felt isolated due to being different to the average white superhero toy, he felt that he was unable to be a superhero because he was black, this shows the power in toys and the effects it can have on children who do not fit the more commonly sold white skinned toys.

To conclude, multicultural toys in early years settings can provide children with a sense of belonging and inclusion, as previously highlighted by Eason (2021) and meadows-Fernandez (2018) , there is power in toys and if there is a lack of diversity and representation amongst them, there is a risk that children can experience long term negative emotional issues such as low self-esteem and inferiority.

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