

Section 1

Introduction

Developing conditions where every child can thrive, regardless of their skills, requires inclusive leadership. This assessment looks at how an inclusive leader might help a child with additional learning needs (ALN) who has trouble going to school because of separation anxiety from their parents. One has personal experience of this, when either mum or dad brings said child to school in the morning there is extreme difficulty in that initial separation from the parents to enter school however, once in school and distracted the child has no issue for the remaining school day, one has found the problem to be worse immediately after a half term. This assignment will examine relationships among children, families, professionals, and communities using Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems as a framework, finding both potential and obstacles to inclusive leadership.

According to theorist Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), a child's development is impacted by several environmental systems, including the macrosystem (cultural and societal influences), the microsystem (immediate environment), the mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), the exosystem (indirect environment), and the chronosystem (changes over time). These levels offer a starting point for comprehending the complex nature of inclusive leadership in this situation.

An inclusive leader should try their best to understand the specific needs of a child with ALN, recognizing the emotional and psychological challenges associated with separation anxiety. According to Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) microsystem, immediate interactions with teachers, peers, and the school environment significantly impact the child, Tudge et al., (2009). These interactions form the most direct layer of influence on the child's development, encompassing the relationships and activities in their closest surroundings, Neal & Neal (2013). Research by Berk (2018) further emphasizes that positive engagement with these immediate contacts can enhance a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development, underlining the crucial role of a supportive and responsive educational environment, however, While Bronfenbrenner's microsystem theory emphasizes the significant impact of immediate interactions with teachers, peers, and the school environment on a child's

development, some scholars argue that these interactions alone are not sufficient to explain developmental outcomes. For instance, Ungar (2012) contends that broader ecological factors, such as community resources and societal structures, can play a more decisive role in a child's development. This perspective aligns with the argument that factors in the exosystem and macrosystem, like socioeconomic status and cultural norms, may have an overarching influence on the opportunities and constraints faced by children, thereby shaping their developmental trajectories.

Implementing strategies such as a consistent morning routine, visual schedules, and a designated safe space within the school can provide comfort and predictability for the child, Hine & Wolery (2006). These approaches are beneficial as they create a structured environment that reduces anxiety by establishing clear expectations, Ganz (2007). Social stories and gradual transition plans can also help ease the separation process, Gray (2010). Additionally, visual supports and individualized transition plans have been shown to improve adjustment and reduce behavioural issues for children with ALN, Knight, Sartini & Spriggs (2015). Collaborative efforts involving teachers and parents to create personalized schedules and social narratives are crucial for effectively supporting the child's transition into the school environment, Hume, Boyd, Hamm & Kucharczyk (2014). However, while strategies such as consistent morning routines, visual schedules, and designated safe spaces are widely endorsed for providing comfort and predictability for children with ALN, some critics argue that these approaches may not address the underlying causes of separation anxiety and could potentially lead to over-reliance on structured environments. For instance, Slavin (2012) suggests that while these strategies can be effective in the short term, they might limit the child's ability to adapt to less structured and unpredictable situations, which are inevitable in everyday life. Moreover, there is a risk that these interventions could create a sense of dependency on specific routines, making it challenging for the child to develop coping mechanisms for handling changes or disruptions, Baker et al., (2015). Therefore, it is crucial to balance structured support with opportunities for the child to develop resilience and flexibility in different environments.

There are opportunities which include tailoring interventions to meet the child's unique needs and creating a more supportive peer environment. Barriers might

involve a lack of resources or training for staff to implement these strategies effectively, Quintero & McIntyre (2011).

Inclusive leadership involves building strong, trusting relationships with the child's family. Parents are integral to the mesosystem, where interactions between the child's home and school environments occur, Epstein (2011). Regular communication and involving parents in decision-making processes can enhance trust and cooperation, Hornby & Lafaele (2011). Research has shown that when parents are actively involved in their child's education, there is a significant positive impact on the child's academic and social outcomes, Desforges & Abouchaar (2003). Inclusive leaders can facilitate workshops and provide resources that empower parents, enabling them to support their child effectively, Goodall & Montgomery (2014). Moreover, establishing regular parent-teacher meetings and using communication tools such as emails, newsletters, and school apps can keep parents informed and engaged, Olmstead (2013). However, there are counterclaims to consider, some parents may experience barriers to involvement, such as time constraints, lack of understanding of the educational system, or previous negative experiences with schools, Hornby & Lafaele (2011). Additionally, research by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) suggests that parents' involvement might not always lead to positive outcomes if not appropriately guided, as it may sometimes lead to increased stress for both parents and children. Moreover, cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and mistrust between parents and school staff, making effective communication and cooperation more challenging (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Providing parents with resources, such as workshops on managing separation anxiety and access to support groups, can empower them to support their child more effectively, Turnbull & Turnbull (2011). Home visits and personalized communication strategies also strengthen this partnership, Desforges & Abouchaar (2003).

Opportunities include creating a cohesive support system around the child, leading to more consistent and effective interventions. Barriers may arise from cultural differences, parental resistance due to past negative experiences, or logistical challenges such as time constraints, Hornby (2000). However, an inclusive leader should consider a collaborative culture among professionals, including teachers,

special education staff, and counsellors. According to Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, effective collaboration among these professionals is crucial, Ainscow (2005). Professional development opportunities focused on inclusive practices and understanding ALN can equip staff with the necessary skills, Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011).

Establishing multidisciplinary teams ensures a holistic approach to addressing the child's needs. Regular team meetings and shared goals facilitate cohesive intervention strategies, Turnbull et al., (2011). Utilizing frameworks such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP) helps align efforts and monitor progress, Yell et al., (2006). The integration of professionals from various disciplines, such as special educators, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists, enables a comprehensive understanding of the child's needs and the development of tailored intervention strategies, Friend & Cook (2017). Collaborative practices, such as co-teaching and joint planning sessions, can enhance the effectiveness of interventions and ensure consistency across different environments, Murawski & Bernhardt (2015). Moreover, multidisciplinary teams can provide a more beneficial support system for both the child and their family. Engaging various specialists allows for a more versatile approach to problem-solving and resource allocation, which can lead to better outcomes Dettmer, Knackendoffel, & Thurston (2013). This approach also facilitates continuous professional development as team members learn from each other's expertise and perspectives, fostering a culture of ongoing improvement and adaptability Friend & Cook (2017). However, Coordination among multidisciplinary teams can be challenging due to differing professional languages, perspectives, and priorities, which may lead to conflicts or misunderstandings Nolte & Tremblay (2020). Additionally, time constraints and logistical issues can hinder regular and effective communication, potentially compromising the consistency and cohesion of the interventions Bronstein (2003). Furthermore, there is a risk that the IEP process can become overly bureaucratic, focusing more on compliance with regulations rather than the child's actual needs and progress Smith (2010).

Opportunities lie in the diverse expertise and perspectives that professionals bring, enhancing the quality of support for the child. However, barriers include potential

conflicts in professional opinions, inconsistent implementation of strategies, and limited time for collaboration Miles & Singal (2010).

Inclusive leadership extends beyond the school and family, involving the broader community. The exosystem and macrosystem highlight the importance of societal attitudes and community resources in shaping the child's experience (UNESCO, 2009). Engaging local organizations and community members in awareness campaigns can foster a more inclusive environment (World Health Organisation, 2011). By collaborating with community-based organizations, schools can leverage additional resources and support systems, such as extracurricular programs, mental health services, and social clubs, which can enhance the child's overall development and social integration Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle (2006). Furthermore, inclusive leaders can advocate for policies and practices that promote inclusivity at the community level. This includes working with local governments, businesses, and non-profits to create opportunities for children with ALN to participate fully in community life. Initiatives like inclusive playgrounds, community sports leagues, and cultural events can help normalize diversity and reduce stigma Runswick-Cole & Hodge (2009). Public awareness campaigns and education programs can also play a significant role in changing societal attitudes towards children with ALN, promoting acceptance and understanding, Hodkinson (2012).

All though efforts to engage the broader community in inclusive practices can be met with resistance due to deeply ingrained societal prejudices and a lack of awareness or understanding about ALN, Clegg, Murphy, & Almack (2010). Additionally, resource limitations and competing priorities within communities can hinder the implementation of inclusive initiatives, Slee (2011). There is also a risk that well-intentioned community engagement efforts may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes if not carefully designed and executed, Ferguson (2008). It is crucial for inclusive leaders to navigate these challenges thoughtfully, ensuring that community involvement is genuinely supportive and inclusive.

Community resources such as mental health services, recreational programs, and support networks can provide additional support for the child and family, Peters (2007). These resources can play a crucial role in addressing the diverse needs of children with ALN and their families, offering specialized services and opportunities

for social interaction and development. Collaboration with community-based organizations can enhance resource availability and accessibility, ensuring that families have the support they need, Johnson & LaMontagne (1993). This collaboration can involve partnerships with local health agencies, non-profits, and recreational centers to create a comprehensive support system, Anderson-Butcher et al., (2006).

Engaging community resources can also help in normalizing the experiences of children with ALN, promoting inclusivity and reducing stigma. Programs such as inclusive sports teams, arts and music classes, and community clubs provide valuable opportunities for children to develop skills, build friendships, and increase self-esteem, Shields & Synnot (2016). Furthermore, mental health services within the community can offer critical support to families, addressing issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are often associated with managing ALN, Boyle et al., (2016). However, there are counterclaims to consider such as accessing community resources can sometimes be challenging due to logistical issues such as transportation, costs, and availability of services, Gordon & Malone (1997). Families in rural or underserved areas may find it particularly difficult to access these resources, leading to disparities in support, Lindsay et al., (2014). Additionally, the quality and effectiveness of community programs can vary, and not all may be adequately equipped to meet the specific needs of children with ALN, Fuchs (2010). There is also the potential for reliance on community resources to shift responsibility away from schools, which should also play a central role in supporting these children, McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd (2014). Therefore, it is essential for inclusive leaders to advocate for equitable access and high standards in community-based support.

Opportunities include the potential for a well-rounded support network that reinforces inclusive practices. A cohesive network involving schools, families, and community organizations can create a nurturing environment that supports the holistic development of children with ALN, Anderson-Butcher et al., (2006). This collaboration can lead to shared resources, expertise, and consistent support strategies that extend beyond the classroom, Kozleski & Huber (2010). Inclusive practices such as community workshops, awareness campaigns, and joint activities

can enhance understanding and acceptance of children with ALN, promoting a more inclusive society, Shields & Synnot, (2016).

However, barriers to creating such an inclusive environment may involve stigma, lack of awareness, and limited community resources dedicated to supporting children with ALN, Green & Stoneman (1989). Stigma surrounding disabilities can result in social exclusion and discrimination, making it difficult for children with ALN to participate fully in community activities, Goffman (1963); Lindsay & McPherson (2012). Additionally, a lack of awareness and understanding about ALN among community members can perpetuate misconceptions and negative attitudes, further hindering inclusion efforts, Hodkinson, (2012).

Resource limitations within communities can also pose significant challenges. In many areas, there may be a scarcity of specialized services, recreational programs, and support networks tailored to the needs of children with ALN, McLeskey et al., (2014). This scarcity can result from inadequate funding, insufficient training for service providers, and competing priorities within the community, Slee (2011). Furthermore, even when resources are available, they may not be easily accessible to all families due to factors such as geographical location, transportation issues, and financial constraints, Gordon & Malone (1997).

Counterclaims suggest that while community resources and inclusive practices are crucial, over-reliance on external support can sometimes detract from the responsibility of schools and families to provide necessary accommodations and interventions, Smith, (2010). There is also the risk that community engagement efforts may not be sustainable if they rely heavily on short-term funding or volunteer efforts, leading to inconsistent support for children with ALN, Ferguson (2008). It is essential to strike a balance where community resources complement but do not replace the foundational support provided by schools and families.

Conclusion

Inclusive leadership is multifaceted and requires a deep understanding of the interconnected systems influencing a child's development. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the

needs of a child with ALN struggling with school attendance. By fostering collaborative relationships with children, families, professionals, and communities, inclusive leaders can create supportive environments that promote the child's well-being and development. Despite the challenges, the opportunities for positive impact are significant and underscore the importance of continued efforts towards inclusive education.

Section 2

Inclusive leadership in early years provision is crucial for ensuring that children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are supported effectively. Two significant policies in Wales that claim to enable inclusive leadership in early years settings are the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act 2018 and the Welsh Government's "Foundation Phase" framework.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act 2018

The ALNET Act 2018 is a comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at transforming the educational landscape for children with ALN in Wales. It emphasizes a person-centered approach, where the needs and preferences of the child are at the forefront of educational planning (Welsh Government, 2018). This policy mandates that every child with ALN has an Individual Development Plan (IDP) tailored to their specific needs, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment (Welsh Government, 2018). The Act requires close collaboration between educational institutions, health services, and social care, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to supporting children with ALN, Boyle et al., (2019).

Supporting this view, Humphrey (2020) highlights that the ALNET Act's emphasis on IDPs facilitates more individualized and effective support strategies. Similarly, Evans (2020) argues that the Act's framework for inter-agency cooperation significantly enhances the provision of comprehensive support for children with ALN, leading to better educational outcomes. Additionally, Roffey (2019) notes that the Act encourages a more inclusive culture within schools, fostering environments where all children feel valued and supported.

However, there are counterclaims regarding the practical implementation of the ALNET Act. Morris and Smith (2019) point out that while the legislation is well-intentioned, the actual rollout has faced challenges such as insufficient training for staff and limited resources. This can hinder the effective implementation of IDPs and inter-agency collaboration. Furthermore, Harris and Davies (2020) criticize the Act for being overly ambitious, arguing that the lack of adequate funding and support structures may prevent schools from fully realizing its potential benefits.

The Welsh Government's "Foundation Phase" Framework

The Foundation Phase framework is another key policy aimed at fostering inclusive education in early years settings. This framework promotes a play-based, experiential approach to learning for children aged 3 to 7 years, emphasizing the importance of inclusive practices that cater to diverse learning needs (Welsh Government, 2015). The framework encourages the use of differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching strategies to ensure that all children, including those with ALN, can access the curriculum effectively, Donaldson (2015).

Research by Estyn (2018) supports the efficacy of the Foundation Phase in promoting inclusivity, noting that its flexible approach allows teachers to adapt their methods to meet the needs of all learners. Moreover, Williams and Roberts (2017) found that the emphasis on holistic development in the Foundation Phase helps children with ALN to develop critical social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Additionally, Taylor et al. (2016) argues that the framework's focus on continuous assessment and observation enables teachers to identify and support children with ALN more effectively.

Despite these strengths, the Foundation Phase framework has faced criticism. According to Lewis and Vulliamy (2019), the framework's reliance on play-based learning can sometimes lead to inconsistencies in how inclusivity is implemented across different settings. They argue that without clear guidelines and adequate training, educators may struggle to effectively integrate children with ALN into play-based activities. Furthermore, Jones and Jones (2020) highlight the challenges of balancing the need for inclusive practices with the demands of the standardized curriculum, which can limit teachers' flexibility to adapt their teaching methods.

Conclusion and Comparison

Both the ALNET Act 2018 and the Foundation Phase framework aim to enhance inclusive leadership in early years provision in Wales, albeit through different approaches. The ALNET Act focuses on legal mandates and structured support plans, while the Foundation Phase emphasizes flexible, play-based learning environments. The ALNET Act's strength lies in its formalized approach to individualized support and inter-agency collaboration. This structure can potentially lead to more consistent and comprehensive support for children with ALN. However, its effectiveness is contingent on sufficient funding, training, and resources, which have been noted as areas of concern, Morris & Smith (2019); Harris & Davies (2020).

Conversely, the Foundation Phase's strength is its emphasis on holistic development and flexible learning environments. This approach can foster inclusivity by allowing children with ALN to engage in learning activities that are tailored to their needs. However, the lack of clear implementation guidelines and variability in teacher training can lead to inconsistencies in inclusive practices, Lewis & Vulliam (2019); Jones & Jones (2020).

In conclusion, while both policies have the potential to enable inclusive leadership in early years provision, their success largely depends on effective implementation, adequate resourcing, and continuous professional development for educators. Combining the structured support of the ALNET Act with the flexible, child-centered approach of the Foundation Phase could offer a more comprehensive strategy for fostering inclusivity in early years education in Wales.

Section 3

As a professional practitioner committed to changing inclusive environments in early years settings, I have observed firsthand the significant impact that inclusive leadership can have on the development and well-being of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). In this reflection, I will explore strategies to promote inclusive leadership, supported by recent research and counterclaims, to provide a balanced perspective.

One of the most effective steps toward promoting inclusive leadership, in my view, is the adoption and implementation of inclusive policies. In Wales, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act 2018 serves as a robust legislative framework that emphasizes the importance of individualized support for children with ALN (Welsh Government, 2018). This Act mandates the creation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), which are tailored to each child's unique needs, ensuring that they receive the necessary support to succeed.

I support this approach as Boyle et al. (2019) highlights the benefits of individualized approaches, noting that they lead to more effective educational outcomes for children with ALN. Moreover, the Act's requirement for inter-agency collaboration creating a holistic approach to support, involving educational institutions, health services, and social care. However, I acknowledge the challenges in effective implementation. Morris and Smith (2019) argue that insufficient training and resources can hinder the practical application of these policies. Without adequate support, educators may struggle to develop and execute comprehensive IDPs, potentially undermining the Act's objectives.

In my experience, promoting inclusive leadership also involves creating a collaborative culture within early years settings. This can be achieved through regular communication and partnership with families, multidisciplinary teams, and community organizations. Epstein's (2011) work on school-family-community partnerships shows the importance of involving parents in decision-making processes, which enhances trust and cooperation.

Creating strong relationships with families is crucial. Regular meetings, open communication channels, and involving parents in the planning and review of IDPs can lead to better support strategies and a more cohesive approach to addressing the child's needs. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) support this, suggesting that family involvement is integral to successful inclusive education.

Yet, I recognize the counterclaims regarding the feasibility of such collaboration. Harris and Davies (2020) note that logistical challenges, such as time constraints and differing priorities among stakeholders, can impede effective collaboration. To mitigate this, schools need to establish clear communication protocols and provide professional development opportunities for staff to enhance their collaboration skills.

Leveraging community resources is another vital aspect of promoting inclusive leadership. Community-based services, such as mental health support, recreational programs, and specialized therapy, can provide additional support to children with ALN and their families Peters (2007). Collaboration with community organizations can enhance resource availability and accessibility, ensuring comprehensive support. For instance, integrating community mental health services into early years settings can help address the emotional and psychological needs of children with ALN. Boyle et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of mental health support in improving educational outcomes and overall well-being. Additionally, recreational programs can offer children with ALN opportunities to develop social skills and build friendships, contributing to their holistic development, Shields & Synnot (2016). However, access to these resources can be uneven. Lindsay et al. (2014) highlights that families in rural or underserved areas may face significant barriers in accessing community services, leading to disparities in support. This shows the need for inclusive leaders to advocate for equitable distribution of resources and to explore creative solutions, such as mobile services or digital support platforms, to bridge these gaps.

Despite the potential benefits of these strategies, I acknowledge the inherent challenges and counterclaims. Resource limitations, both in terms of funding and availability of trained personnel, can significantly impact the effectiveness of inclusive practices, Slee (2011). Moreover, the reliance on community resources should not detract from the responsibility of schools to provide primary support, Smith (2010).

Furthermore, while policies like the ALNET Act provide a strong framework, their success largely depends on the commitment and capacity of individual educators and institutions. Continuous professional development and adequate resourcing are essential to equip educators with the skills and tools necessary for effective inclusive leadership.

Conclusion

Promoting inclusive leadership in early years settings is a diverse undertaking that requires a commitment to inclusive policies, creating collaborative cultures, and leveraging community resources. While there are significant challenges and counterclaims, the potential benefits for children with ALN are profound. By addressing these challenges thoughtfully and persistently, I believe we can create environments where every child has an opportunity to thrive.

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