

Inclusive Leadership

Section 1

An Inclusive leadership is an activity which is a continuum. Providing a setting where all participants feel appreciated, and opinions are valued. In order to facilitate this, practitioners need to be equitable. Respecting other views, needs and addressing views which can be detrimental to others according to Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio (2021); Isles-Buck and Newstead (2019). Inclusive leaders must continue to develop through courses to enhance knowledge and understanding of the ever-changing diverse world. Mitchell and Bateman (2018); Mitchell *et al.* (2017), suggests that through inclusive leadership a sense of belonging and support for wellbeing can be acquired for non-native families joining a setting. However, there are many barriers. Families may feel overwhelmed and withdraw their participation, practitioners or other stakeholders may feel reluctant to change. This may be due to unclear boundaries set suggests Ferdman (2017).

Inclusive leadership has become pivotal to educational settings according to Childhood Education International (2021). To listen to, and communicate with the children, parents/carers, governing body, the community, and the staff of the setting can provide essential information to create an inclusive educational setting. Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio (2021); Siraj and Hallet (2013), support this, stating that an inclusive leader can appreciate the value that stakeholders can contribute with their knowledge and life experiences. Therefore, creating diverse learning experiences for children in order to improve their outcomes. In contrast to this, Bortini, *et al.* (2018), suggests there are leaders with a role of great responsibility that assert power, which can make the stakeholders feel unappreciated and powerless to contribute to the setting. A challenge to create an inclusive setting in a hierarchical context. However, Childhood Education International (2021); Booyesen (2014), believe that an inclusive leadership can reduce the number of children being excluded from education. This may be because of a learning difficulty, which can materialise into unacceptable behaviour, due to frustration. Moreover, in more recent studies, inclusive leadership is to reduce the exclusion from education because of their race, ethnic background, gender to name a few.

Scenario

Ben has recently joined the school. He lives with his father, who has recently been given parental responsibility over Ben, after overcoming an addiction problem. Ben seems to be engaged in classroom challenges and tasks independently. He does not appear to be mixing with his peers well and will only converse with practitioners when led by the adult. When dad collects Ben from school, he stands at the back and does not give eye contact. Invites have been sent to Dad, offering the opportunity to come and speak to staff about Ben's development, yet Dad does not reply. In this situation both, father and son may feel excluded, therefore a practitioner can demonstrate inclusive leadership skills by working with Ben, his father, the professionals, and the community to enable this family to have a sense of belonging, feel valued, which in turn can support their wellbeing. Furthermore, with better communication, information about Ben's needs and wants can be shared, allowing the opportunity to enrich Ben's development (Ferdman, Prime and Riggio 2021).

Ben arrives at school on time, always well presented with his uniform, however, some days at lunchtime Ben will be the first to finish, then will sit and watch the other children eat. The practitioner who has noticed this, then asks Ben in the mornings, if he has had time for breakfast or if he would like something to eat in the class. Some days Ben will take a piece of fruit. As the school offers a free breakfast to all primary school children (Welsh Government 2022a), the practitioner sends a form home with Ben offering him a place. The form is not returned. Gov.uk, (2023), states the importance that a nutritious breakfast can improve a child's concentration, their wellbeing and valuable life skills, for example eating at a table, with their peers can improve social skills. Additionally, Graham, Russo, and Defeyter (2015), support this, stating that most breakfast clubs, offer time for the children to play with a mixed age group and practitioners, allowing that sense of belonging to develop and feel included through an unstructured session. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, children need to have a sense of belonging in order to have self-esteem. However, children can move up and down the hierarchy of needs theory according to McLeod (2023). Ben's self-esteem may be very low due to his early life experiences; therefore, socialising can be a challenging activity for Ben, and he may already feel excluded and have negative feelings about school, suggests Allen *et al.* (2016).

The practitioner communicates concerns to Ben's teacher. As Ben has been attending the school for around six weeks now, Ben is due to have an initial screening test for

the Children's Assessment Teaching Tool known as ChATT. Carmarthenshire County Council (2023), offer this strategy for children with speech, language, or communication difficulties. An inclusive leader can incorporate these activities to enhance Ben's social skills with his peers. The practitioner also communicates with the class teacher that whilst awaiting the return of the breakfast club form, that Ben could have one of his peers sat with him whilst he eats his fruit. The class teacher may start to feel anxious and overwhelmed, with these additional concerns, as the pressure of the change in the curriculum, making sure the needs of every individual child is met and continuing to have a successful work/life balance can be very stressful according to Brackett and Cipriano (2020). Furthermore, O'Sullivan (2015) agrees suggesting that negative attitudes from practitioners, due to the workload or feeling unsupported can have a detrimental effect to a child's outcome. Therefore, an inclusive leaders would need to ensure that the whole school approach policy for emotional and mental wellbeing guidance was being followed (Welsh Government, 2022c). Allowing the class teacher time to discuss their own difficulties and offering support where available. Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2021) states, that an inclusive leader must respect and value the feelings and opinions of others in order to acquire a sense of belonging without compromising their uniqueness. However, an individual's uniqueness may not be appropriate for the outcomes desired for the school suggests Randel *et al.* (2018). Ben's dad does not communicate with the school, forms are not returned, and the class teacher is unable to speak to dad at the end of the day because he stands away from the door and does not make eye contact with the teacher. This is not inclusive practice. According to Ferdman (2014); Minehart *et al.* (2020), inclusive practice means that all parties involved in the school should participate, in order to obtain this from parents/carers then practitioners may need to empower them. Ben's father can contribute knowledge and understanding about Ben to practitioners that can be beneficial to his development. This should be a core aim. However, Ben's father seems reluctant to engage with practitioners. This may stem from a feeling of embarrassment. Dad is overcoming an addiction, yet, the feelings of shame and guilt can overpower during the recovery process. Therefore, widening the gap to socialising suggests Addictions UK (2021). The practitioner, an inclusive leader, who has noticed the exclusion Ben and his father may be feeling, starts to communicate with dad at the end of the day, according to Hohertz (2022); TalkingPoints (2021) positive interactions can build confidence to engage. The practitioner needs to break down the barriers and

understand that Ben's father has his own individual experiences and beliefs, and as an inclusive leader to show the willingness to learn and gain knowledge about unknown areas is a way to start making the father feel respected suggests Scanlan and Johnson (2020). The practitioner greeting dad and informs him of steps Ben is achieving. Raising Children (n.d.) website also suggests that positive information can build relationships with parents/carers. The practitioner can then build on this interaction by inviting dad into the class to see Ben's work, asking questions about Ben's likes and dislikes, and listening fully to the replies from dad. However, if dad feels judged by the school, then he may retract from the communication, resulting in diminishing the relationship according to Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2021). Dad has been, and will be, continually monitored by children services, as he is still receiving therapy treatment for his addiction problems. HM Government (2018) suggests that children should stay with a family member unless there is immediate risk of harm. Zaman (2019) supports this, stating that children need consistent interaction for development. Moreover, dad has made progress, and may understand that the social worker has a responsibility to support and encourage positive steps for both dad and Ben to achieve their full potential, dad may also feel defeated if the social worker focuses on the negatives, or disconcerted if he does not understand the terminology according to Baginsky (2022).

The Social worker attended the school not long after Ben started, some information was shared with the headteacher and Ben's class teacher as shared knowledge allows the experiences, understanding, and knowledge from others to work together in order to achieve successful outcomes for Ben. Collaborative leadership can achieve better results than individual leadership suggests Hafford-Letchfield *et al.* (2014). However, due to the strict confidentiality guidelines, social workers can feel sceptical about sharing information, therefore, important information may not be communicated according to the Department for Education (2014) which may be critical to the interaction with Ben or his dad. This can then impede on the relationship between the school and the family. Therefore, during the social workers next visit the practitioner mentioned about breakfast club and that Ben was due to start having ChATT sessions. The social worker relayed that dad had said, Ben will refuse breakfast at home most mornings. The practitioner suggested that they speak to Ben and dad collectively to offer Ben a place at breakfast club where he will have the chance to play and eat with his peers, as he seems to enjoy lunchtime at school. The UN convention on the rights

of the child (Unicef, 2019) article 12 and 13 state, that every child has a right to express their thoughts, feelings and wishes. This can give Ben a sense of belonging to the school, to feel included. If Dad agrees then the practitioner can assist dad with the form. However, Dad may be insulted by the assistance and may feel judged by the practitioner due to his life experiences and class in society, as he is under the surveillance from children's services, this does not mean that he is unable to complete a form suggests Cottle and Alexander (2014). In contrast to this, MacIntyre, Stewart and McGregor (2019) state the importance of working collectively with families and other professionals. An inclusive leader needs to appreciate the abilities of each individual and how they can enhance the situation in order to meet the needs of the child. Experiences, knowledge and understanding, and perspectives are unique to everybody.

The practitioner discusses with dad about the community activities the school has, as stated by the Welsh Government (2022d), the school embraces the area it is situated. The local park has allocated an area for the school to grow their own vegetables. Therefore, the appeal for support from parents/carers is welcomed. Furthermore, the school run activity days, where there are various stalls and activities that parents can engage in with their child (Penygaer Primary School, n.d.). The local family centre (Family Information Service Carmarthenshire, 2022) hold cookery classes for parent and child, along with a father's group. The Welsh Government (2018) believe that parental involvement can influence the child's achievements, six times more than the school. Therefore, to introduce the father to Ben's school and community can have a fast improvement on Ben's outcome. Estyn reported (Estyn, 2023), that the school has a caring community with a priority of children's health and well-being. Encouraging engagement for each child to attain a sense of belonging. However, staff can be over enthusiastic, resulting in leading children and not giving the chance to explore and experience at their own pace. This is an autocratic style of leadership, which is not suitable for an inclusive leader, as this leadership style does not encourage individuality, Bortini *et al.* (2018) states that an inclusive leader knowledge and supports children's individual needs.

Furthermore, the world is changing, and technology is offering knowledge to the public, misinformation is readily available as often as the correct information, therefore, inclusive leaders need to be up to date with displaying the school's information, via social media or an online school website. As well as displaying the information of the

school, the community need to have a platform to view their opinions and suggestions according to Fiore (2021). However, dad had reservations about Ben being on social media or on the school website, as he lacks the knowledge and understanding of the diversity with technology today (Auxier *et al.* 2020). The practitioner explained to dad that the school run an open door policy, this is where parents/carers, stakeholders, families and the community can voice their views or find out further information suggests Gross *et al.* (2015), therefore, if dad has any reservations then he can speak to a member of staff and gain knowledge and understanding, the staff can also assist dad with the home school app, where dad can access current information about the school. Gross *et al.* (2015) explains the importance of the open-door policy and by extending to other educational settings, knowledge can be shared to obtain reciprocal benefits.

To conclude this scenario can demonstrate some effective ways of inclusion. However, the practitioners need to understand how they can become an inclusive leader. Inclusion is not a sole responsibility of an individual. Diversity, equity and inclusion require input from all participants in order to become effective and improve outcomes from children. Practitioners can be a catalyst for the change in educational settings when they acquire the knowledge and skills required to become an effective inclusive leader.

Section 2

This section will critically evaluate a policy that claims to promote inclusive leadership in early years settings. According to Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay (2013), a policy is a document aimed to set out clear guidance and obtain commitment from all, to adopt a universal course of action. Pollack Porter, Rutkow, and McGinty (2018), agrees, further stating that policies from a local government are public policies. These policies on Ferdman's system of inclusion, are at macro level (Ferdman, Prime and Riggio 2021). A policy that can be derived by the views of the Government in power, work down through the levels to the core. Similarly, to Bronfenbrenners theory, where the child is at the core. The layers around that child can influence their growth and development, an inclusive approach. Policies can affect a child's outcomes (Evans and McLeod, 2023). It can be a legal requirement to follow the guidance stated in the policy. However, some practitioners feel that these policies are routinely written by office workers, simple to tick a box. Therefore, not fully understanding the implications and reasoning behind it, furthermore, believe that they are not able to have a viewpoint, suggests Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay, (2013). The implementation of a macro policy is the responsibility of all, irrespective of their role suggests Ferdman (2014). Therefore, Liddicoat (2014), suggests that macro policies can impede on the pedagogy of the practitioners and believes that inclusion leadership and pedagogy of a setting should be addressed at a micro level. A level which is inclusive for the individual setting.

Wales are the first country to recognise this with the implementation of the new curriculum for Wales, in September 2022 (Welsh Government, 2023). Settings are required to develop their own curriculum, which can meet the needs of the children in their settings. Gibb, (2016); Trickey, (2021), state the importance of the Welsh curriculum, a guidance set by the government, a macro level policy. The successful futures report (Welsh Government, 2015), by Graham Donaldson set the precedence for the new curriculum in Wales, highlighting throughout the report, the importance of inclusive leadership and an inclusive education for all children. However, Majoko (2017); Dally *et al.* (2019); Takala and Sirkko (2022), suggests that for inclusive leaders to promote an inclusive education then practitioners require further training, knowledge and understanding of what inclusion for all represents, as this can prove challenging for some practitioners due to their lack of experience and training. Nevertheless, the

OECD, (2020) acknowledges the innovated design of this curriculum, where practitioners at all stages in their career, children, and stakeholders were part of this design from the start. This guidance can assist practitioners and the whole community of a setting, where to take the education of children, in an engaging and inclusive environment, whilst utilising contact time effectively. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 28 and 29 (Unicef, 2019), states that every child has the right to an education which will promote their development. The new curriculum has been designed to incorporate the ever changing and diverse world we live in. In contrast to this Bradbury, (2013) suggests that policies can be set from the assessment of children in the early years which could impede on their development. Depending on the achievements during the assessment, children could be restricted from development or regress due to over assessment.

The new curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020), has been designed to hopefully eradicate these issues, where practitioners as inclusive leaders are set to co-construct with the children, families, and communities, their individual curriculums based on their setting needs. However, Soutullo *et al.* (2016), believes that there can be many challenges, for example, parents who have suffered trauma from their childhood experiences, therefore leaving them with a negative attitude towards educational settings. Families who believe they should refrain from their child's education. Nonetheless, the European School Education Platform (2023), states that an inclusive leader can recognise the importance of family involvement into the construction of the new curriculum. They are a child's first educator and can provide valuable knowledge about the child, which in turn enhancing the development of children. Strategies like early communication and lowering hierarchy perceptions therefore, showing the parents and family respect and how valuable their input can be. Practitioners played a vital role in the development of the new curriculum. It is stated on the Welsh Government (2023), website that the curriculum was designed by the practitioners for the practitioners, however, throughout the guidance there can be confusing terminology. Cynefin, this is a Welsh word with no direct translation, Mulder (2018), suggests the term as ambiguous, therefore, complex to explain and understand. Furthermore, the same terminology is used in the curriculum for funded non-maintain settings (Welsh Government, n.d.). Similar terminology used throughout the curriculum guidance, for example, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies (Welsh Government 2022b), can be confusing and leave practitioners, families, and

stakeholders uneducated and embarrassed to ask for clarification according to Kimberly *et al.* (2017). Additionally, the Welsh Government (2023), have made changes to the terminology used and the guidance is set for an annual update in January henceforward.

Duggan *et al.* (2022), researched the preparations for the commencement of the new curriculum in Wales, and found varying results. Schools that are fully engaged and underway with the process, to schools that were very unsure of the guidance. Some schools had little or no preparations, divulging the lack of support and guidance they had received. Whilst some had collaborated with other schools to share and gain knowledge and understanding. The Welsh Government (2021), states that practitioners must take responsibility of their own professional development, regardless of previous qualifications, the world is continually changing and to become an inclusive leader then updated training can enhance knowledge and understanding. However, with the cost increasing to release practitioners from their role to attend training can affect the school budget as this is not always covered by the government, according to Duggan *et al.* (2022).

Section 3

Historically, mothers were labelled as the main care giver, whilst fathers were given the label as the financial provider and play mates to the child. Yet, over time roles are changing with mothers going out to work and fathers engaging more suggests Lansford (2021); Cabrera, Volling and Barr (2018), furthermore, research finds that fathers can play an influential role on a child's social and emotional well-being, by having positive impact on their behaviour and self-esteem according to Bateman et al. (2017); being the parent (n.d.). Being the parent (n.d.) suggests the differences of a mother's support being protective whilst a father can encourage more independence and confidence. Nevertheless, children can develop into successful citizens if both or just one parent is raising them states Lansford (2021), with cognitive stimulation and social and emotional support. However, Cabrera, Volling and Barr (2018) suggest that further research on parenting need to include fathers, as the majority of previous research on parenting mainly focuses on the mother.

Father and child bonding is developing, and early years settings can encourage this by offering a father child class. Fathers still feel judged when on the school run, reporting that they have a sense of isolation rather than belonging according to Fletcher (2019). Torslev *et al.* (2021) states the importance of cookery classes, bring a sense of belonging, strengthening a relationship between a father and his child, where they have to learn new skills, like cooking methods, healthy food and furthermore, broaden their cultural experiences of foods from around the world. To achieve a successful cookery class then practitioners need to learn from the fathers, by discussing their needs and skills, this can open a door to new experiences. Everyone has individual life experiences and by allowing the opportunity to share can educate others. This encourages an inclusive setting where the opinions of all are valued according to Adams, Harris and Jones (2016). However, there are many barriers to holding a father cookery class states Tully *et al.* (2018); Lechowicz *et al.* (2018). Fathers tend to withdraw from activities where they may need assistance, some fathers have work commitments, therefore would be unable to attend. A language barrier could hold some fathers back, yet their cultural knowledge may be very beneficial to the group and themselves. The use of an interpreter could assist the father to join the group, this could give him confidence to attend the class with a familiar adult yet, highlight a weakness in his vulnerability to that person suggests BMA (2022), further implications

are the cost and time. As the interpreter would need to be available for the class and who holds the responsibility of the finances (Lechowicz *et al.* 2018).

There are many benefits to holding a fathers cookery class within an early year setting. Promoting inclusive leadership, building bonds between father and child, this is a topic for further research in order to rule out the stigma of mothers being the primary carer and promote the positive effect a father child relationship can have.

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