

Section 1

Reza (2021) acknowledges how leadership in early years education has changed. Historically, the world inclusion would focus on children with special educational needs or addition learning needs. However, inclusive leadership and practice now means addressing all forms of exclusion, inequalities, and marginalisation. Barak (2011) cited in Ferdman (2021) affirms that inclusive practice should extend our thinking beyond organizational demography to empowerment and participation of all, by removing obstacles that cause exclusion. Van Knippenberg et al., (2013) discusses the importance of knowledge, as inclusive leaders need to be able to explain how diversity matters and minimize differences in identities, cultures and highlights the value of a positive diverse mindset. Ferdman (2021) supports this view by acknowledges that inclusive leadership requires skills engaging with and creating space for multiple dimensions of diversity and adjusting practice to deal with people in varying ways to suit their individual needs. Barak (2011) discusses some of the skills and competencies that underpin inclusive practice. Inclusive leaders should create inclusive environments, partnerships, and effective collaboration. Booyesen (2014) adds that respectful relational practice which enables individuals to part of a whole, aligned and committed environment that should work towards shared outcomes for the common good for all whilst still celebrating diversity and uniqueness. Ferdman (2021) supports this view and acknowledges that inclusive leadership is fostering conditions that allow everybody with their differences without hiding identities, to do their best and be their best in a safe, engaging environments where they should feel a powerful sense of belonging. Hendry (2012) acknowledges the challenges that come with ensuring that all children are included and valued but with a comfortable, welcoming environments with practitioners that are willing to listen and learn. As well as setting a framework of shared boundaries and expectations, it can be possible.

According to Rodd (2013), the concept of leadership in early years settings is evolving and should be a transformative and empowering for all individuals. Welsh Government (2022) states that the most effective leadership teams are those who invest in their team and foster leadership and accountability at every level to create an equal playing field and encourage ambition to work towards something bigger than themselves. Furthermore, Siraj and Hallet (2014) acknowledge that leadership

should be a communal concept where everybody can engage and benefit from leadership to share power. Slee (2019) highlights inclusion as a principle in education, therefore, educational settings are fundamental in shaping a child's opportunity and their experience of belonging.

Reflective Scenario

The scenario to be critically evaluated, involves a single parent who has full custody of his seven-year-old son. During his first year at school (nursery) this child has been living with their father as his mother was sentenced to time in prison. Over the last four years, there have been no significant issues or concerns with the welfare of this child. There have only been minor concerns raised regarding lack of parental support in their learning and development, such as homework and reading at home.

However, after a meeting with the father, he agreed to support from the school and there has been an effective parent-practitioner relationship continuing to support the learning outcomes of the child. Unfortunately, in the last 6 months, there has been a decline in the child's attendance and as the child is now in Progression Step 2, the communication with the father has become less frequent due to the child walking to and from school. The school has always been aware that the father has a history of mental health illness where he takes daily medication, However, this has not affected the welfare of the child in the last four years. After the child not attending school for three weeks consecutively and extremely limited contact from the father, it has been brought to the attention of the school that the father is currently suffering with his mental health and is currently in conflict with the mother regarding custody. The school has managed to organise a meeting with the child and both parents to determine the next step towards supporting the child and their family.

Souto-Manning (2021) consider the experience of belonging and a '*fundamental human need*' which has a direct link to the well-being of individuals and communities. In early years education, it can have a more profound affect as it can impact children's socioemotional development (Bowlby 1969), affecting children's belief in their potential, attachments, and transitions. In contrast, Gere and MacDonald (2010) discussed the negative impacts that can come with the feeling of being rejected, excluded, or ignored. They also found that the need to belong has strong effects on

individual's socioemotional developments and, without the feeling of belonging can lead to negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Johansson and Purolia (2021) affirm the importance of every child having a right to experience a sense of belonging, to be shown respect and valued equally, despite their background or individual needs. For the child to feel included, it is vital for them to be involved in any decisions that may affect them (Social Care Wales, 2019).

According to Ferdman (2014) The role of the inclusive leader is to create and embed interpersonal practice that provides a sense of safety, belonging, participation and voice.

The UNCRC article 12, which is part of Welsh law, where 'children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them', should be central. The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2018) included children and young adults in important meetings when setting out new policies and procedures that affecting them. She found that giving children a voice is an essential part of this work and will lead to better policies and outcomes. Social Care Wales (2019) acknowledge that there are many people involved in a child's life and it is important to keep the child at the centre of all planning. In line with the Well-being (Wales) Act (2014), keeping the children at the centre of the decisions that affect them could promote their physical and emotional well-being, protection from neglect and maintain or develop family relationships. Ferdman (2021) affirms that inclusion is related to whether people feel appreciated, safe, valued, and respected. Murray (2019) supports this view and from research, found a that early year's settings who actively gave children a voice had a better understanding of the children's needs and interests which also enables adults to positively respond to children and optimise their learning and development. Murray (2019) argues that children's well-being could be improved when their own views are considered.

Even though, The New Curriculum for Wales (2022) is to be designed by each individual school. The framework used to design it, included a curriculum accessible to all. It is recommended that the school's curriculum should be aware of the individual needs of all learners. Equity of opportunity should be considered when arranging interventions and support while still raising aspirations for all. The framework adds, using the four core purposes to progress is essential for individuals

to thrive in a complex world whilst playing an active part in their community and wider society. Furthermore, ESTYN (2018) highlights a school that has adopted the SHINE curriculum which empowers children to lead their own learning where every child has a significant voice in designing and shaping the curriculum. A well-being survey found that children having a voice had a positive impact on their, learning attitudes and approaches.

However, Murray (2017) highlights the challenges to listening to the children's voice. In particular, the practitioners attending a meeting with children and families may not know the child well enough. To enhance a child's opportunities and outcomes, it is important for all practitioners to have sufficient knowledge of child development as well as a secure knowledge and understanding of the individual child. For example, Murray (2017) states that a practitioner that may not know the child as well as their key worker could make assumptions about the child's actions or words, which could result in undesired outcomes for the child. It is important to take time to understand the child fully.

Goryl et al. (2013) and Jenkins et al. (2017) highlight the increasing concern regarding the exclusion and marginalization in many parts of the world and studies have shows that children are confronting discrimination, subjection, and bullying. Woodhead and Brooker (2018) cited in Murray and Cousens (2019) consider the impact of such actions and how they may exclude children. When their views are recognised and considered important, it provides children with a sense of belonging and identity which supports their wellbeing and development. Therefore, a disregard for children's views and opinions, diminishes their sense of self and self-regulation which could significantly impact their motivation for learning.

Hallet (2016) states that to achieve inclusive practice from all practitioners, an inclusive leader must create an environment where children feel comfortable, valued, and listened to within a framework of a shared vision. Siraj (2014) also acknowledges the importance of a shared vision in a supporting and inclusive environment so that practitioners are not working towards different or conflicting agendas. Siraj and Hallet (2014) suggest that the skills and knowledge required to do so are developed through reflective practice, training, learning and experience.

Due to the circumstances of this family, including the mother spending time in prison and the father diagnosed with a mental health illness, a range of multi-agency workers have been involved in this child's life since an early age, to support both parents. (NSPCC, 2019). Until recently, there has always been a proficient level of communication between the school and the father, the priority is to rebuild that relationship of mutual trust to create the best outcomes for the child and family. Rodd (2013) states that inclusive leadership in early years education, should be '*exercised in a climate of reciprocal relationships.*' Rodd (2013) adds that the leader should work *with* others instead of trying to assert power over them. The leader's role should be cooperative, flexible, and adaptable where communication and people skills are used effectively.

Spagungan (2014) agrees that parental involvement and attitudes has a significant impact on the well-being of the child as well as their learning outcomes. However, there may be obstacles that prevent parents from becoming actively involved in their child's education, such as practitioner attitudes, parent's misconceptions. The responsibility lies with the setting as Spagungan (2014) argues that these barriers may be overcome by continued professional development for all practitioners to create an enabling environment to make parents and carers feel safe and valued. Scanlan and Johnson (2020) supports this view and affirms that in efforts to engage parents, leaders should empower those who had traditionally been marginalized. Henderson and Mapp (2002), cited in Scanlan and Johnson (2020) provides evidence to suggest that building trusting and collaborative relationships with families and community members and acknowledging families' diverse needs whilst sharing responsibility and power, allows growth for the child in their learning.

There could be many barriers to effective communication in this scenario. Gibson (2015) acknowledges the impact of the involvement of a social worker and how it can cause prejudice and feelings of failure as a parent. As well as Mullins (2021) who notes that the shame and stigma that surrounds multi-agency involvement could prevent the parents to be open to discussions. However, Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2021) acknowledges that there is a consensus regarding the way in which people live their lives allows for the equity received. Therefore, the parents may already feel that they are not going to be treated equally due to misconceptions and stereotypes

as Reynold (2010) cited in Fenton (2017) found that some parents felt that their exchanges were misunderstood and at times, hostile when meeting with leaders.

Siraj-Blatchford and Mani (2007) cited in O'Sullivan (2015) found that the early years leaders who were most successful at imparting their vision in a way that was better understood were the leaders who created effective communication among staff. O'Sullivan (2015) acknowledges the detrimental impact that unsuccessful communication can have. Therefore, a foundation of effective communication is needed before any decisions can be made.

Martin (2017) considers how valued participation from children and families can create successful multi-agency work through collaboration. This could provide families with an opportunity to receive appropriate outcome-led interventions and provision between specialist professionals. However, Anning et al. (2010) acknowledges the challenges that come with teams working in a multi-agency way, such as inter-professional dilemmas. These may include different values within the team where different pay grades are not treated equally. Aubrey (2011) supports this view and acknowledges the challenges of leading a team of professional with different professional status and values. Harris et al. (2007) cited in Martin (2017) suggests creating an inclusive 'can do' culture and shared moral purpose as a key priority to create positive staff collaboration.

Furthermore, Welsh Government (2015) acknowledge the importance of community partnership in strengthening schools, such as relationship with parents, as schools do not exist in isolation and can benefit greatly and receive further support by developing successful community partnerships. Community partnerships can strengthen family engagement by supporting schools to overcome families' barriers to engagement by providing expertise, contacts as well as specific target groups. Similarly, Chaminade (2009) affirms that community support and involvement enhances family engagement and opportunities by setting up parental groups and working with other agencies.

Reina et al. (2013) found that having a community school approach on a meso level, including the potential outcomes of a community school approach on a neighbourhood level, had a positive impact on educational performance as well as

families feeling more involved with the school. Therefore, having greater responsibility for their children's learning and outcomes.

Section 2

Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) describe policy as a governmental and administrative practice, an expressed intention, and an action to be implemented by individuals with responsibility. Although, it was also acknowledging how the demanding and fast paced nature of the role of an early year's practitioner can distract from focussing intently on policy, and that policies are seen as something produced by 'people in suits, somewhere else.' Although, Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) argue that the people who create the policies have reason for what they do, and it is important to understand the reasons to implement them more effectively, that accepting that practitioners are helpless and must put up with the consequences of change. UNESCO (no date) emphasise how solid policies and plans are the foundation to build educational systems, achieve educational outcomes and contribute significantly to lifelong learning. Furthermore, the purpose of this section is to critically evaluate policies and professional guidance affecting early years provision. However, Hess (2013) argues that the decision makers who are formulating the policy, rarely check how the policy is being implemented and there is a vast distance between policy and practice. Therefore, This section will focus on Curriculum for Wales Guidance (2020) and Children and Families (Wales) Measure (2010) and whether it enables inclusive leadership.

The Curriculum for Wales Guidance (2020) was designed to set out the requirements for the individual design of the New Curriculum (2022) to ensure all schools cover the same core learning and develop a consistency across Wales. Knight and Criock (2021) argues that even though the guidance promotes equality, the feeling of being valued and inclusivity by '*creating a curriculum which recognises the diverse culture of their society enables learners to celebrate the diverse nature of all societies*'. However, Knight and Crock (2021) argue that the curriculum is not as inclusive in practice, particularly the 'I can' statements, which could instantly create a 'normal' and feeling of exclusion if they cannot. Ferdman (2020) states that inclusive leadership requires challenging ideas of what is 'normal' such as access to

resources and use reflective practice to change assumptions about outcomes and processes. For example, I can interact with others, talking and writing about my thoughts, feelings and opinions showing empathy and respect.' Immediately, children with certain Additional Learning Needs are excluded. It is contradictory to The Additional Learning Needs Code and Regulations (2022) which aims to deliver a fully inclusive education system for children in Wales. Siraj and Hallet (2014) identify that the co-construction by staff, parents and children of a shared objective provides direction in inclusive leadership. A shared vision is fundamental in successful teams and should be clearly articulated to all. Booysen (2014) defines inclusive leadership as a 'respectful relational practice'. It is the role of the inclusive leader to enable individuals to be part of a whole team and direct towards a shared outcome. Ferdman (2020) adds that another key element is to challenge individuals and groups to develop a vision of inclusion for themselves. Viennet and Pont (2020) affirm the importance of providing high-quality education and competencies. A shared outcome could be fundamental in improving their implementation process to ensure the policies are reaching the classroom and supporting the setting to achieve their learning outcomes. However, The New Curriculum for Wales (2022) is designed by the individual schools and settings which should allow for inclusive leadership to provide opportunity to remove the current barriers to move forward with a shared vision to design an inclusive curriculum, appropriate to their setting.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure (2010) is also a macro level policy (Ferdman, 2021). This policy's aims are to eradicate childhood poverty, which can have a lasting impact on their social and emotional development and sure to inadequate resources and care, could experience exclusion and bullying (Hughes and Davies, 2019). Even though the aim of the policy is for the greater good, the language of the policy may not necessarily be understood by the individuals who are expected to implement it (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Throughout the policy, the word 'may' is frequently used, which can convey a mixed message to practitioners. OECD (2016) suggests engaging practitioners and other stakeholders in design processes could build a mutual trust around the tools and objectives to achieve the policy goals, which in turn could minimise the individuals that oppose during the implementation process.

According to BBC (2021) a third of children in Wales are living in poverty, which is the highest percentage in the UK. BBC (2019) state that for a child to be considered growing up in poverty, their household income is below 60% of the median income. However, in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure (2010) it refers to the relevant income group as '70% below median income'. Thus, marginalising and excluding 10% of the children in Wales living in poverty. Brodie and Savage (2015) highlight how policymakers discuss social exclusion and how it presents itself, which can be defined by access to resources, economic life, and participation. Hamilton (2021) refers to marginalisation as social exclusion and described the affects as lack of opportunities, rights, and resources. Marginalisation can also cause vulnerability which can lead to inequality and long term poor educational attainment. Due to 10% of children, being excluded from support and resources, it creates an uneven playing field which provides challenges in creating a curriculum for all (New Curriculum for Wales, 2022) and making sure all practitioners feel valued and respected (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2019). However, Hallett (2016) discusses how promoting inclusive practice can eliminate discrimination and promote the equality of opportunity. Despite some children and families not receiving the financial support they may need, the role of an inclusive leader can make sure the child is safe, healthy, happy, and achieving outcomes to support a greater quality of life for children (Knowles, 2009)

Section 3

Inclusive Practice in Early Years Education: The Impact of Parental Partnership

Pacey (2022) highlights the importance of an enabling environment in supporting children's learning and development. Specifically, the significance of parent-practitioner relationships. Brodie and Savage (2015) affirm that parents are fundamental in supporting the well-being of children during early interventions and Bartleton (2021) acknowledges that early year's practitioners should create an environment that is welcoming and nurturing, where children and families feel that they have a sense of belonging. Although, the responsibility lies with the setting to provide a space that encourages equality and represents diversity fully, as it is in

these early years that children base their foundation for their knowledge of the world around them. Bartleton (2021) adds that working in partnership with parents helps to identify the individual needs for the child. Birth to Five Matters (2022) emphasises that every child and family is unique, should be celebrated, and discusses the positive impact that the inclusion of diverse cultural knowledge and values could have on an early year setting.

Even though, nursery resources (2021) acknowledges that parents play a key role in ensuring children are raised to understand the importance of their own culture and other people's culture, it is important to allow the parents to offer insight into their practice and values to represent them more accurately within a setting. When children are exposed to social, cultural, and learning differences at a foundation level, it will create a diverse, inclusive, and supportive environment for all children. Early Years Alliance (2022) states that to be an inclusive setting, early years practitioners should be initiative-taking in addressing challenges and barriers to inclusion such as conscious and unconscious bias, stereotyping, and negativity. This could be achieved by implementing clear strategies and nurture collaborative approaches to develop anti-discriminatory attitudes and provide a positive practice.

Following a study on parent-partnerships in early years settings, Cottle and Alexander (2013) argue that creating a quality provision would be impossible without positive relationships built on mutual trust and a common purpose. However, they acknowledged that parent-practitioner relationships can be complex and challenging, especially if there are conflicting mindsets. Vandebroek (2009) argues that to build strong parent-practitioner relationships both need to challenge norms and trust each other's knowledge and expertise. Ferdman (2020) supports this view and acknowledges that inclusivity requires mindsets and skills for noticing, engaging, and creating space for multiple dimensions of diversity. It is important to understand that approaches which involve practitioners collaborating with parents are sensitive and should be managed with care. Dunlop (2022) states that 'parents know their child best' and sharing information with practitioners can provide a much better understanding of how best to support a child.

It is clear to see the positive impact that successful parent-practitioner relationships can be, in supporting a children's learning and development as well as creating a

quality setting that is inclusive to all children. However, the complexities in achieving this have been highlighted. Kambouri-Danos et al. (2022) suggests that to create effective partnerships there is a need for settings to:

- Acknowledge and act on barriers to collaboration.
- Strengthen communication and other enablers to collaboration.
- Create a shared vision of what practitioner-parent partnerships will look like.

As well as the UNCRC Article 12 and 13 encouraging children to have a voice and have 'freedom' to express a view. Parents should be given the same opportunity.

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