

Section 1

Scenario - Chen is a two year old boy who has recently moved from China to Wales with his family. The family is learning English as a second language. Chen's family would like for him to start attending a local Early years setting. A smooth transition into pre-school is supported with a home visit by the settings leader followed by a taster session. This offers the child and family the opportunity to meet a familiar face and discuss any aspect of the child and setting. During this initial home visit it was clear that Chen's parents had concerns about how Chen will settle into a new provision. A discussion took place about the differences between Chinese culture and Welsh culture. Chen's parents are very proud of their Chinese culture and were concerned that Chen may lose or be embarrassed about his cultural identity. The Early years leader reassured the family that the culture of all the children at the setting is recognised, valued and celebrated. The early years setting will endeavour to ensure Open communicating and good relationships between home and setting to ensure the feelings of confidence, respect and belonging are evident from the initial introduction.

Introduction

In an increasingly multicultural society it is fundamental that Inclusion, equity and diversity are understood and embedded in the early years. According to The Welsh Government (2016) almost one in ten pupils in Wales come from an ethnic minority background.

The Welsh Government recognises the critical role of early years education and care, placing a strong emphasis on inclusion. Policies, frameworks and guidance documents are designed to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and provide inclusive practice in inclusive environments. Early years settings adhering to legislation and frameworks including The Equality act 2010 (UK Government), Inclusion and pupil support (Welsh Government 2016) and Strategic equality plan (Welsh Government 2024) show drive in striving to ensure inclusive, equitable,

quality care and education for all children regardless of their, cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, their gender, race or ability.

Wales was the first country in the United Kingdom to embed the principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Unicef 1990) into domestic law, ensuring children's rights are of paramount importance. UNCRC provides a framework supporting the rights and well-being of all children. Embracing diversity and ensuring equity. The UNCRC ensures that all children are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised. Article two states that child care settings must ensure that children are treated equally, without discrimination.

The Inclusive leader

The role of the inclusive leader is to create an environment where each individual child feels a sense of belonging and are able to be their true selves (Louis and Betteridge 2024).

It is crucial that the Inclusive Leader in early years setting acknowledges and appreciates differences in all forms. The importance of addressing cultural differences, fostering inclusive leadership and inclusive practices must be understood and embedded into the setting ethos.

To ensure Chen feels valued and respected, the early years leader will gain knowledge and understanding by listening with empathy, with an open mindset, without judgement (Bourke and Titus 2019). With these qualities the inclusive leader will model inclusive practice, inspiring and challenging others to develop an inclusive environment, being mindful of personal bias and addressing assumptions (Ferdman, Prene and Riggio 2021).

Inclusion ensures everyone feels accepted, safe and valued. Without inclusion children are less likely to participate and engage in routine or activities

Maslow identified the need for belonging as a fundamental aspect of human existence. Explaining that children have an inherent desire for meaningful relationships and community, a sense of belonging materialises when a child feels part of a group and has a sense of identity. This has a positive effect on the child's self esteem and confidence (Pichère and Cadiat 2015) However, Halse 2018)

recognises that the importance of belonging can be taken for granted or adapted in busy early years settings, challenging the promotion of inclusion, According to Kalkman and Clark (2017). A sense of belonging is crucial to children's holistic development. The feeling of belonging has an impact on children's attachments, transitions, relationships and their self belief. Inclusive leaders have the responsibility to make strong connections with the children's homes and communities to strengthen their sense of belonging. The importance of belonging is evident in the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh Government 2020) as one of their five developmental pathways, recognising the importance of relationships and social support .

Theory

Understanding the importance of diversity and inclusion in early years settings can be supported by applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This theory is based on the belief that a child's development is influenced by environmental systems that interact with one another. The microsystem includes the immediate environment in which the child interacts, namely their family, the early years practitioners and their peers. An inclusive leader can ensure a welcoming and supportive environment for all children. The mesosystem refers to the relationship between home and school. The inclusive leader can strengthen these connections (El Zaatari and Maalouf 2022).

Understanding theories of early years education provides practitioners with awareness of how children learn from their surrounding environment and the people around them. Piaget proposed that children actively build understanding of the world around them through interactions and experiences similarly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory argues that children learn through social interactions with adults and peers. These theories highlight the importance of social interactions, hands-on experience in a child centred environment. Welsh Government (2020) recognises that early years practitioners can create engaging, enriching environments that support children's development, promoting agency.

Inclusive practice

According to Guo and Dalli (2016) agency is driven by a child's efforts to bond with others and to develop a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Over (2016) states that

there is a negative effect on the child's wellbeing if they are deprived of the sense of belonging.

Murray (2019) believes that It is crucial that all children are valued with equal respect regardless of their background or individual needs, explaining that it is important that early years settings provide an opportunity for children to experience belonging by providing a welcoming, inclusive environment. Furthermore, Tillet and Wang (2018) insist that being welcomed, accepted and included promotes positive emotions such as feelings of calm, contentment and happiness. As opposed to negative feelings of sadness, depression and loneliness that can come from being ignored, rejected or excluded. Moreover, Randel et al (2018) where belongingness is facilitated, equity is ensured. The importance of belonging in the early years is evident as it is named as one of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2020) five developmental pathways that will support children's authentic and purposeful learning. It is the responsibility of the early years practitioners to make connections with the children's family and links with the community. These connections will strengthen the child's sense of belonging

Siraj Blachford and Mani (2007) suggest that when leaders in the early years encourage effective communication among staff they successfully ensure consistency of practice in all areas. Following the home visit to meet Chen's family, the inclusive leader wanted to support the whole family with language support to ensure barriers were removed in the important element of communication.

Incorporating simple phrases from Chen's native language into daily routines, may help Chen's transition into setting and beyond. Languages are explored as part of the daily routine, children are encouraged to use basic greetings, in welsh, chinese, makaton and other languages that reflect the children in the setting and the surrounding community.

Visual aids, gestures and simple language may be used to further promote communication, helping to bridge the language gap and make activities more accessible. Support for bilingual or multilingual children may be provided through training. Reflective practice will ensure that Chen's wellbeing and development are positively benefitting from support.

The early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, Te Whariki (Ministry of education 2017) supports cultural diversity, equity and inclusion, promotes the cultural identity

of all children and celebrates cultural differences aiming to give children a positive awareness of their own cultures and other cultures too.

Murray (2019) insists that it is crucial that all children are valued with equal respect regardless of their background or individual needs, explaining that it is important that early years settings provide an opportunity for children to experience belonging by providing a welcoming, inclusive environment. Being welcomed, accepted and included promotes positive emotions such as feelings of calm, contentment and happiness. As opposed to negative feelings of sadness, depression and loneliness that can come from being ignored, rejected or excluded. (Tillet and Wang 2018) practitioners must modify the environment, activities and approaches to suit individuals enabling everyone to participate in all experiences available.

Diverse and authentic resources, images and text should reflect the wider community. The inclusive leader engaged with Chen's family, inviting them to share insight into cultural traditions and stories. Ensuring celebrations and activities at the setting are inclusive of a wide range of cultural traditions. Open conversations and Curiosity is encouraged in a respectful way, promoting understanding and reducing stigma. creating a supportive environment where children can share and learn from each other's diverse experiences. Diversity can be further celebrated with cultural days where children can share traditions or items to show, promoting pride and confidence, respect and understanding of cultural differences. Stories and music can reflect different cultures from all around the world. The child should see their culture, family, and themselves reflected in the curriculum. This may involve incorporating elements from Chen's culture, providing valuable learning experiences for all of the children and staff at the setting, building Chen's confidence and promoting a sense of community and belonging for Chen and his family. By creating a more inclusive and empathetic environment in time these inclusive practices should encourage Chen to be more likely to participate in activities, build friendships and feel a sense of belonging. Ryder and Greenway (2020) state that it is a child's fundamental right to take part. Resources in the setting should reflect the diversity of the children and the families that attend the setting. Resources and displays enable children to see that they are represented, respected and valued without prejudice stereotyping. In the case of Chen, displays will include people or scenarios that reflect his native country. Items such as woks, chopsticks and crockery may be available in the authentic kitchen. During the initial meeting with Chen's family. The inclusive leader aimed to gain

knowledge and information about Chen's day to day life and about his lifestyle in China. Chen's parents were proud of their culture and agreed to share with us resources and time within the setting. Their opinions and suggestions were sought to improve the learning opportunities for the children, offering understanding of the diverse world we live in. The inclusive leader wants to avoid cultural appropriation, when aspects of culture are borrowed without understanding the history or tradition and strive for cultural appreciation where culture is learnt with respect. Vollans (2017) explains that learning can be expanded when cultural backgrounds are explained and understood when resources are introduced.

In order to successfully embed inclusivity and diversity into settings, different cultures need to be understood and respected. Practitioners must strive to understand the diverse backgrounds of all children, working to incorporate this understanding into practice. Siraj-blatchford (2006) believes that celebrating diversity in a superficial way could potentially reinforce stereotypes. Celebrating diversity should not be an occasional theme but advocates a more meaningful engagement with diversity where an awareness of individual identities is created amongst children and staff, embedding diversity in everyday practice thus promoting genuine inclusion and equality. This is supported by Li *et al.* (2010) who suggests that in many early years settings, when multicultural learning opportunities are handled in a tokenistic way children and families of minority cultures may have limited access to their own cultural values.

Conclusion

Child centre, play based curriculum promotes children's curiosity, independence and agency. These qualities are all enhanced when a child experiences positive well being and self esteem. These qualities are possible to achieve when a child feels like they belong, that they are valued. The holistic approach to learning in early years settings in Wales ensures that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to thrive, building a strong foundation for future learning and social development. By incorporating multicultural resources and teaching practices, practitioners can reflect the diverse backgrounds of the children, fostering a sense of belonging and validation.

Section 2

Introduction

According to Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) Policy makes a commitment to an approach or plan of action, reflecting the setting's values whilst promoting and influencing behaviours. According Birkland (2019) to Policy provides a framework for consistent actions and decision making, establishing clear guidelines. Furthermore Hill (2017) suggests that policies help to minimise the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Policy clearly states what is wanting to be achieved and what needs to be done in order to achieve this, providing clarity and consistency.

Policy in an early years setting ensures the setting complies with all relevant standards, laws and regulations which promotes children's rights to safety, care, development, wellbeing and positive outcomes.

The Well-being future generations(Wales) act 2015

The Welsh Government aims to promote, develop and improve the well-being of future generations by providing principles and guidelines in The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Well-being Act Places an obligation on practitioners to realise the impact that their practice has on achieving long term well-being goals. Inclusive leadership must ensure equal opportunities for all children, meaning diversity is respected and all families and communities are actively involved in the setting. The Well-being of Future Generations Act is legally binding and is made up of seven well-being goals to make Wales healthier, more prosperous, more resilient and more equal. The aim is to also Make the country more globally responsible, building cohesive communities, whilst proudly celebrating Welsh culture and language.

The act underscores the fundamental role of the Inclusive leader to ensure equal opportunities for all children, respecting diversity, and actively involving families and communities in early years practice. (Guo and dalli 2016) reports that in many early childhood settings across the world, immigrant children's voices rarely guide early childhood programmes or influence policies. This is not acceptable, Inclusive Early years practice in Wales is critical for children's learning and development. Quality early years education and care lay the foundations for life-long learning and holistic well-being. To ensure this Leaders must commit to ensuring high quality training,

providing relevant, up to date information is available in order for knowledgeable practitioners to ensure inclusive and equitable access to services. Appropriate staffing ratios are important to ensure children's interests, personalities and needs are recognised and met. The Wellbeing Act promotes collaboration among public bodies, which is crucial for the The implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. settings must also ensure regular open communication, active participation of families and communities and encouraging inclusivity. Fostering Inclusion policies that respect and incorporate diverse cultural backgrounds.

When policies are compiled it is important that appropriate respectful wording and language is used. Language must be clear to try to ensure clarity and consistency. It is also important that vocabulary used is not misleading or open to misinterpretation, ambiguous words may be open to more than one interpretation, making understanding and implementation of the policy complex or difficult to achieve in practice. Because of the diverse world we live in, the way we interpret policies can affect how inclusive practice can be implemented.

The implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act into early years provision faces challenges. One significant challenge when trying to effectively implement the well-being act into early years practice is budget limitations. Funding can affect the availability of resources, this leads to inconsistencies in the quality of early childhood education and care and support provided to children and their families.

The long-term nature of the well-being goals promoted in the act could make it difficult to measure or evaluate the effectiveness of success of the Act on early years provision.

Inclusive leadership requires continuous up to date training. Ongoing professional development is essential for early years practitioners to keep up to date with best practices especially in relation to inclusive learning, care and development. The Act indicates the importance of quality education and training however, ensuring that all practitioners have access to high-quality professional development opportunities remains a challenge

The well being and future generations act's many well-being goals could conflict with each other's priorities or be too overwhelming for early years provisions, leaders would need to balance and prioritise the needs of the children in their care, their families, and communities while adhering to the Act's framework.

Conclusion

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a framework for promoting sustainable improvement of the well-being of future generations. However, the successful implementation of the Act into early years settings requires overcoming challenges such as funding and resource constraints, professional development, and balancing multiple goals to ensure that all children have access to high-quality, inclusive early education and care.

Section 3

The early years are a fundamental time for learning and development. I am an early years practitioner inspired by Te Whariki's notion that all children are born with immense potential. Every child is unique, practitioners must recognise each child's potential and provide an environment where they can thrive. Creating a rich, inclusive environment that caters for diverse learning styles and abilities, removing barriers to ensure every child reaches their full potential. Inclusive leaders have the important role of ensuring all children feel a sense of belonging, feel valued, respected and included, building the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Inclusivity in the early years means that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, race, colour, gender, ability or circumstances feel supported in reaching their full potential. All early years settings should have an equality policy in place to support and protect children and their families, ensuring all stakeholders have a clear understanding and a framework to follow, ensuring clarity and consistency. All policies and procedures must be understood and adhered to. All children and staff in the setting should be valued and treated with equal respect with the needs of each individual being addressed and met. Inclusive leaders must ensure that all children have equal access to a range of activities, opportunities and experiences in an engaging environment, both indoors and outdoors. Barriers to participation must be overcome to ensure accessibility for all children. The inclusive leader must ensure

that a wide variety of activities are available to cater for all different interests, schemas and abilities ensuring representation of the wider community. Activities provided should include sensory play, imaginative play, physical play and a quiet space for children who want or need it. The children should be free to make their own choices with their voices being respected and listened to. Loose parts and open ended resources in the outdoors environment for me are the perfect combination as the children can use the items that they choose themselves in the way that they want to in the freedom of the outdoors. Child led learning empowers children to make their own choices. My experience as an early years practitioner has led to my passion for the child led approach to learning and development in the early years. Child led play promotes children's imagination, critical thinking skills, decision making and social development. Children thrive as they engage in meaningful, purposeful play.

Practitioners who observe children engaged in play can gain information to understand children's interests, learning patterns, strengths and needs. These observations can be reflected upon to provide tailored support strategies with clear understanding of the child's background and specific needs. It is important that knowledgeable, experienced practitioners are up to date with the ever changing world we live in with training and ongoing professional development in inclusive practice being continually provided. Practitioners who engage in reflective practices will continually improve their approach to inclusivity. Regular team meetings, one to one meetings with the inclusive leaders and supervision all support practitioners to ensure inclusion is embedded in their practice, reflective practice is key to enable practitioners to evaluate and improve their approaches to inclusivity.

Collaborating with families to understand diverse backgrounds helps children to feel seen, valued and respected. Regular communication and involvement in school activities will strengthen relationships. consistent and open communication between practitioners and families help to create support and therefore confidence and relationships.

Communication and collaboration with professionals including teachers, language support specialists, health visitors, physiotherapists and inclusion officers ensures an effective coordinated approach to supporting the children's development and addressing any barriers to inclusion identified. One of the primary roles of an inclusive leader is to establish strong partnerships with families. An open door policy promotes confidence and open communication between families and develops

respectful relationships between practitioners, children, families and communities also helping to create a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Conclusion

An inclusive leader with knowledge, understanding and empathy can promote inclusivity into the early years setting, ensuring that every child feels valued and has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Child led learning and planning in the moment incorporates diverse interests as learning is driven by the child's own interests. Open ended resources and loose parts can be interpreted as wide ranging as the child's imagination. An inclusive early years setting provides an environment where children's differences are recognised and celebrated, every child has access to a wide variety of resources regardless of background or ability. Children's well-being is promoted ensuring they can confidently learn, develop and grow with a sense of pride and belonging.

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