A Critical Evaluation of the Role of the Inclusive leader within a Scenario.

This section of the portfolio aims to explain the term inclusive leadership whilst critically evaluating the experience of the inclusive leader's role in an early year's scenario. It will look at potential opportunities and barriers to inclusive leadership when working with children, families, professionals and communities.Isles-Buck and Newstead claim that high quality early years settings have inclusive practice at their core, with setting managers promoting inclusivity whilst tackling stereotyping within the setting. Hallet (2016) agrees that promoting stereotypes is detrimental to inclusive practice, but within an educational setting, inclusive practice is the responsibility of all staff members, not solely management. This shared responsibility is what Booysen (2021) believes contributes to inclusive leadership. Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) state that a non-hierarchical type of leadership where all members lead from within promotes inclusivity, as the knowledge and initiative of individuals can emerge at any level of the organisation, identifying and acting on opportunities and challenges as they arise. According to Ferdman (2021), inclusive leadership is a type of leadership that focusses on the importance of diversity within communities or groups. An inclusive leader will recognise and appreciate the differences between individuals and be proficient in explaining the importance of diversity. Inclusive leaders do not tolerate discriminatory behaviour and challenge unpleasant biases. Booysen (2014) agrees, also stating how inclusive leadership enables individuals and groups to collaborate respectfully, remaining dedicated to achieving a culture that celebrates uniqueness whilst pursuing outcomes that benefit all. Ryan (2006) states how inclusive leadership is informative, with the whole community of the setting educated on inclusivity, being students, their parents, teachers and administrators, as within diverse settings it is claimed that individuals do not know much about each other, and the impact exclusive practices can have. Booysen (2014) believes that inclusive leadership is important in promoting an institutionalised culture of inclusion. Learners in an inclusive early year's setting will feel comfortable and safe, being confident to express their true selves and explore possibilities, which according to Maslow’s theory, contributes to an individual being able to reach their full potential (Aubrey and Riley, 2022).

This leads on to the scenario to be evaluated: **A four-year-old Muslim child with English as an additional language, whose family sought refuge from Syria was noticed to be wearing shoes that were too small for them. The nurse that had noticed, passed her concerns on to the class teacher who decided to approach the child and later the child's parent(s) at pick up time. Upon mentioning the ill-fitting shoes, the child described them as their trainers that make them run fast. However, on speaking with the child's father, he broke down in tears explaining that the family had been evicted from their home a few days previous and that all they had were the clothes on their backs and that the child was having to wear shoes from their sibling who is of the opposite sex. The class teacher was shocked and offered support and help in the way of clothing and shoes, but the offer was declined.**

This is an example of intersectionality, where more than one factor comes together to build a bigger picture of the oppression and discrimination this family may be facing (Coaston, 2019). As a Syrian family, they are classed amongst an ethnic minority group within Wales. As a refugee family, they are classified by their immigration status, which Parker (2018) claims puts them at risk of discrimination and racism. Having English as an additional language places the child and their family into another intersecting category, where individuals can experience direct and indirect discrimination (Leung, 2015). Being evicted from their home could be a result of low income and living in poverty, which Manstead (2018) claims puts them at an increased risk of discrimination due to them being perceived as lower class. Being Muslim, places individuals at another intersection where they face discrimination for their religion (Welply, 2017).

Children

According to Winkler (2009) infants as young as six months can categorise individuals by their race, with children between the ages of three and five forming their own racial biases and excluding or holding power over those who look different to them in their play. There is potential for the child in the scenario to experience this type of racial exclusion within the setting as their skin colour is different to the majority of children

within their class. According to Souto-Manning *et al.* (2021) children of colour who are also immigrant children, often do not feel a sense of belonging within the environment, which could have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and development. Welsh Government (2023) include belonging as one of the five development pathways in the Curriculum for Wales, stating that it is an important contributory factor in the holistic development of learners that can be supported by positive interactions between practitioners and learners. At a micro level, inclusive leaders within the setting can recognise and challenge inequities, holding individuals accountable for creating an inclusive environment, explaining why and how it matters to be inclusive (Ferdman, 2021). At macro level, inclusive leaders are implementing policies such as, Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, to tackle racism, having recognised the importance of all individuals feeling a sense of belonging and tackling the issue of discrimination within education settings (Welsh Government, 2022a). UNICEF (no date) states that all children have the right to an education and a life free from discrimination. Isles-Buck and Newstead (2019) state that for inclusion to be part of practice, leaders need to keep up to date with policy, ensuring they and other practitioners understand the terms equality and inclusion and how they can be implemented.

With regards to the child wearing shoes described by the father as being for the opposite sex, Culhane and Bazeley (2019) claim that children start to recognise gender differences around the same age that they become aware of differing ethnic identities. When the child in the scenario was asked about his shoes, they did not state that they were girl’s or boy's shoes, but rather as shoes that ‘’made them run fast’’. This could be because the child is yet to recognise gender differences, or it could be because the practitioners in the setting have achieved an environment that does not promote gender stereotypes. Mulhane and Bazeley (2019) state that when a practitioner challenges gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, the psychological and physical wellbeing of children can improve as they are not subject to peer bullying due to non-conformity.

Having been evicted from the family home could imply that the family are living in poverty. Hughes and Davies (2019) state that childhood poverty can lead to the child experiencing social exclusion due to difficulties in sustaining friendships and engaging

with peers. This often leads to bullying, along with not belonging to the dominant race, religion, social class or the wearing of inappropriate clothing (Hughes and Davies, 2019). As a refugee child, forcibly displaced from Syria, they are at an increased risk of suffering with poor mental health and a variety of emotional problems due to the potential trauma and adversity they have experienced. (Michalek *et al.,* 2021). Although they are no longer living in a country at war, they still face everyday challenges such as language barriers, which they are known to have as they are learning with English as an additional language (EAL), poverty, and racial discrimination (Michalek *et al.*, 2021).

Booysen (2014) states how an inclusive leader listens to the child's voice, which is a right of the child. When there is a language barrier, the practitioner needs to look for non-verbal ques and read the child's body language. For the child to feel a sense of belonging in the setting the practitioners could learn some phrases from the child's first language. Devarakonda (2020) states how listening to the child about how they identify themselves is important, and that practitioners should not hold stereotypical attitudes or expect children to conform to the majority culture. Treating individuals with respect will help children to develop their own unique identity, feeling accepted and included. Moyles, Payler and Georgeson (2017) state that inclusive practitioners should aim to learn from the children as much as they expect the children to learn from them. This can lead to a more child centered approach to teaching whilst also being able to acknowledge the diversity of the children within the setting and share appreciation for the uniqueness of individuals (Ferdman, 2021).

The Family

Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020) maintain that children's development is reliant on input from their families and that when professional input is also seen, the child's holistic development is positively affected. Scanlan and Johnson (2020) agree, stating that the developing child sits within the families influences, which is a theory supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny, 2017).

However, practitioners' communication with families can be challenging when they come from diverse backgrounds (Oke, Butler and O'Neill, 2020). Evangelou *et al.*

(2013) state that some families may be hard to reach due to being excluded, vulnerable or isolated from the setting, which can be caused by being from an ethnic minority group or speaking a different language to that of the country they reside in. They might also lack key skills such as confidence, income, and housing. In the scenario, the father seemingly fits into these categories. Evangelou *et al.* (2013) claim that it might not be that the families are hard to reach but the services to support them may be inaccessible to them. The practitioner in the scenario would not have been aware of the challenges being faced by the family if they had not approached the father at the end of the day. This poses the question of, 'why didn't the family inform the setting of their situation?'. Perhaps the practitioners have not made themselves available before and after sessions, which Estyn (2020) claims is an important way of inviting parents to share information with them. Moreover, Rodd (2013) claims that inclusive leaders in the early years value the relationship between families and the setting, appreciating the importance it plays in the child's holistic development. By involving families in decisions empowers them to be in control and have a say over their lives. The practitioner in the scenario potentially approached the parent and the child without a wider thought as to why the child may be wearing ill-fitting shoes. The ability of the practitioner to decenter themselves, by opening their thinking and looking at things from the viewpoint of the child or the family, is a way of inclusive practice (Katz, Miller and Biggs, 2021).

The Community

CSIE (2020), state that to promote inclusion, relationships between communities and schools must be sustained and that inclusion in schools needs to be recognised as an important factor of inclusion in society. OECD (2015) recognise that for immigrant families and children to overcome adversity it is important that schools and local communities offer help, with collaboration between the two being more effective in promoting inclusion. Arar (2020) states that schools and communities need to work cooperatively to overcome the challenges that refugee children and their families face, by continually working on attaining social justice and equity, especially in the form of curriculum and testing. Ferdman (2021) states that this cooperation is an example of inclusive leadership. As previously mentioned, the family in the scenario posess many

intersectional factors that could lead to them being reluctant to engage with the setting. Welsh Government (2013) states that family engagement can be strengthened by developing community partnerships. Within diverse areas, inclusive leaders at settings can work in partnership with faith or race organisations and groups to build good relationships and improve the wellbeing of the children in their setting. This in turn can tackle stereotyping and discrimination whilst ensuring the setting adheres to the delivery of the Equality Act 2010 (Welsh Gov, 2013). Department of Education (2024) suggest bringing communities together to celebrate special festivals, this will not only enrich a sense of belonging to the children who's religious festival it is, but it will help develop the social understanding of the individual's who are unfamiliar with such festivities. Department of Education (2024) also recommend visiting supermarkets to familiarise children with the range of diverse cultures that are represented through the products sold. The father in the scenario discloses that they have no other clothes than the items they are wearing but refuses the practitioner's help. However, if the practitioner had communicated clearly about the settings community ethos and directed the parent to the school foyer, he may have not felt marginalised, but more accepting that it is the normal thing to do within this school. O'Sullivan (2015) explains that a successful leader needs to be proficient in communication and their ability to persuade and enthuse, however it is also noted that what is being communicated needs to be thought through and prepared, which the practitioner did not have time for in this scenario. Katz, Miller and Biggs (2021) claim that the inclusive leader should build trust, following through on promised actions whilst also respecting confidentiality.

Other Professionals

Engagement between services, agencies, schools and the community help children to be healthy and safe, enjoy life and achieve to their potential, make a positive contribution to the community and to ensure their economic wellbeing (UK Government, 2003 and Chemanais, 2009). In this case, the practitioner can communicate with other agencies to support the child and their family. The father explains how they are without a home; the inclusive leader would listen to the parent and encourage an open and non-judgmental dialogue to further understand the challenges being faced. The practitioner

could try and find out what avenues of help and support have already been explored and signpost the family to any other agencies or organisations that may be able to help. Martin (2017) suggests that communication is woven throughout the collaboration of professional agencies, and that for a coherent service to be delivered, inclusion of all staff within teams, parents and the child need to be heard and valued.

To conclude, inclusive leaders need to be proficient in communication, with the ability to decenter themselves to consider how individuals within their setting may be facing discrimination and oppression. To combat negativity in diverse groups and promote inclusion, inclusive leaders need to be confident in calling out discriminatory behaviour and being clear with why inclusion is important and how everyone plays a role in making it happen.

Section 2

A Critical Evaluation of Whether Policy in Wales enables Inclusive Leadership in Early Years Provision.

According to Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013), policies are a stated intention to act on an issue, which is proposed by individuals in a position of responsibility. It is noted that policies all policies possess common features. The first being that each policy has to belong to somebody, whether it is an organisation, political party, or an individual setting. The second is that each policy must show a specific commitment to a particular course of action. Thirdly, the body that the policy belongs to has taken responsibility for its status. Finally, the policy includes specific ways to deal with the specific issue it aims to address.

The policy that this part of the portfolio will evaluate is the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022b). This policy is written by the Welsh government and is considered a macro policy. Ferdman (2021) states how inclusive leadership is translated from macro level through a multi-layered construct down to micro level, which in the case of policies would be those such as policies written by early years settings. Therefore, for inclusive leadership to be witnessed at micro level, it needs to be seen at macro-level first.

Booysen (2021) states that inclusive leadership needs to be co-created. When evaluating the curriculum for funded non-maintained settings in Wales, it is noted that it was co-constructed for practitioners by practitioners. Although this is a form of co-construction, critical evaluation deduces that the input of individuals from more diverse backgrounds may constitute the policy being more inclusive. As Ferdman (2021) states, gaining views and ideas from many different people is key to inclusive leadership. That said, the policy's introduction clearly states that it aims to bring a sense of belonging to practitioners and children in settings where the diverse culture of Wales is celebrated. Devarakonda (2021) states that feeling a sense of belonging in a setting is obtained when children develop their own sense of identity relating to their gender, race, ethnicity, social class and age. The

images used in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings depict the diversity of children in settings (Welsh Government, 2022b) which practitioners, children and their families can relate to. OECD (2021) claims that the understanding of education policy in practice can be ambiguous, as the dialogue between macro level and micro level can differ due to the use of uncommon vocabulary. However, with the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings being co-constructed by practitioners, it means that the use of vocabulary and the way that it is written is more inclusive of the individuals that will be using it and so it should be easier for practitioners to translate into practice. OECD (2020) claims the importance of this inclusive stakeholder engagement in policy design to be influential in the way the curriculum is delivered in practice.

Within the leadership section of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, it is stated that leadership refers to all individuals that are in a supervisory, management or leadership role (Welsh Government, 2022b). It does not state that all individuals working within the setting are leaders, which is what Ferdman (2021) believes is needed for inclusive practice. Booysen (2021) states that having a setting where there are hierarchical positions does not promote an inclusive ethos, as power is not distributed throughout the system, but is concentrated to certain individuals. However, although not all staff are considered as effective leaders, those that are are expected to have good communication skills, be inspiring role models and work collaboratively with parents, and the community, which Devarakonda (2021) claims are attributes of an inclusive leader. It is also stated that leaders should respect the views of all partners when reflecting on ways to improve practice and listen to the voice of all members of the settings team, which again is an important aspect of being an inclusive leader (Ferdman, 2021). In the section of the policy about adverse childhood experiences, it is noted that settings should have an open-door policy where families and carers feel confident to share information with practitioners about issues that may be affecting the development and wellbeing of their children (Welsh Government, 2022b), Katz, Miller and Biggs (2021) state that part of inclusive practice is the ability to build trusting relationships. Lane (2008) states that inclusive practice must consider the diversity of the children within the setting when deciding on what resources to

provide, this includes books that represent different cultures fairly and positively, role play items that also do the same and designing areas of learning that are not gender specific. The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings adopts this practice, stating that the environment should include a range of authentic and open-ended resources that represent the diversity of the communities within Wales and that they are accessible to all, demonstrating inclusivity (Welsh Government, 2022b). The policy also states that the experiences offered to children within settings should be reflective of different cultures, including the opportunity to experience different languages and cultures through song, rhymes and stories, this is believed to enhance the children's understanding of diversity within Wales. Lane (2008) claims that this type of practice is inclusive.

To conclude, although there are aspects of the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings that do not fully belong to inclusive leadership and practice, the majority of the content is aimed at making sure that every child is celebrated for the individual that they are. By nurturing their sense of belonging through the representation of the diverse communities in Wales within settings, children will build their sense of self identity.

Section 3

Inclusivity – Are your resources reflective of our diverse communities? Home corner

Cultural diversity in Wales is ever expanding, with an average of over 11% of all school pupils coming from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (Welsh Government, 2019). Therefore, an important topic to consider in the early years is whether settings recognise this, appreciate it and celebrate it. Firstly, an inclusive leader needs to be reflective and knowledgeable about different cultures (National Day Nurseries Association, 2022) Increasing knowledge can improve an individual's ability to recognise and appreciate different cultures and celebrate them appropriately which can in turn influence the type of resources an inclusive practitioner may want to include in their setting. Devarakonda (2021) suggests that the resources found within early years settings play an important role in child development, particularly the development of self-identity.

Look around the home corner in your setting and consider whether you are leading inclusive practice.

The Welsh Government (2019) claims that 3% of registered teachers in Wales are from ‘another ethnic group’, which is disproportionate to the number of pupils. This means that most children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are being cared for and educated by teachers from a White background. Therefore, for a practitioner to be inclusive of the diversity of the setting, they need to think openly about the cultures and experiences of all children within the setting. By decentering themselves they can broaden their knowledge and provide resources and opportunities that are reflective of everyone's personal identities. Ferdman (2021) states that an inclusive leader needs to think about what is missing from an environment that would make it more inclusive. Department of education (2024) agrees, stating that practitioners need to reflect on whether the setting reflects the diversity of the community, considering whether

resources such as dolls and small world figures, and books are representative of the diverse cultures of the world. Devarakonda (2021) agrees, stating that also that resources within the roleplay area, such as kitchen utensils and cutlery are also reflective of the diversity of children with settings. Lane (2008) and Devarakonda (2021) state that to be fully inclusive, practitioners must talk with children about the diversity of resources to enable children to respect the differences of individuals. Lane (2008) claims that resources that reflect diverse communities should not be considered to be of an additional cost but should be bought continually as part of good inclusive practice. Inclusive play resources are those that positively reflect diversity, and include a range of skin colours, hair textures and other differing physical features. They may be different musical instruments, cooking utensils and clothes for dressing up. Ultimately, they must be used actively to reflect the multicultural community that exists (Lane, 2008). An inclusive leader in early years practice can uphold the child's right to develop respect for their own culture and the cultures of others (UNICEF, no date), by ensuring a range of diverse resources are available and dialogue is open and respectful.