

Welsh Government (2016) inclusion is about creating an environment where everyone can perform at their best, feel valued and appreciated, and participate safely and equitably while retaining their unique identities. The Welsh Government (no date) has emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership in Wales for meeting individual needs and promoting inclusion within the country. Ferdman (2021) uses the term 'inclusive leadership' to refer to as going beyond cultural competence and diversity management. It involves building and maintaining environments that allow everyone to be at their best, to recognize the value in doing so, and to belong and participate in ways that are safe, engaging, and equitable, regardless of their differences. In contrast, Booysen (cited in Ferdman, 2014) defines inclusive leadership as a relational technique that preserves individuality and authenticity while empowering groups and people to be integrated into the whole, guided, aligned, and dedicated to shared goals for the benefit of everyone. Inclusive leadership is essential for working with diverse groups. It values and respects individual differences, builds trust, increases engagement, and improves outcomes. McDevitt (2021) recommended that partnering with families, professionals, and communities is an effective way to narrow the inclusive practice gap. This assignment evaluates inclusion and its effectiveness in a given scenario, analyzing opportunities and barriers, and proposes recommendations for future practice (Welsh Government, n.d; Schuelka, 2018).

For this assignment, we will focus on the scenario at hand. Kate is a single parent who was diagnosed with alcohol addiction one year ago and has overcome her addiction. At the time, Kate had a black three-year-old son, David, who lived with her but was removed from her care until she got the help she needed. David was placed to live with his grandparents for that time. Kate has been assessed as being able to care for her son, David, on her own. Kate even though she has overcome her addiction she is currently struggling financially. Lauren, Mary's elementary school teacher, notices Kate standing alone on the playground at home time, and other parents look at her but do not invite her to join their talks. Kate is nervous around teachers and only stays for a short while to talk if needed. David is doing well academically but he struggles to build social relationships.

Children

There are still areas in Wales with high childhood poverty rates (Murphy & Conn, 2022). Childhood poverty can have lasting effects on individuals (Victora *et al.*, 2022). It may cause malnutrition, social stigma, and limited access to cultural activities. Let's take a moment to reflect on the scenario where David was performing very well academically however he struggled to build social relationships. Within this context, David encountered discriminatory biases based on poverty. Growing up in poverty can impact a child's social development negatively (Hughes and Davies, 2019). Chen and Badolato (2023) suggest that children from low-income families often struggle to maintain friendships and participate in social activities due to the lack of resources such as (uniform and food). For example, children may experience various behaviors such as difficulty making friends, following social cues, and expressing themselves. These children may also display aggressive or withdrawn behaviors and struggle with emotional regulation. As a result, David may become a victim of bullying and isolation (Li, Hu and Tang, 2022). In order to support such children, an inclusive leader in the early years setting can work collaboratively with a variety of individuals such as the child's parents, teachers or staff members, and professionals such as therapists or social workers (Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa, 2014). By working together they might identify the root causes of poverty, provide support and resources to families, and expand access to critical services and programs such as (food stamps for the family, offering David a place on the food program at the setting or informing the parent about donation outposts for clothes). Despite David participation in the food program, David felt a sense of isolation due to the unfavorable opinions of his peers and his teacher displayed bias towards him, adding to his feeling of isolation. This situation is an example of positionality, where an individual's social and political context can influence their experiences and perceptions. For example, how can a teacher understand poverty without experiencing it? David's experience highlights the impact of external factors on an individual's sense of belonging and inclusion in a setting.

The Foundation Phase Framework (2015) emphasizes the importance of creating settings that promote the ethnic and cultural identities of all children. Inclusion can be achieved by incorporating diverse perspectives in the setting and encouraging children to become active global citizens. However, experiencing a lack of cultural

representation may make David feel excluded in the setting. Bumeister and Leary (1995 cited in Souto-Manning, 2021) says that acceptance, inclusion, and welcome generate positive emotions like happiness, while rejection, exclusion, and being ignored elicit negative feelings. As a result, David may face emotional and social repercussions that negatively impact his sense of identity and self-efficacy. According to Cottini and Morganti (2016) attaining inclusivity in educational environments is important. Inclusive leaders may create safe spaces for children to express their identities and experiences to achieve inclusion or celebrating cultural diversity through food, festivals, and language in the setting is another way to promote inclusion (Curran and Petersen, 2017; Brown, 2019; Graham *et al.*, 2023). However, not all teachers possess a comprehensive understanding of diverse cultures in their setting, nor are they inclined to learn about them. Some teachers may be susceptible to social categorization, leading to the formation of stereotypical perceptions about black children such as David (Nishii and Leroy, 2022). Inclusive leaders may gain understanding through comprehensive training and guidance from individuals with greater understanding, such as those within the community, families, or workplace, aligning with Vygotsky's scaffolding theory which states about learning from a more knowledgeable other (Emile *et al.*, 2022). Individuals with a deeper insight into different cultures can act as mentors and provide valuable guidance to those lacking understanding. However, some individuals may not be receptive to this type of training due to a perceived lack of need or insufficient funds. It is essential to recognize that everyone has unique challenges and limitations, and a one-size-fits-all approach may only be practical for some. Therefore, an inclusive leader may look into ways to support training, such as collaborating with members of the same community as David to provide insight into that culture, hosting fundraising events, or making a time frame that fits everyone.

Families

Turner (2015) states that it may be considered crucial for vulnerable families with children facing racial inequality and poverty to receive the necessary support. By striving to create a culture of inclusivity that recognizes and empathizes with the unique challenges faced by families, they can help to break down cultural and communication barriers in settings to support families that are being discriminated

against, race, poverty, and addiction. As inclusive leaders supporting parents with cultural barriers, such as Kate and David, they may have to understand different culture to ensure that the parents feel safe, inclusive, and respected

(Georgis, Gokiart, Ford and Ali, 2014; Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers, 2021).

Promoting inclusion in setting this may be done through providing training and resources to teachers and other staff members (Ackah-Jnr, 2022). However, there is a lack of resources for teachers to help gain knowledge about different cultures and lack of training available due to limited funding (Leithwood and Louis, 1998). Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) believes that engaging families and communities in culturally appropriate manners is considered crucial dimension of culturally responsive leadership. This can be achieved by involving parents in the decision-making process which may lead to teachers developing an understanding of the culture of the family (Baquedano-López, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013).

On the other hand, due to her race, Kate faced a cultural barrier that prevented her from fully participating in activities within the setting. Families are sometimes called "hard to reach" in specific settings (Watt, 2016). Still, many parents feel that it is the services and professionals who are challenging to get in touch with rather than themselves (Wheeler and Connor, 2009, cited in Lindon and Lindon, 2011).

However, "hard to reach" parents are sometimes those parents in a setting with barriers such as communication and culture, as seen in the scenario (Evangelou *et al.*, 2013). Sharing information through partnership with families is one way of open communication to help support families and children in settings to identify any barriers (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). As seen in the scenario, Kate was a struggling parent in the setting when it came to communication with other families and teachers due to a perceived social stigma related to her alcohol addiction and poverty. This communication barrier made Kate feel isolated within the setting, causing discomfort and shorter stays (Bennouna, Brumbaum, McLay, Allaf, Wessells and Stark, 2021). In situations where there is a communication and cultural barrier, an inclusive leader may take action to reduce such barriers. One approach could be to introduce Kate to individuals who can help her navigate the cultural nuances and language differences. This could include colleagues who have similar backgrounds or those who have successfully integrated into the new culture. By doing so, the

leader can help Kate feel more included and valued and improve overall team dynamics.

Whalley (2017) inclusive leaders can partner with local organizations that offer resources and support services to these families such as pen green centre for children and their families. It may be necessary to involve and empower parents who lack the confidence and skills to participate in such progress by aiding them in developing their abilities and networks (Sime and Sheridan, 2014). They can organize community outreach to raise awareness, promote education, and foster greater understanding of racism. Inclusive leaders can use their influence and platform to advocate for policies that benefit these families (Ainscow, 2020). This can involve joining advocacy groups, speaking out against discriminatory policies, and collaborating with lawmakers to introduce policies that provide critical resources and support (Almog-Bar and Schmid, 2014). In essence, it is the responsibility of inclusive leaders to support families with children living in poverty and facing racism. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, partnering with local organizations, and advocating for policy change, they can make a meaningful impact and improve the lives of those who are most vulnerable (Klammer, Leitner and Leiber, 2019).

Professionals

In order to support vulnerable families in early years facing poverty, alcohol addiction and racism there needs to be a collaborative effort aimed to address the various challenges faced by families in these situations, including financial instability, addiction, and discrimination, by providing comprehensive support services that are tailored to meet the unique needs of each family (Cheminais, 2009; Martin n.d cited in Crutchley, 2018) . Teachers may have to develop a deep understanding of the challenges children face, as well as the skills and knowledge required to work effectively with them (Copland, Garton and Burns, 2014). This may be done by providing access to resources such as books, articles to help professionals develop their skills and knowledge of the different cultures in their settings. They can also invest in ongoing training and professional development opportunities for their staff to ensure they are up-to-date with the latest research and best practices (Brennan and King, 2022). However, there are limitations to training staff to deal with these

issues such as finances (Mohammed, 2022). The setting may not have the necessary funds to provide staff with training or some staff may think that training is not relevant to them because they have conscious and unconscious bias to the issues within their setting based on their positionality (Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson and Scott, 2013; Corkum, Bryson, Smith, Giffin, Hume and Power, 2014). For example, parents were biased as Kate because she was living in poverty and had an alcoholic addiction that led to parents isolating themselves from Kate because of their stigma and positionality. How would parents who have never experienced poverty or alcohol addiction understand what Kate was going through. However, inclusive leaders can foster partnerships with community organizations serving low income families (Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis and Turnbull, 2015).

By working together with these organizations, they can provide more comprehensive and practical support to families of different ethnic backgrounds. For example, they can collaborate with food banks, housing organizations, and other social services to ensure families have the necessities they need to thrive. They can also partner with community organizations that provide educational and recreational opportunities for children to help ensure that all children have access to enrichment activities that can help them succeed in life (Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Blue-Banning and Turnbull, 2015). Inclusive leaders can also advocate for policies that promote equity and social justice (Bhowmik, Walker and Bryant, 2023). This might involve supporting policies that provide more funding for schools in low-income areas or advocating for policies that address systemic racism and inequality. By using their influence and voice, inclusive leaders may help create a more equitable and inclusive society for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status or race. According to Theoharis and Scanlan (2021) inclusive leaders may play a crucial role in supporting professionals to promote inclusion for children living in poverty and racism. They can create a culture of respect and empathy where diversity is valued and celebrated (Johnson *et al.*, 2018).

Communities

To support Kate and David, who are facing challenges such as poverty, alcoholism, and racism, multiple agencies have joined forces to provide support in their

environment. Consider Vygotsky's theory, which places the child at the center and highlights the importance of collaboration among different agencies in supporting their development (Román *et al.*, 2021). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the significance of social interaction and cultural context in a child's growth (Vélez-Agosto *et al.*, 2017). The theory proposes that learning and development occur through interactions between a child and their social environment. In this context, various multi-agencies, including parents, teachers, and peers, support David and Kate's development. As the saying says it takes a village to raise a child. This approach acknowledges that a child's development is not solely an individual process but is influenced by the social and cultural context in which they live (Ungar, 2015). This collaborative effort aims to address the various challenges faced by families in these situations, including financial instability, addiction, and discrimination, by providing comprehensive support services that are tailored to meet the unique needs of each family. The agencies involved in this initiative are working closely with families to identify their specific needs and develop personalized plans that promote positive outcomes for both children and parents in these challenging circumstances. By working together, these agencies are helping to create a stronger, more resilient community that supports the well-being of all its members (Khanlou and Wray, 2014).

One way that multi agencies can support families going through poverty, racism, and alcohol addiction is by working collaboratively and sharing resources. This can involve providing access to counseling, financial assistance, job training, healthcare services, and support groups through families first and community first programmes (Welsh Government, 2015). This is communities working together and sharing information to tackle issues such as poverty. By pooling their expertise and resources, these agencies can provide more comprehensive and effective assistance to families in need (British Council Wales, 2021). Additionally, Gay (2018) states that it is important for these agencies to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of the families they serve, particularly in regards to issues of race and ethnicity. This can involve hiring staff from diverse backgrounds, providing language services, and incorporating cultural competency training into their programs. Overall, a coordinated and comprehensive approach can go a long way in helping families overcome the challenges of poverty, racism, and alcohol addiction.

However, the Welsh Government (2016) states that in supporting families there can be training to support staff to deal with different problems.

Kate and David can also receive support from the social worker who conducts annual check-ins and a family support worker who collaborates with the social worker to ensure the family's well-being (Taylor, 2013). This can be done through an open door policy (Gibson and Blandford, 2005). This allows for information to be shared with parents and the wider community. However, for this to happen there need to be an open communication between the setting, families and the community. By building a strong and effective communication network, trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility can be fostered, improving outcomes for everyone.

In a setting focused on early years education, the importance of inclusion cannot be overstated. It requires a collaborative effort with multiple agencies, such as healthcare professionals, social workers, and families, to provide comprehensive support to each child, regardless of their background, abilities, or challenges. This approach nurtures a positive environment where every child feels valued, respected, and supported on their learning journey. The ultimate objective is to create a community that embraces and celebrates diversity, promotes equal opportunities, and empowers each child to reach their full potential.

Levin (1997 cited in Baldcock, Fitzgerald and Kay) defines policy as an action taken on an issue by those with responsibility. Policies are important in early years education because they help ensure that children receive high-quality care and education in a safe and nurturing environment (Hyson, 2014). By having policies in place, early years settings can promote consistency in practice, ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, and provide a clear framework for decision-making. Policies can also help parents and guardians understand what to expect from an early years setting, and provide a basis for communication and collaboration between families and educators. Ultimately, policies play an important role in supporting the healthy development and wellbeing of young children in early years settings. The two policies we will critique are the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years and the Foundation Phase Framework.

The Foundation phase framework (2015) is targeted at everyone with an interest in education in Wales (headteachers, teachers, practitioners and governing bodies of maintained schools). The Foundation Phase Framework is designed to enable inclusive practice by providing a flexible and child-centered approach to learning. Inclusive practice is promoted through the recognition and celebration of diversity, as well as the provision of a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment. The framework encourages teachers to work collaboratively with parents and other professionals to ensure that each child's learning needs are met. It also emphasizes the importance of promoting positive relationships and communication between all stakeholders in a child's learning journey. This shows collaboration in this policy which links inclusive practice.

When it comes to the foundation phase framework (2015) there is a lot about involving children and what is expected to happen; however, it is considered crucial to ensure that there is ample evidence of the child's voice throughout the policy (Neal, 2006). Additionally, any collaboration with multiple agencies should also incorporate the child's perspective. This is important because it helps to ensure that the child's needs, wants, and feelings are considered. By actively seeking out and incorporating the child's viewpoint, policymakers and agencies can create a more collaborative, effective, and ultimately successful framework for the foundation phase.

There can be several barriers to implementing the foundation phase framework in settings. One of the significant challenges is the need for more resources, including funding, infrastructure, and trained personnel. Another barrier can be resistance to change, especially if the current system is deeply ingrained in the organization's culture and practices. Additionally, the need for more awareness and understanding of the framework's benefits can hinder its adoption. Lastly, the absence of a clear roadmap and guidance for implementation can make it challenging to navigate the process effectively as it was difficult for practitioners to understand (Maynard *et al.*, 2012). However, Siraj (2013-2014) in his independent stocktake recommends continued professional development and training to support staff in settings to fully understand the foundation phase framework.

National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years (2023) targets everyone (all those with an interest in child minding and day care). This policy shows collaboration with multi agencies to provide quality care for children. In this policy, children are given a voice to express their opinions. However, Dallimore (2019) states that it is also how society views children that can impact policy implementation. This statement suggests that some practitioners believe that children should not be given a voice in any matter.

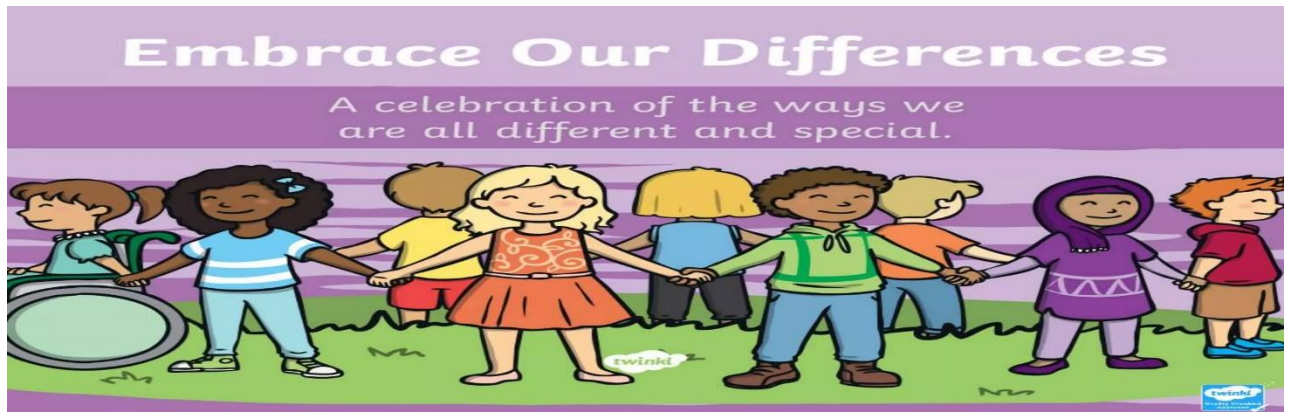
Ensuring a safe and secure environment for children is of utmost importance, and this is where the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years (2023) policy introduced ratio. The policy mandates that a certain number of adults must be present for every child in the facility to ensure adequate supervision and care. It is also important to note that the available physical space at the facility may impact the maximum number of children that can be accommodated while adhering to the ratio policy. Therefore, it is imperative to carefully consider both the ratio policy and the physical space available when determining the number of children registered at the premises. However, while ratio and spacing are of utmost importance, not all sets have the financial needs to ensure their setting has the available space.

According to the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (2023) the physical environment of childcare facilities for children up to the age of 12 should be appropriate for those with disabilities or additional needs, as far as reasonably possible. While some settings may have provisions for children with additional learning needs, others may not have the resources due to limited funding. However, it is possible to improve this situation by seeking sponsorship from the community or hosting fundraising events.

Doucet (2021) states that to facilitate effective communication and cooperation, we recognized the importance of establishing a unified lexicon across diverse domains. The jargon employed by policy experts and professionals frequently varies, leading us to presume that we possess a comprehensive grasp of developments within the educational realm. However, scholars, politicians, educational leaders, administrators, guardians, learners, non-governmental organizations, communities,

and educators tend to converse past one another instead of engaging in constructive dialogue (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018). A mutually agreed-upon vocabulary and comprehension of concepts can greatly simplify communication and collaboration to ensure each practitioner understands the policy they are dealing with in their settings. Welsh Government (2019) recommends that there will be collaboration between the Care Inspectorate Wales and local authorities in order to identify opportunities for regular and improved engagement, with an aim to share information about areas of mutual interest.

The power of Diversity: How embracing differences can enhance early years leadership



Diversity in early years leadership is essential for positive outcomes in education (Halpern, Szecsi and Mak, 2021). Leaders who value and embrace differences create an inclusive environment that promotes creativity, innovation, and collaboration (Gotsis and Grimani, 2016). By bringing together individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, these leaders can solve complex problems and drive positive change (Chin and Trimble, 2015).

The classroom is a melting pot of diverse cultures, each with its expectations, skills, talents, abilities, and values. These unique traits contribute to each child's self-concept and are shaped by how others perceive them. Hayes, Toole and Halpenny (2017) states that it is considered crucial to foster an environment that recognizes and respects the importance of each child's family and cultural background. Failure to do so will result in children feeling invisible, unimportant, incompetent, and

ashamed of their identity. Individuals may create a classroom that celebrates diversity and cultivates a sense of belonging for all by acknowledging and validating each child's individuality.

"We all can promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion — and that is something I believe every leader has a responsibility to do. It starts with having a dialogue until we are all comfortable and no longer have the fear of saying the wrong thing"

~ Inga Beale

Leadership that embraces diversity in the early years of education can bring about several benefits. One of the most significant advantages is promoting cultural competency and understanding. Leaders who are exposed to different cultures and ways of thinking can work more effectively with families and children from diverse backgrounds. Lopez (2016) says that leaders can create an inclusive and welcoming environment by understanding the diverse perspectives, values, and beliefs of these families and children. Such an environment can lead to better relationships between educators and families, resulting in improved outcomes for children (Ferdman, 2014). Embracing diversity in early years

education can create a more holistic and culturally relevant learning experience that can benefit children from all backgrounds (Civitillo *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, early years leaders must embrace diversity to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all children.

Furthermore, valuing and respecting differences promotes a sense of belonging and community among staff and families (Simplican *et al.*, 2015). This results in higher engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction among educators, leading to better quality of care and education for children.

Finally, Gómez-Hurtado *et al.* (2021) states that diversity fosters innovation and

creativity in the early years of leadership. Bringing together individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives can lead to challenging assumptions, thinking outside the box, and developing new ideas. This can result in more effective teaching strategies, better use of resources, and improved outcomes for children.

In conclusion, diversity is an essential tool in early years leadership that should not be overlooked. By embracing differences, leaders can create an inclusive, culturally competent, innovative environment that benefits everyone involved. Whether you're an educator, a parent, or a leader in early childhood education, recognizing the value of diversity

and working to promote
it in your practice can
significantly impact the

lives of children and
families.

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