

ECEY6004: Inclusive Leadership: working together to support families**Part 1; Reflection****Introduction**

In accordance with Gerritsen (2020), inclusive leadership is an approach of leadership where the involvement of the social characteristics is incorporated into actions. Ensuring that actions are taken to make sure that all children's educational needs are respected (Moya, Molonia, and Cara, 2020), their rights are facilitated and fostered (Cologon, 2014), diversity is acknowledged, and those from diverse societies are recognised and are treated equally, claims Ferdman (2021).

When enabling and ensuring an early year's practice is inclusive, according with Flottman, Mckernan, and Tayler (2011), Gerritsen (2020), Agbenyega, and Klibthong (2022), the roles and responsibilities leaders hold in supporting the needs of children are not undertaken alone. They are shared and implemented with a collaborative effort by other staff members, ensuring that they are also taken into consideration and are appreciated, claim Moya, Molonia, and Cara (2020) and Theoharis, et al. (2021). As expressed by Agbenyega and Klibthong (2022), when leaderships roles are shared between staff members of a setting, it expresses and facilitates high quality learning experiences for children across the early year's provision.

Childhood Education International (2021) suggests that inclusive leadership is important for the improvement of academic learning and for all areas of children's development. Cologon (2014) claims that within an inclusive educational setting, children that come from a diverse community can attain more and develop differently in positive ways than they would if they were put into an educational setting that specialises in those diverse needs. Without an inclusive education, as Ferdman (2021) states, the emotional wellbeing of those from diverse groups may be affected, they may feel that they are not appreciated and accepted.

Below is an example of how leaders within an early year setting collaboratively worked with their practitioner to support a family and a child with impaired hearing ensuring inclusive education.

Scenario

In December last year, a new child with moderate hearing loss a condition where someone is unable to hear properly in one or both ears, as compared to those who can hear sounds clearly in both ears (WHO, 2024). Along with communication difficulties and a requirement of hearing aid, giving and aiding them the ability to hear (Inclusive Employers, 2024) due to their sound pressure level being between 26 - 70 decibels (Riesberg Institute, 2024) started in an educational setting. Over the recent months, an early year's practitioner has noticed that the child is still struggling with their transition from home to being within the setting

and has not yet felt settled. The practitioner had recognised that reason could be caused by them encountering often rejection from other children when trying to socially interact with them when playing at an activity, causing the child to become upset and feel isolated. As these observations that have occurred on multiple occasions, concerns regarding the child's social, emotional, and mental wellbeing due to the communication hurdles the child encounters were raised by that practitioner to the leaders of the setting.

In addition to the early year's practitioners concern, one of the child's parents had also raised their concerns about the child's behaviour at home to the leaders of the setting. While expressing the concern, the child's parent also asked if the behaviour that happens at home occurs within the setting when the child struggles to communicate their needs and becomes frustrated.

How well did inclusive leadership work within the scenario above?

For children:

With the acknowledgement of Article 23 underpinned within the UNCRC framework, stating that every child with a disability has the entitlement to live their life and flourish as best they can with respect (UNICEF, no date), and with the recognition that the children should have access to tools that are obtainable to support their needs (UNICEF UK, no date).

Early year's leaders within the setting mentioned in the scenario, had assured that those concerns that were raised were acted upon and dealt with through a collaborative and transformational approach.

Acknowledging that hearing loss is a rare disability that early year's practitioners many not often encounter and come across within a provision (Welsh Government, 2019).

Encouraging an inclusive education and leadership, the leaders of the setting had organised an informal team meeting, that had enabled them to include early year's practitioners and collaborate with them to plan, discuss, share the knowledge and understanding of hearing loss and deafness with each other. Additionally, bring ideas together to discover ways the child with hearing loss and their peers can develop a greater understanding of the condition and deal with it in an appropriate manner, as well as talk through different strategies and interventions that can be implemented within their practice. So that the aim of how the child mentioned above in the scenario can be supported to help them feel accepted by other children and valued within the setting. Furthermore, to decrease the stigma of deafness, can be achieved. As with the appropriate interventions implemented suggested by Martin – Prudent *et al.* (2016), it can help to improve those with a degree of a hearing impairment social and emotional growth and their linguistic skills. As impaired hearing can have a negative impact towards the children's emotional and social needs and abilities, claims Welsh Government (2019).

By involving and bringing together staff members within the informal team meeting to invite, hear and acknowledge their ideas, it assures staff that they are being appreciated and accepted within their provision. Which in accordance with PACEY (2017), can enable the practitioners a sense of motivation in continuing with providing a quality service for the children they care for and their families, as well as the setting itself.

Throughout the informal meeting that was organised ideas of how the child can feel a sense of belonging, help the child and other children within the setting develop a greater understanding and awareness, as well as to reduce the stigma and discrimination around hearing loss and deafness was expressed and shared out load so that everyone in attendance could voice their opinions. While suggestions were voiced, the team members alongside the leaders, liked and had come to a collaborative agreement on the idea of introducing the awareness of deafness or hearing loss through the provision of new children's picture books. As The National Literacy Trust (2021) and Deaf Unity (2020), both express that the utilisation of books can be a practical way of how disabilities can be addressed, especially the introduction of impaired hearing enabling it to be easily understood by children. Suggested by Gilmore and Howard (2016), books can help in supporting children to develop awareness of their own identities, of other people identities, surrounding and the different environments. Additionally, books can facilitate children the ability to recognise the different disabilities and their diverse needs and help children cope with their emotional barriers (Gilmore and Howard, 2016). The aim of the providence of these new books is to facilitate the child with hearing loss and other hearing children around them to easily understand and become aware of and address the condition from a story perspective and in a child friendly way. Through the exposure of messages that expresses the awareness of deafness and hearing loss within an illustrated children's book, Golos and Moses (2013) suggests that it can promote children with impaired hearing to become valued and encourages the hearing children to gain the ability of assuring the respect for each other. Moreover, in compliance with Golos and Moses (2013), when hearing children are exposed to illustrated children's books that expresses and relays a message of deafness and hearing loss, it can enable those children to then become helpers in supporting the practitioners to facilitate the child with hearing loss linguistic skills and behaviours. As well as children's books relaying messages of deafness and hearing loss across in many positive ways and can have a great impact on all children, some issues could arise and come into light. Some picture books for children can portray negative messages. For example, relaying the medical requirements that children with impaired hearing needs for them to attain and develop as they should, and not often foster or encourage the sense of acceptance (Golos and Moses, 2011). This can have a negative impact on the child that cannot hear as much or at all, it can lower their self-esteem and makes the child feel the need of change (Golos and Moses, 2013). Dependent on the messages that the different children books relating to deafness and hearing loss portrays, in accordance with Golos and Moses (2011), the illustration and images within the book that displays and fosters the

emotional connectiveness, relating to the children themselves can help children gain the emotional confidence of themselves and become able to accept their own individuality.

For Families:

Due to the cost-of-living crises that is happening presently around the world and early years care and educational settings also being affected in many areas (Croxon, 2024). The leaders of the setting mentioned above, have realised that the provision of being able to have access to and provide the appropriate number of new children books focusing on the awareness of impaired hearing can be limited and challenging, due to the costing of these books being prevalently high.

Despite the high costs and recognising the need for those children picture books promoting the awareness of impaired hearing that could potentially support the child mentioned above, and their peers in providing a sense of acceptance and value the child with hearing loss. Additionally, to support the child with impaired hearing family and parents to become integrated within the community they live in and reducing the stigma around deafness. The leaders while taking into consideration of their practitioner's ideas and with the children family's input, had organised a fundraising event at the setting where the awareness of impaired hearing could further increase.

For the trust and positive relationship to build between the leaders, practitioners and the child family through positive communication and feedback. Additionally, for the success of raising the awareness of deafness, the leaders had engaged with the child's family and worked together throughout the planning process of the fundraising event. Furthermore, acknowledging that the involvement of parents is key it can foster and encourage the attainment of children's learning abilities (Department for Education, 2021), leaders and practitioners had enabled the child's parents and family to participate within the event, by reaching out to the parent and their family face to face and inviting them through having verbal conversations (Yulianti, *et al.* 2020). To provide them the opportunity and the ability for them to share their knowledge and understanding. Moreover, coach other families to help them recognise what impaired hearing is as a disability and express the signs and symptoms of hearing loss to the children's parents to help them become aware of what to look out for. As in accordance with Welsh Government (2017) when engaging with parents and their families in their child's learning provisions, they become more inclined to accept advice and guidance given, when they recognise that they are welcomed and acknowledged. Suggested by Yulianti, *et al.* (2020) and Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020), engaging with families within the early years sector is defined in a series of ways, and explains that it can be seen as a process in which children's parents and their families are working in partnership with the collaborative work of their child's early year settings

practitioner to help with the facilitation and the supporting of children's holistic learning experiences.

Moreover, with the positive relationships between the parents and practitioners it can facilitate positive improvements to the children's academic learning and growth no matter their diverse needs and culture, claims Department for Education (2021). In compliance with Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020), involving and having a positive relationship with the children's parents can also have a positive impact on building of the practitioner and child social interactions and relationships. In addition to the development of children's social relationship between the practitioners within an educational environment when the responsibility to facilitate the learning and development of children is shared, it can increase children's emotional and personal growth as well, suggests Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020). Lastly, with the sense of welcome and value, Yulianti, *et al.* (2020) states that it can encourage and assure positive communication between the practitioners and the families themselves and the likelihood of them to become more engaged and connected with their children's learning experiences.

Multiagency and Community:

To raise the awareness of impaired hearing and the deafness of both children and adults further. The leaders of a setting had acted to also support the community outside of the early years setting, with the partnership working of multiagency professionals. As Welsh Government (2015), states working in partnership with the community and developing a relationship with them can provide the educational settings with an essential source of assistance that can help the setting expand and succeed. Additionally, it can help to enable children's families and parents to become active participants in their children's learning and development attainments fostering positive relationships and their level of engagement, claims Welsh Government (2016).

The leaders of a setting had collaborated with multi agency professionals, to help themselves in furthering their professional practice and to gain the appropriate knowledge and understanding of impaired hearing and deafness. So that the leaders can with the appropriate knowledge and skills deliver and offer training session within the setting to both their practitioners, their children's families and parents outside the school community. The training sessions has been organised and is designed to help everyone develop their understandings and become aware about deafness and aids families to integrate so that the child with impaired hearings parents can also develop a sense of belonging within their community. Engaging with multi agency professionals suggests Welsh Government (2016), can help the leaders in facilitating and meeting the needs of children with additional needs and those with families who are encountering challenging times. Furthermore, have suggested that with the collaboration of multi-agency professionals, it can enable and foster smoother transitional periods (Welsh Government, 2016). Which can have a positive impact

on the development and learning of the child with impaired hearing mentioned in the scenario above.

To ensure continuous inclusive leadership, the leaders of the setting mentioned above in the scenario had made sure that next steps were taken in supporting the ongoing awareness of impaired hearing. To further support the child with impaired hearing and their parents/ families, the leaders of a setting had stayed in collaboration with multiagency professionals as well as services. For example, a therapist who specialises in speech and language and other educational practitioners that specialises in deafness and has the appropriate knowledge to share (BATOD, 2019). To aid the leaders in improving their professional development, their communication skills and develop knowledge on how to implement BSL (British Sign Language) or Makaton throughout their provisions and practices. When reaching out to those professionals above to aid the leaders with their own professional growth in the development of learning BSL or Makaton, it enables and allows them the ability to then provide efficient support when practitioners require it so that they can communicate with the child with impaired hearing in their setting effectively.

Part 2; Professional guidance in Wales that claim to enable inclusive leadership.

As inclusive education is one of the many human rights that belongs to everyone (Moya, Molonia, and Cara, 2020), especially for children (Cologon, 2014), it is a central characteristic of today's leadership role, suggests Ferdman (2020). Additionally, many early educational settings worldwide are aiming to ensure that their practice is inclusive and facilitates equality and fairness, claims Angelides (2011). To assist early years professionals and practitioners in ensuring inclusion and equity for all, throughout their practice, many statutory, non-statutory, or both policies, procedures, and professional guidance's are followed and implemented (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2008).

Despite there being many policies, procedures and professional guidance's available in Wales that encourages inclusive education and expresses the roles that leaders should undertake to ensure inclusion for all. A professional guidance, the Curriculum for Funded non – maintained nursery settings that claims to enable inclusive leadership will be analysed within this section of the assignment.

The curriculum for funded non - maintained settings:

The curriculum for funded non - maintained nursery setting is a non-mandatory (Welsh Government, 2022) practical framework assembled by and with the collaboration of early years practitioners, providing advice, guidance and support for professional's and practitioners within the early year's profession states Estyn (2021).

Welsh Government (2021) states in their discussion document regarding the Curriculum for funded non – maintained nursery settings, that the curriculum was assembled from the foundations of the Curriculum for Wales structure of guidance. Furthermore, it was

developed to provide support for children between the learning stage and educational ages of 3 – 16 years (Welsh Government, 2021). Additionally, it immerses the 5 developmental pathways which are the essential characteristics of the Curriculum for Wales and is crucial within the framework (Welsh Government, 2022).

How does this policy enable inclusive leadership:

The curriculum for funded non - maintained nursery settings framework enables inclusive leadership through multiple statements that emphasises the need of belonging. Which is one of the 5 developmental pathways that is essential to facilitating children's ability to attain successful learning and development, claims Early Year Wales (no date). Additionally, is foundational to their holistic state of being happy and healthy (Wastell and Degotardi, 2017; ARNDT, 2020).

Although being a common word that is familiarised in daily and educational circumstances and experiences, explains Wastell and Degotardi (2017) and Roberts and Callaghan (2021). The phrase 'Belonging', is not easily defined. As according to Johansson and Puroila (2021), the concept of 'belonging' is broad, they suggest that it is a word that can be defined in many ways as it can be conceptualised through a variety of different perspectives, thought of and acted upon in a series of ways. In their study Peers and Flee (2014), have expressed their thoughts on what belonging is to them, and explains 'belonging' is an action that a variety of people can benefit from for them to have the possibility of integration and unity, facilitated and fostered through the emotional connections of social relationships and the embracing of an environment or a community (Wastell and Degotardi, 2017).

Although, there are a series of statements stating the prominence of the need of belonging and expressing what can be done to implemented. Enabling inclusive leadership and assuring the sense of belonging for children, one statement within the Curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings advises practitioners to make small changes to their play environment and adjustment to their provision should they want to, to assure that every child's needs are met (Welsh Government, 2022). As Long and Guo (2023) states that those with disabilities and different interests should be treated with equity, they should have the equal and fair ability to join and benefit from the same activities, social and learning opportunities as those children that do not require extra support. Meeting the rights outlined within the UNCRC Articles 23, claims Long and Guo (2023).

Exploring within an enabling environment that is well mannered and suitable for all children's needs assures the children that they are being valued and included suggests Welsh Government (2022). As to belong, is one right that associates with children and is acquired to be fostered regardless of their unique abilities, uniqueness and differences (Johansson and Puroila, 2017; Roberts and Callaghan, 2021; Long and Guo, 2023). Additionally, how children are welcomed within a setting it can impact and foster how social relationships between the adult and child are developed (Virtual Lab School, 2023).

In accordance with Virtual Lab School (2023), altering an environment to meet the needs and interests of children is an action that is undertaken continuously and not just on one occasion. As many practitioners may not feel as though they lack the knowledge or the skills essential to making changes to their environment to support the needs of children with difficulties and disabilities. Virtual Lab School (2023) have suggested that leaders of a setting can support and assist their practitioner in encouraging the improvement of an environment through the providence of appropriate tools and professional learning opportunities with guidance on what to do and how.

Part 3: How can inclusive leadership in an early year setting be promoted (My Thoughts)

Stated by Early Year's Resorces (2023) inclusive leadership can be promoted with the implementation of certain strategies and tools. Furthermore, from research that acknowledges communication is a key characteristic of being able to navigate throughout life efficiently (Lee, 2022). To help and provide an inclusive education for those children that have difficulties with the ability to communicate effectively, I believe Makaton as a strategy to enable and help those with communication difficulties, whether they have additional needs or not, to feel valued and included with an early year's setting can be embedded within practice to encourage and ensure inclusive leadership and education.

What is Makaton?

According with Sin (2020) and Corral – Granados, *et al.* (2023), Makaton is a communication process consisting of the use of hand movements to express signs and symbols with the incorporation and articulation of speech, to help with the ability to liaise with people, states NDNA (2024). Moreover, as suggested by Mistry and Barnes (2011), Makaton was formulated by Margaret Walker with assistance of Kathy Johnston and Tony Cornforth (Lee, 2022), in 1972 (Mistry and Barnes, 2011).

Who is Makaton used for?

Sin (2020) explains that Makaton has recently become a supportive tool that supports the communication needs for all children and adults now and not just for those with additional needs. In compliance with Drew (2019), this facilitates integration and the inclusion for everyone.

Mistry and Barnes (2011) and in a more of a recent study Sin (2020) believe that Makaton can support the communication needs of those who speaks English as their second or additional language with no additional delays and needs. As they can also encounter a language barrier that can influence and effect their ability to attain and acquire learning (Mistry and Barnes, 2011). The findings from Mistry and Barnes (2011), study where the use

of Makaton was investigated to support the communication, linguistic and literacy abilities of children who speaks English as their second language, showed that Makaton can help and support their ability to speak the English language effectively.

The benefits of using Makaton to support their communication needs and difficulties of children

In addition to supporting the development of the English linguistic skills for those that speaks English as an additional language. The utilisation of Makaton can support the emotional wellbeing of those with communication difficulties. As suggested by Mistry and Barnes (2011), Makaton can help to remove the emotional challenges that is encountered when communication is ineffective, helping the children to feel free from emotional distress (Drew, 2019 and NDNA, 2024). As well as reducing the emotional barriers, in accordance with NDNA (2024) Makaton can increase children's emotional confidence, it can enable children to express their how they are feeling, their thoughts and needs with ease.

How to implement and integrate Makaton within practice to promote inclusive leadership?

To promote the inclusion of staff and to help them provide an inclusive education within an early year's setting, in compliance with Mistry and Barnes (2011) and Conway (2024), the integration of Makaton can be implemented through the facilitation and the providence of Makaton training, which is a requirement for it to be successful. Makaton training as suggested by Conway (2024) can help practitioners enable children to feel valued and gain that feeling of belonging, as well as help practitioners understand how Makaton can be incorporated within their practice. Once having the training, practitioners can then integrate Makaton efficiently within their practice and teach the children how to use Makaton through singing nursery rhymes and songs (Lee, 2022).

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