

Inclusive Leadership: working together to support families

Section 1

According to Newstead and Isles-Buck (2019, p.64) and Crisol Moya, Molonia and Caurcel Cara (2020) to provide a good quality childcare setting the manager should ensure they promote inclusive practice within the setting. The manager will take on the responsibility of monitoring attitudes, behaviour and procedures and supporting staff and children with how to achieve an inclusive environment whilst educating them on the importance of it. Childhood Educational International (no date) points out that effective education system and school leaders should communicate and listen to all stakeholders which includes teachers, community members, parents, and students. These leaders create successful management teams that share a vision for change and implement strategies to achieve it. Billingsley *et al.* (2018) and Nappi (2014) maintain that in effective inclusive schools' leadership responsibilities are shared out with other staff members such as administrators and teachers, they may give advice on supporting inclusion through the creation of school structures and promoting instructional practices which in turn addresses the needs of disabled children and others that are at risk of not learning. DeMatthews (2015) and Shogren *et al.* (2015) say that many studies based on inclusive schools have found evidence that shows distributed and shared leadership is important in inclusive reform.

Ferdman (2021, p.3) points out that inclusive leadership extends much beyond cultural competency and diversity management to include establishing and cultivating environments that allow everyone to achieve their best and to belong and participate in ways that are engaging, appreciated, safe and fair. Scanlan and Theoharis (2014) maintain that the people held accountable for the students' academic achievements are school leaders, therefore they should be receptive to how these various elements of diversity intersect in ways that influence student learning. Bush *et al.* (2010, p. 9, cited in Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014) states that there is evidence of the relationship between children's positive educational outcomes, school improvement and effective school leadership. According to Guiffrida *et al.* (2012, cited in López-López, León Guerrero and Crisol-Moya, 2021) inclusive leadership involves improving ties between families and schools as this can improve children's academic results and socio-emotional development.

Scenario

A child's father has recently passed away leaving the mother as the sole carer for the child. She often stands alone in the playground when picking the child up from school and avoids eye-contact and social interactions with other parents. She will talk to the teacher if needed but will not volunteer any information unless asked a question and seems to be depressed. Her daughter has been doing well in school but since finding out the news about her dad is struggling to socialise and regulate her emotions.

Providing support for children and families

According to Adams (2011, cited in Dimery and Templeton, 2021) and Thurston (2014, cited in Dimery and Templeton, 2021) the language used is important when providing support for a bereaved child. The information discussed should be age appropriate and adapted based on the child's understanding. However, Schonfeld and Demaria (2016) state that to lessen the likelihood of misinterpretations about death euphemisms should be avoided. When talking to a young child it is advisable to use the word 'dead' or 'died' when discussing a bereaved family member because it may cause confusion and fear of going to sleep themselves if phrases like 'they are in an eternal sleep' are used. Joy *et al.* (2023) points out that to enable effective and appropriate support for bereaved children caregivers should understand and answer the children's questions about grief and death and adapt their conversations to the child's unique experience and needs. Furthermore, Gorosabel-Odrizola and Leon-Mejia (2016) and Duncan (2020) believe that children should be educated on bereavement and death in schools as if a child loses a family member, they will require accompaniment and guidance which should be provided by teachers and school leaders. The headteacher should ensure this is incorporated in the school's curriculum to provide support for the student in the scenario that is experiencing bereavement and any other children going through it.

Nevertheless, Jackson and Colwell (2001, cited in McManus and Paul, 2019) and Gunn (2009, cited in Duncan, 2020) states that some staff are reluctant to talk about bereavement and death with children due to concerns and fears of making the children more anxious or upset. Paul (2015) and Lytje (2017) maintain that childhood bereavement training is not systematically received by school staff and leaders, often

training is only accessed in response to a specific incident and after a bereavement has taken place. This can cause difficulties when supporting grieving students. Furthermore, Holland (2016, cited in Costelloe, Mintz and Lee, 2020) believes that a proactive approach to bereaved children is informed by bereavement policies with continuous procedures in place for all staff to follow, with staff partaking in training in bereavement before an incident occurs. A reactive approach to bereaved children is when support is given after a bereavement has taken place which indicates staff training is lacking in this area. It has been found that most schools adopt reactive approaches. The school leader should ensure that all staff working with the bereaved student have up to date training in this area and are aware of the appropriate procedures that must be followed with regards to the pupil currently dealing with bereavement.

Parsons (2011, cited in Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021) and Lytje and Dyregrov (2021) point out that research has shown that childhood bereavement can result in long and short term negative psychological and academic outcomes. According to Boelen and Spuij (2024) and Boelen, Spuij and Lenferink (2019) dealing with the death of a parent is one of the most impactful and frequent life events that a child may experience. However, most children do not experience long-term psychological issues after loss. Morell-Velasco *et al.* (2020) and Papadatou (2002) state that bereaved pupils may suffer a range of school adjustment problems, including difficulties with concentration and memory, deterioration in academic outcomes and decreased attendance and motivation.

Nevertheless, Bronfenbrenner (2005, cited in Costelloe, Mintz and Lee, 2020) and Chachar, Younus and Ali (2021) say that Bronfenbrenners bio-ecological theory of human development values the school as significant with regards to providing support for bereaved pupils because of its importance in the child's immediate surroundings and the mutual interactions that develop over time between the bereaved child and the school. Parsons (2011, cited in Abraham-Steele and Edmonds, 2021) and Hiyoshi *et al.* (2021) believe that there is a higher risk of losing a sibling or parent if a child is from a low-income background. Therefore, Holland and McLennan (2015) state that schools are important to these vulnerable children and can provide a supportive and inclusive environment if the leader promotes inclusivity.

Working with Professionals and Communities

Horwath and Morrison (2007, cited in Solomon, 2019) and Salmon (2004, cited in O'Reilly *et al.*, 2013) states that an inclusive leader should promote multi-agency working within their setting. To meet the complex needs of children multiagency collaborations are important with the aim to provide comprehensive services for children. Siraj and Hallet (2014, p.48) and Bortini *et al.* (2016) maintain that an inclusive leader should be able to communicate effectively and connect and build relationships with others. Leaders will need to communicate with a broad range of early years stakeholders such as health, education and social services. With regards to the scenario the inclusive leader should provide information to support the referrals to agencies and have continuous correspondence with agencies such as 'Play Therapy' and 'Family Bereavement Programmes.

According to Chen and Panebianco (2017) and Young (2008, cited in Sories *et al.*, 2015) one of the most common interventions for bereaved children and their families is play therapy. Webb (2011, cited in Prabha, 2014) believes that play therapy can be modified based on circumstances, age of the children and setting it takes place. It can be carried out in community settings, homes, or schools therefore it is an adaptable treatment for bereaved children that provides support following the death of a loved one. Webb (2003, cited in Sories *et al.*, 2015) states that through play therapy children mourning the loss of a parent can process and express their feelings through verbal methods such as storytelling, games, sand play and puppet play. There are also nonverbal methods such as creative writing, music, art and dance. Landreth (2002, cited in Stutey *et al.*, 2016) maintains that play therapy enables children to communicate in their native language of play, communicate at a pace that they are comfortable with and gain control over their emotions and reactions to life experiences.

However, Sepehrtaj *et al.* (2021) points out that results of a study show that while play therapy proved beneficial for children going through bereavement and helped alleviate some emotional and behavioural issues, not all issues changed significantly following the intervention, and some problems that had been lessened during the intervention process resurfaced in the follow-up phase. Furthermore, according to

Turner (2019, p. 267) and Chauhan *et al.* (2024) bereavement-based play therapy is more than just providing therapeutic toys, the therapist must have play and grief therapy supervision and training. Also, a clear vision, appropriate funding support and an understanding of the communities needs.

Sories *et al.* (2015) maintains that play therapy focuses on fixing attachment issues. These issues can be caused by grief and loss and often lead to behavioural problems. Bowlby (1980, cited in Aleem, 2022) points out that complications may arise when insecurely attached children go through the grieving process. According to research, bereavement and attachment patterns are linked to one another, in terms of coping and maintaining bond. Bowlby and Parkes (1970, cited in Sochos and Aleem, 2021) say that grieving children rely on the level of care they receive and the mental images of their attachment figures since losing a loved one triggers the attachment system. These are the primary tools used by grieving youngsters to cope with the emotional threat that they believe the death of a loved one to represent. The child and mother in the scenario could partake in play therapy to support their mental health whilst expressing their emotions through play and improve attachment and family relationships whilst going through the grieving process.

According to Ayers *et al.* (2014) and Sandler *et al.* (2018) research shows that the Family Bereavement Programme (FBP) is effective for children suffering parental loss. Cognitive behavioural techniques and psychoeducational techniques are adopted in this therapy. Sandler *et al.* (2016) and Schoenfelder *et al.* (2015) states that the parent group in the FBP often focus on skills to reduce parental depression, strengthen positive parenting and protect children from exposure to stressful events that may take place after the loss of their parent. The child group in the FBP often focus on increasing positive interactions and family relationships, reducing inhibition of emotional expression and negative stress appraisals and teaching skills to strengthen realistic control and adaptive coping beliefs. Nevertheless, Bergman, Axberg and Hanson (2017) and Akerman and Statham (2011) maintain that support programmes that include combined sessions for the family instead of separate child and parent groups are important due to allowing the family time to discuss their loss and emotions together. Sandler *et al.* (2016) say that there are twelve sessions in the FBP programme, and some include conjoint parent-youth activities.

Ayers *et al.* (2014) point out that results of a study show that families that took part in the FBP showed a decrease in caregiver mental health issues, increase in positive parenting, increase in positive coping, reductions in negative events and decrease in inhibition of expression of feelings. Sandler *et al.* (2016) agrees and says that over a six-year period, the FBP was found to improve mental health including depression and psychiatric distress, alcohol abuse, grief and positive adjustment which includes parental warmth and coping efficacy. However, Neimeyer (2010, cited in Wilson, Errasti-Ibarrondo and Rodriguez-Prat, 2019) believes that bereavement programmes can be harmful to individuals. They can sometimes result in sustained or increased grief by the activities they participate in through the programme and contact with others that are grieving. Furthermore, Ayers *et al.* (2014) maintain that following the FBP results of a study show that significant effects were not displayed for child and youth mental health issues.

On the other hand, Patterson *et al.* (2010, cited in Henoch, Berg and Benkel, 2016) and Metel and Barnes (2011) state that talking and listening to others in similar situations can promote feelings of recognition and sometimes gives people reassurance and confidence to talk about their own feelings. Schoenfelder *et al.* (2015) says that results of a study show that the family bereavement programme did not have direct effects on educational functioning. However, there is suggestive evidence that prosocial development which aids coping with the tasks of succeeding in school is promoted in the family bereavement programme. The Family Bereavement Programme may benefit the mother and daughter in the scenario as they include parent-based sessions and child-based sessions with the opportunity to collaborate and partake in activities together. Some aims are to improve relationships, aid mental health issues and provide coping strategies for the family.

Akerman and Statham (2014, cited in Linder, Lunardini and Zimmerman, 2024) and McClatchey, Vonk and Palardy (2009, cited in Richardson, Ferguson and Maxymiv, 2017) maintain that the aim of a bereavement camp is to provide support for parentally bereaved children. They have been proven to reduce traumatic stress symptoms and grief. Fluegeman, Schrauben, and Cleghorn (2013, cited in Richardson, Ferguson and Maxymiv, 2017) say that activities that are carried out in the camp have been proven to teach coping skills, decrease isolation and encouraged campers to ask for help and express emotions. Griffiths *et al.* (2019)

states that results of a study highlight that all carers were pleased with the camp, and the majority of the children's open-ended responses supported this conclusion, implying that participation in the camp was connected with favourable outcomes for both the children and the carers. However, Linder, Lunardini and Zimmerman (2024) believe that although bereavement camps do not cost the family money there are other barriers which may be faced. The application process can be difficult, families may struggle with transportation to and from the camp and parental engagement could be lacking. Furthermore, information of the availability of bereavement camps may not reach those that would benefit from the support.

Welsh Government (2015) say that an inclusive leader should incorporate community partnerships into their curriculum and setting. The school itself can promote enhancing community cohesion but this may also be supported through collaboration between working partners in the community including groups and organisations. Estyn (2020) point out that to support the learning and wellbeing of students and their families it is important that schools reach out to their communities. Community schools work in partnership and collaborate with statutory services, community organisations and an array of specialist agencies to provide beneficial services for families, pupils and the community. The bereavement camp will support the child in the scenario by providing community links and enabling the children to gain support and build friendships with other children that are also grieving. Furthermore, the camp involves the work of professionals that will provide appropriate activities, support and guidance for the bereaved children.

Section 2

According to Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013, p.3) and Lassance (2020) policy is an attempt by those working within an organisation to think coherently about what it is aiming to achieve and what it must do to get there. It can also be viewed as a stated intention which provides guidance on a course of action. Levin (1999, cited in Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013 p.2) believes that policies entail commitment due to being committed to certain approaches, belongingness because the policy will belong to someone or an individual setting. It will also entail status because the set of ideas will be formally adopted by the body that has ownership of it and specificity as it will state how to deal with certain issues and situations. Dallimore (2019a) and

Ben-Arieh (2014) point out that there are underlying determinants with regards to Early Childhood Care and Education policy. Society's view of childhood, education versus care and development, and respective roles of family and state all impact policy choices. Some societies view young children as 'empty vessels' which are 'ready to learn' with their value being calculated by academic attainment.

Alternatively, other societies view children holistically, where each child is viewed as a unique and competent learner that should be supported and encouraged. Byrne and Lundy (2015) maintain that recognising the legitimacy and utility of children's rights by policymakers is an important step towards creating an environment in which children's rights can be effectively implemented. Dallimore (2019b) believe that Wales have aimed to develop a children's policy agenda with the focus being on children's rights. However, developing Early Childhood Education and Care policy might be challenging due to potential misappropriation by competing policy areas based on various rationales.

The professional guidance that promotes inclusive practice and will be analysed is 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (UNCRC). According to Unicef (2019) and Quennerstedt, Robinson and l'Anson (2018) the UNCRC is the most comprehensive statement of children's rights that has been produced and the most generally adopted international human rights document in history. Unicef (2019) and United Nations (1989, cited in Fairhall and Woods, 2021) maintain that there are fifty-four articles covering every aspect of a child's life stating the political, economic, civil, cultural and social rights. All children are entitled to claim the rights in the convention, and they apply to children universally. Lyle (2014) and Freeman (2012, cited in Lyle, 2021) states that in March 2012, the Welsh National Assembly passed the Children's Rights Scheme, which aimed to facilitate the inclusion of children in every aspect of life. Its purpose is to ensure that the UNCRC is incorporated into all policies and practices regarding children and young people.

However, Williams (2017, cited in Fairhall and Woods, 2021) says that a barrier for adults to display a child-rights approach is the complexity of the UNCRC. Theobald (2019) agrees that children's rights are underpinned by a democratic perspective which makes them complex. This may result in situations where one person's right conflicts with the rights of others, therefore judgements must be made about whose rights are attended to. Lyle (2021) and Unicef (2003, cited in Bradwell, 2019)

maintain that article 12 of the UNCRC it states that the child's voice must always be considered to promote inclusive practice, although implementation of this will be dependent on how socially and politically acceptable the rights of the child are viewed by the adult population. It will remain rhetoric unless it is deeply ingrained in the social policies that the adult population finds acceptable. Furthermore, Sargeant and Gillett-Swan (2015) states that voice inclusive practice is linked to Article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC. It refers to actions and practices that incorporate and actively engage with children and their perspectives on issues that impact them. It is also linked to Articles 24 and 29 with regards to including the child in decisions relating to their education.

However, Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra (2021) and Collins (2017) state that often adults are deterred from seeking to involve children due to the risk of tokenism. A tokenistic process is when children and young people's views are not taken into consideration when decisions are made despite being consulted about it. This contradicts the UNCRC's aim to promote inclusive practice. Nevertheless, Lundy (2018) maintains that tokenism is not a valid justification for inaction. She states that the perspectives of children in some recent studies indicate that this is not always the case with children who have participated in collective participation activities, implying the need to revisit and re-evaluate the traditional view on the role and effect of tokenism in child participation.

The words 'appropriate' and 'necessary' are used throughout the UNCRC which may be a barrier because it can be confusing and unclear. Cruz *et al.* (2017) and Ismail, Bsharat and Amirbayeva (2022) believe that vagueness occurs when there is insufficient specificity in a statement, leading to different interpretations. Channell (1994, cited in Li, 2017) points out that vague language is a controversial item in legal documents. Anesa (2007, cited in Li, 2017) and says that 'weasel words' for example 'necessary' and 'appropriate' are examples of vagueness. Furthermore, Alwan (2022) states that weasel words are known to weaken the conclusion with the aim to reduce the chance of being refuted. However, according to Li (2019) using ambiguous language can also help legal drafters achieve inclusivity in their texts by allowing them to cover a broad range of unforeseen circumstances. According to Orr (2014) and Kalverboer *et al.* (2017) when the convention refers to the 'best interests of the child' it is not clear who should determine these. Van Buren (2007, cited in Orr,

2014) maintains that the introduction of the convention did not give children power, it empowers officials to make decisions and act in a role that was previously allocated solely to parents. Furthermore, Marz (2022) believes that in general, it is preferable to have unanimity between the child and all other stakeholders including the family when decisions are made that affect the child creating an inclusive approach. However, this isn't always achievable often it will be referred to court for a resolution.

Section 3 – Blog

Incorporating multi-cultural literature in a setting to promote inclusive practice

I believe that every childcare setting should promote inclusive practice and an effective way to do this is through discussions and incorporating multi-cultural resources such as books into the setting. This gives the children an awareness of different races and cultures and decreases the likelihood of racism. According to Allen *et al.* (2021) to ensure children learn about race they should be given the space, time, curriculum and support to discuss it and gain an understanding of what they are noticing and seeing. Vittrup (2016) believes that children should be properly educated about respect for diversity, tolerance for others and the nature of cultural differences in the early years. Purnell (2007, cited in Garces-Bacsal *et al.*, 2022) point out that culturally relevant stories are engaging for young children to make connections from their school lessons to their own life experiences, whilst also modelling acceptance of diversity in the setting.

According to Hayes and Francis (2023) results of a study showed that early childhood teachers had a proactive approach to diversity as part of their teaching practices. In addition to their overarching pedagogy, they used multicultural children's literature to provide equal classroom experiences for pupils. Gunn *et al.* (2013, cited in Bennett *et al.*, 2021) points out that to effectively address religious diversity, teachers must not only develop strategies for teaching all pupils, but also get a deeper awareness of religious traditions and relevant literature that offers an approach to talk about religious diversity in a child friendly way.

Mandarani and Munir (2021) believe that multicultural literature should be embedded in the classroom to promote diversity awareness and inclusion. Nevertheless, Skerrett (2013, cited in Bennett *et al.*, 2021) maintains that teachers' lack of awareness and fear have resulted in limited attention to religious literature and

omission from curricula. Portes *et al.* (2018) say that effective teaching in culturally diverse environments requires innovative pedagogies, and research shows that their success is often contingent on the availability of comprehensive continuous professional development. Furthermore, CLPE (2020) state that an ongoing issue in the United Kingdom is that there has been a shortage of quality, inclusive and representative books that reflect the diversity of children in our classrooms and the wider community.

According to Ong (2022) use of multicultural books also poses the risk of essentialising culture. This refers to the view of individuals in cultural and ethnic groups possessing homogeneous traits. Layne and Alemanji (2015) state that it is important that books that promote diversity through characters do not display existing stereotypes. However, Goo (2018) maintains that literature can be used to illustrate unacceptable stereotyping and counteract traditional stereotypes. Hamilton *et al.* (2006, cited in McIver, 2018) agrees that classroom books that challenge cultural norms have a positive effect on children's social and cognitive development and counteracts stereotypes.

In conclusion the literature analysed in this blog clearly highlights that it is important for settings to promote multicultural books and literature to promote inclusive practice and diversity. There are many benefits of introducing these in the early years however there are also many barriers to implementation which have been discussed in depth above.

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