

Inclusive Leadership

Section 1

Society is changing at a vast rate, and it is essential that we accept these changes in an inclusive and open manner. Bearing this in mind, leadership styles and the beliefs of management, can have a detrimental effect on inclusiveness within an Early Years Setting. Historically, Early Years Settings have been maintained under a hierarchical and commanding style of leadership, whereby the decision-making process typically flows down from the Setting's Leader (Goleman, 2017). This usually takes the form of senior members dictating to members of staff what needs to be done, without providing other members of the staff the opportunity to share their own thoughts. Within this situation, management behaviours can be restricting, due to an individual's personal mindset (Siraj and Hallett, 2016).

Inclusiveness plays an extensive part in today's society, but what exactly is 'Inclusiveness'? Previously, inclusive practice focused on the removal of systemic barriers, and inequalities preventing individuals with learning or physical disabilities from being treated as equals (Crutchley, 2018). However, today's society differs in numerous ways, these include cultural and religious differences, gender equality, sexual identification or orientation, and poverty. Therefore, for inclusive practice to be successful, an understanding and acceptance to this diversity must be undertaken (Ferdman, *et al.*, 2021). Inclusiveness enables individuals to have a sense of belonging, acceptance, and a feeling of safety. Ferdman (2014) states further that, when an individual is provided with a sense of value, they are provided with a voice, to have the confidence to engage, participate and contribute within the workplace and wider community.

To provide this sense of empowerment, it is essential that an inclusive and democratic leader possesses the ability to decentralize themselves. This provides an environment whereby individuals can challenge their own beliefs, ideas and values, by learning from others in a non-discriminatory situation (Booyen, 2014.p. 306). An Inclusive Leader must be actively involved and committed to managing a diverse, equally inclusive environment and having the confidence needed to challenge policies, attitudes, and behaviours of others (Ferdman, 2014 and Rapp and Corral-Grandos, 2021.p. 423-439). Enabling the facilitation of belongingness and shared

decision making, encourages diverse contributions and an environment which ensures everyone is treated with respect, equality and justice (Randel *et al.* 2018.p. 190-203). Brown (2022) states that when an inclusive leader recognises that they have the means to facilitate and transform other individuals, by the means of equality and power sharing, they have the potential to inspire individuals within the setting. Hallet (2013) reinforces this fact by explaining that when a working partnership is based upon equality, it creates enabling and empowered individuals, due to their self-awareness and newfound self-confidence (Vollans, 2017).

Bourke and Titus (2019) disclose that when demonstrating an inclusive leadership style, it enables positive relationships to be built within the local society. This is accomplished due to the visual commitment to challenge the status-quo demonstrated by practitioners, by recognising their humility and acceptance that wrong choices can be made, and their ability to reflect on a situation to rectify and overcome these issues (Bortini *et al.*, 2018). This awareness and open mindset to others, enables deeper curiosities to be sparked, embracing other cultures, beliefs and ideas, and allow for an effective collaboration connected to the Early Years vision and mission (Ferdman, *et al.*, 2021.p. 20-21).

When inclusive leadership is central to a child's development, it provides the child with a sense of belonging (Kalkman and Clark, 2020.p. 120-132). As stipulated within Bowlby's (1969) attachment and Maslow's (1943.p. 26-47) Hierarchy of Needs theories, the sense of belonging is paramount to a child's cognitive and socio-emotional development, in addition to their own self beliefs and their capabilities to fulfil their future potential (Tillett and Wong, 2017.p. 37-49). The Early Years Alliance (2024) maintain and support this theory, stating that, an effective inclusive practice, provided children with support and opportunities during the most influential years of their development. An open inclusive setting, provides both the child and their families a voice, allowing safe and open communication, whereby, trust can be gained between children, practitioners, families, and the wider community.

Scenario

‘A new child has arrived at a nursery setting; she is four years old. During the initial introduction meeting with her parents, her father explains that they are a Royal Air Force family on an external posting away from their parent unit. However, due to the location of the setting, there are no other forces families within the area. The mother has raised concerns, as within the last year, due to family relocation, this will be the second setting that their daughter has attended. Previously the child has demonstrated behaviours associated with attachment issues.’

Within this scenario it is essential that an Inclusive Leader acknowledges the fact that, although this family is not the traditional traveller family, they do however follow the same nomadic lifestyle (NMFA, 2024 and Lester et al., 2016 a (p. 938-949) and b (p. 14-24)). There are two pivotal issues within this scenario which need to be addressed. Firstly, the child’s transition into the new setting and secondly, the family’s integration into the community.

It is crucial that an Inclusive Leader, understands the issues faced by this individual family. By accessing ‘Living in our Shoes’ (Gov UK, 2021) it provides practitioners with an understanding of the challenges faced by UK Armed Forces Families today, such as deployment, and the importance of the wider force’s community. By accessing this document, it enables Inclusive Leaders to decentralize themselves from their own personal values, beliefs or ideas, by gaining an insight to the lives and challenges of other’s (Ferdman, *et al.*, 2021). This decentralization process enables practitioners in accordance with Vygotsky (1978), to scaffold the child and the family, to ensure they gain a sense of belonging.

Although The Centre for Social Justice (2016) and DeVoe *et al.* (2018.p. 2138-2148) stipulates that military children display more resilience than that of civilian children, they do nevertheless require additional support when faced with separation anxiety (Williamson *et al.*, 2018). McElhinny (2023.p. 259-269) and the National Military Family Association (NMFA, 2024) expands further, that when dealing with separation anxiety in a child who is a dependent of serving personnel, it is paramount the child is provided with a primary point of contact or a key person (Olsson, 2021). A

knowledgeable Inclusive Leader can provide the child with continuity within a disruptive period of their life (Nelson *et al.*, 2019.p. 1-12., Wolf *et al.*, 2016.p. 26-40).

Within both Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth's (1970) Attachment Theory (as cited in Bretherton, 2013.p. 57-96) a disruption between the emotional bond of the child and their primary caregivers, can affect both a child's emotional and psychological development. However, Alfano *et al.* (2016.p. 17-29) and Early Years Matters (2023) states that when provided with a key person, it enables the child to form a secure relationship with an individual who is sensitive to the child's emotional and well-being needs. When initiating an Inclusive Leadership Approach, the key worker can provide the child with an equal, diverse, and inclusive environment in which a triangle of trust can be developed (Nutbrown, 2014). Once developed, this triangle of trust and respect, provides opportunities for practitioners to alleviate external stress or pressure, experienced by the child whilst in the setting, providing a safe environment in which they can thrive (Russo & Fallon, 2014.p. 407-416., Olsson, 2021., and Randel *et al.*, 2018.p. 190-203).

The introduction of a key person can assist with providing the family and child with a reassuring point of contact (PACEY, 2021). In addition, by providing the family with a knowledgeable practitioner, enables a positive relationship to be developed (Bhowmik *et al.*, 2023.p. 139-156). Furthermore, working together with the family, can provide both the child and the family a voice in the decision-making process, enabling each individual to regain empowerment within the situation (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2022.p. 1-17). Due to this nomadic situation, Armed forces children and families long for a sense of belonging, but due to the constant relocation this is somewhat difficult (Longfield, 2018., and NMFA, 2024,). Fernman (2014) and Booyson (2014) insist that for an individual to thrive, this sense of belonging must be established, through a shared commitment for the uniqueness and common good for every individual. Nutbrown (2024) supports this, by stating that for the principal of the 'unique child' to succeed, a child's individualism and heritage must be respected. The implementation of a key person approach enables practitioner to gain an understanding of what is important to the child and their family, this provides individuals the sense of acceptance, belonging, safety, and their opinions are valued (Ferdman, 2018.p. 157-167).

However, a key person approach can become problematic when the individual is unavailable due to illness or training purposes (Mentally Healthy Schools, no date). In addition, due to cuts in funding and staff ratios, this option can be quite difficult to maintain for the duration of the deployment (Tremlett, 2024. and BBC, 2021). Although beneficial for the family and the conveyance of information, an individual point of contact, does nevertheless, provide opportunities for miscommunication between setting staff (Birth to 5 matters, no date, a and b). However, this can be overcome by allocating a shared caring approach, through which two members of staff are responsible for the well-being and emotional support for the child and their family (PACEY, 2021).

When addressing the second situation within the scenario, it is important that an Inclusive Leader explores a family-centred approach. Within this situation an Inclusive Leader can seek assistance from external agencies and within this collective group of individuals, opportunities for a shared thinking process can occur (Hadfield, Jopling, and Needham, 2015).

Rouse, (2012.p. 17-26) explains that the core principles of a family-centred approach is to provide the family a culturally sensitive, inclusive, and unbiased flexible approach, in which professionals work alongside the family, providing the best possible solutions for their unique needs. When there is respect, understanding, and a sense of empowerment for the family within a family-centred approach, positive outcomes can be achieved for both the child and the family.

Hughes-Scholes & Gavidia-Payne (2019.p. 719-729) states that within this approach, the family must be recognised as an essential pillar of the child's support system. Further discussing that when the family are provided with a personalised support strategy, it has the ability to improve the psychological and developmental outcomes of the child (McCarthy *et al.*, 2021.p. 1-32. and Popova *et al.*, 2022). McCarthy *et al.* (2020.p. 46-57) clarifies that when families feel empowered within the decision-making process, it enables positive relationships to be built between the family and practitioners. This enables an increase level of family involvement, interaction and openness between the family and the setting due to the strengthened bonds created. Retamal-Walter *et al.* (2022.p. 645-659) and Berger & Font (2015.p. 155-176) elucidate that when provided with professional intervention, it is essential

that the family is considered as the central element, and that it is necessary to involve agencies that understand the families' circumstances.

Clever & Segal (2013.p. 13-39) continues by stating that for a family-centred approach to be successful, partnerships must be formed with individuals who have a better understanding of a family's circumstances. Within the above situation, the involvement of charities such as Soldiers', Sailors', and Airmen's Family Association (SSAFA, 2024) and Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF, 2024) can provide a crucial insight to the imperative support required to assist the uniqueness of this family's situation in its current circumstances. Due to the diversity within the UK Armed Forces, social workers and support workers within both SSAFA and RAFBF, have a vast experience of working within an inclusive manner, possessing an understanding of an individuals need of acceptance, a sense of equality and belonging within an authoritarian culture (Clever & Segal, 2013.p. 13-39). Goletz (2023) and Julian *et al.* (2017.p. 106-118) identify and acknowledge the importance of a family intervention process, stating that when provided with support, and the opportunity to be treated as an equal, in which they feel that they are being heard, enhances a parent's ability to reflect on situations that are being experienced.

However, although society is changing, wives and dependents within the UK Armed Forces still experience oppression. This unfortunately results in individuals refusing assistance or help from external professionals, due to the belief that seeking assistance is a sign of weakness (Lester *et al.*, 2016a).

When provided with the support from SSAFA and RAFBF, the Ministry of Defence believes that social and public stigma associated with the negative stereotype that has been associated with the UK Armed Forces and overseas conflict, can be removed (Gov UK, 2021). Forbes *et al.* (2013.p. 957-965) states that this negative stereotype can cause dependants and serving personnel, social uncertainty, and can result in forms of anxiety or depression. Sadly, within the Armed Forces, stigma surrounding mental health issues is still a serious issue, and due to this, it is cited as one of the most common barriers why serving personnel or dependents do not seek assistance (Gov UK, 2021). As an Inclusive Leader, Mind Cymru (2024) believes discriminatory behaviour should be challenged, and the removal of systemic barriers such as stigma can be eradicated. Stating further, that when individuals are

educated or become aware that anyone at any time can suffer with mental health issues, the taboo and stigma associated with the subject will be removed.

It is essential that an Inclusive Leader understands the importance of the school community, to provide a safe and welcoming environment for every individual. However, it is also important that the school community values both individual differences and the diversity within its society (Brodie & Savage, 2015). As with any situation or scenario, it is crucial that an Inclusive Leader recognises the ecosystem within their local community, as this is required to fulfil the needs of every individual within their locality (CEI, 2021). When achieving an Inclusive Community Practice, it is necessary for an Inclusive Leader to collaborate, share and support stakeholders within the school community. This enables a social commitment to the development of an inclusive environment, whereby knowledge, understanding and respect are acknowledged and where cultural resources can be shared (Vollans, 2017).

Within this scenario, the wider forces community is essential for the family's wellbeing, safety and the sense of belonging. This may be because there is no discrimination towards the individuals on arrival, in addition to a community support network which has already been established (McGuire & Steele, 2016). However, when deployed into a civilian community, due to today's diversity, migration and the beliefs of some individuals, a prejudice can be displayed against the uniform and what it represents. This stigma maybe a result of past personal or family experience, in which the individual has experience discrimination themselves (Souto-Manning *et al.*, 2021).

To overcome these challenges, an Inclusive Leader can provide opportunities for the family to become an integral part of the school community, this could involve an introduction to the National Parent Teacher Association. Within this process, every individual within the group has one shared mission, to advocate for the rights of every child and to empower every family (National PTA, 2022). Although an Inclusive Leader can provide these opportunities, Anderson, (1998) (cited in Scanlan and Johnson, 2020. p, 234) explains that practitioners sometimes encounter difficulties when trying to engage with parents and that occasionally an opposing effect can occur. However, Wheeler and Conner (2009) (cited in Lindon and Lindon, 2012. P. 143) believes that this misconception of the parent being opposed or demonstrating

a 'Hard to Reach' persona, may in matter of fact be the result from the view of the practitioner and not that of the parent. Thus, conflicting with the importance of the rights and the voice of the child and family (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2022.p. 1-17). Due to this, it is paramount that an Inclusive Leader, has the rights of the child and the wellbeing and inclusion of the family at the forefront of their decision-making process. Although sometimes wrong decisions can be made, Hallet (2013) explains that it is essential that the practitioner reflects on their practise and decision outcomes, to enable continuous learning and self-awareness.

To conclude, an Inclusive Leader has the ability to decentralize themselves from their own personal beliefs and idealisms, to show empathy, understanding and are curiosity to gain a cultural intelligence, due to being an active listener, and their ability to cross cultural boundaries. Enabling a collaborative, unbiased decision-making process, where the Inclusive Leader shares their power by providing individuals with a voice, which is valued and respected. Challenging discriminatory practice and promotes inclusiveness through supporting inclusion, equality and diversity by advocating policy changes.

Section 2

To enable practitioners to undertake the role of an Inclusive Leader, it is essential that policies and professional guidance, provide a clear means to support equality and diversity within early years provisions. Within this section a discussion between both macro and micro policies will be made, in addition to a critique of the significance of The Race Equality Action Plan for Wales, on macro level (Welsh Gov, 2021).

Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2016) explain that a policy is a set of administrative plans, stating an intention of a planned course of action, on an identified issue, that will be undertaken by the owning body. Levin (1999) (as cited in Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2016) states that on the creation of the policy, ownership belongs to the political, governmental or organisation who created the document. The owner must take responsibility for the commitment, and course of action required for a specified issue and demonstrate its formal adoption within the owning body. When implemented correctly, policies provide the framework required for consistent and fair decision-making process (Walsh, 2024). Bardach & Patashnik, (2024) discusses that the key attribute of a policy includes, a clear and specific document, which is evidenced-based; inclusive; informed; and has the ability to be monitored and measured, but critically, achievable.

Ferdman *et al.* (2021) determined that due to the administrative status of the organisation creating the policy, it can be described as either a macro or micro policy. Explaining that when a policy is created by either a national or local government, it is categorised as a macro policy. This document is an umbrella law, act or policy which influences micro settings policies. Although compiled at government level, these document consists of 'policy speak' and technical jargon which provides an opening for misinterpretation (Dorey, 2014). Suggesting that individuals with powerful socioeconomic background, create these Governmental Acts, without the necessary collaboration with individuals from both the micro and macro social diverse society (Ferdman *et al.* 2021). However, when a policy is created within a setting, due to the close proximity of the identified individuals, this micro policy has the ability to collaborate directly with the targeted individuals (Ferdman *et al.* 2021).

Hudson *et al.* (2019.p. 1-14), Besic (2020), and Bradbury, (2013) believe that equality policies within the early years settings, have previously been associated with disability, having favoured the self-directed 'ideal learner' and are inadequate for today's diverse society. In addition, Naumann (2018) states that because settings are ill-equipped financially, the expectations documented within the Governmental macro policies are unachievable.

The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (Welsh Gov, 2022) due to the complexity of the issue, was created with the co-collaboration of Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic children, young people and adults, to tackle race inequality and institutional racism. Under pinned by the Equality Act (2010), it has been designed to adopt an approach in which anti-racism is integral to government policies, formal and informal rules and regulations (Children in Wales, 2020).

Due to the collaboration of individuals directly affected by racial inequalities, and the link with the 'Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world' section within the four purposes of the Curriculum of Wales (Hwb, 2022b), it provides practitioners the tools needed to achieve an inclusive learning environment, whereby individuals have a sense of uniqueness and belonging (Booyesen, 2014.p.306).

Attributing to fact that this is a macro Welsh governmental policy, it is extremely lengthy, containing ambiguous phrases, which can become open to interpretation.

On closer examination, in spite of the fact that this document has been created to targeting racial inequalities, there is a lack of formats in which this policy can be viewed, such as Welsh being the only alternative language available, which realistically is discriminative in itself (Welsh Gov, 2022.p.2). In addition, whilst there is a summary version available, unlike the format adopted with the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (Hwb, 2022a) with easy read information and imagery, this document possesses both technical jargon and 'policy speak', and provides opportunities where misinterpretation may occur (Amin-Ali, 2021).

Within this document there are a number of goals which have been set for settings and school to achieve, one of which is to 'Make it mandatory to include the teaching of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and contributions across the revised Curriculum for Wales.' (Welsh Gov, 2022.p.45). However, Williams, (2021) states that

currently there is no systematic approach within Initial Teacher Education, and that feedback from Higher Educational Institutions suggests that to achieve this agenda, new guidance and training are required. Expanding further by stating that, for teaching practitioners to prioritise this area of learning, key barriers such as competence, confidence, knowledge, resources and time restraints must be overcome (Williams, 2021). The BBC, (2021) acknowledges, that there is a crisis of cultural diverse educational practitioners in Wales who can provide a positive role model for these individuals. To achieve this, it is essential that provisions are secured to encourage wider ethnic and multi-cultural individuals into the teaching and early years sector.

Additionally, these restraints, harbour the achievement of the goal 'To create an anti-racist teaching workforce through embedding anti-racist professional learning.' (Welsh Gov, 2022.p.47). Although the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan was co-conspired, Williams (2021) states that at the micro level there still exists a lack of shared knowledge and expertise between peer's or from school to school. Without this shared knowledge, a setting can demonstrate a difficulty in promoting innovation within the area of diversity and equality.

Although it is essential for setting to achieve the goals stated within the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, Tremlett, (2024) explains that due to the current financial restrictions within the school budget and staffing ratios, some of the stated goals may be unachievable currently.

To concluded, this macro Action Plan, enables Wales to tackle racial discrimination at a government level. It provides goals and recommendations in which policy makers, and practitioners on a micro level, can develop and discuss, collaboratively with the social groups affected by these issues. However, until multi-cultural groups, feel a sense of value, belonging and equality within today's society, this void in multi-cultural, practitioners and teachers within the education and care sector, will still exist. In addition, current governmental cutbacks within the care and educational sectors, are causing a detrimental effect on ration numbers within settings. Both of these issues needed to be tacked, before communities can benefit for the diversity of today's society.

Section 3

To shelve or not to shelve, that is the question!



(Source: Krieg, 2023)

Within the developmental pathways set out within the Welsh Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care framework for 0 to 3 year olds, the sense of 'belonging' is paramount (Hwb, 2023). Providing children with opportunities to shape their sense of self acknowledgment and understanding of who they are (DofE, 2024).

Today's society is diverse in numerous ways, and as early years practitioners, it is our responsibility to provide opportunities for the children within our care (Devarakonda, 2021). They should be provided with a safe inclusive environment in which to explore, understand and value their diversity, and to gain a sense of belonging within the setting and community (Booyesen, 2014).

Promoting Inclusivity within our Settings

Within our settings, children have ample opportunities to access picture or imagery resources, whether they are images within books, pre-determined displays, or physical resources, such as puppets or dolls. But on closer inspection, how many of these images actually represent every individual within our setting or community?

As Inclusive Leaders, it is our responsibility to challenge these stereotypes, by providing alternative, all-inclusive resources (Mirza, 2024). How many times, have we as individuals picked up a book such as Little Red Riding Hood, and how many times has the image depicted the stereotypical Caucasian, able bodied, female? What does this image demonstrate to the children within our care? Where does it state, that Little Red Riding Hood was in matter of fact a little girl, let alone Caucasian? If we as practitioners do not challenge these stereotypes and resources, how do we demonstrate to the future generations, that we are an inclusive society?



(Source: (Hartigan, 2013)

Overcome and Conquer

We must appreciate that traditional book such as these, did have their place generations ago. However, the world is a different place to when these books were first published, and the diversity of today's societies must be equally represented



(Source: Pragmatic Mom, 2024)

(Chan, 2022). To overcome such issues, we as Inclusive Leaders, must seek assistance for the multicultural families within our community (Borkett, 2018). By initiating such relationships, enables us to explore a wide genre of texts, in a multitude of languages. Providing a shared understanding and contribution, we as school community have the ability to learn from each other (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2021). This sense of belonging encourages families to take an active interest

in their child's education (Wilson, 2016). Enabling multicultural social groups to engage and share traditional stories from their own culture, with individuals who would not usually have access to such texts or knowledge (Woodstein, 2024). Although as practitioners we are very mindful in how we convey such story's, we as individuals, may only possess a basic understanding of the topic. For this reason, it is essential that these stories are share by the community which are knowledgeable in such matters, preventing misinterpretation and discrimination towards this specific social group (Adam *et al.*, 2019.p. 549-563). If, however, this is unachievable, there are a vast collection of multicultural books available.



(Source: Santone, 2016)

By providing access to these texts, enables children the opportunity to explore and investigate the diverse content. Providing opportunities for all individuals to identify themselves within the pages and enabling a sense of belonging and equality.

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