

Portfolio

Section 1

Ferdman *et al.* (2021) states that as part of today's current approaches to sustainable and inclusive leadership, it is important to foster and encourage an 'inclusive culture' in work environments, groups and within the community. He defines inclusive leadership as facilitating people's ideas, implementing safe environments and encouraging inclusive participation and change for everybody, of which Brown (2019) agrees. He explains there is also an importance to nurture equity and fairness for a diverse group of identities.

Rodgers and Wilmot (2011) and Bortini *et al.* (2016) have similar views, thus define inclusive leadership as respecting and appreciating all individuals for who they are, acknowledging their personal qualities, opinions, and their different ways of being. They further explain that early year's leaders must encourage fully inclusive environments (agreeing with Brown, 2019 and Ferdman *et al.* 2021) where every person involved within the setting - whether this is a staff member, a parent, a child or even a student volunteer - is wholly respected, accepted and valued.

O'Sullivan (2009) supports the ideas of Rodgers and Wilmot (2011) by stating inclusive leaders have the capacity to understand the needs and circumstances of all persons involved within an Early Years organisation. She explains these leaders have an acknowledgeable self-awareness, recognising and appreciating an individual's skills or personality, with the ability to communicate in specific ways and leadership styles to successfully engage with their varied audiences – whether this is an adult or a child. Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) supports the views of O'Sullivan (2009), by adding hierarchical leadership is being succeeded by collaborative, relational and interdependent leadership approaches. This means people are having to work together and practice inclusivity to complete tasks rather than rely on one leader.

However, Nutbrown *et al.* (2013) explains that not all leaders' understanding of 'inclusion' is the same. For example, she says practitioners often have either 'narrow' or 'broad' ideas of inclusion and therefore 'inclusive leadership', meaning sometimes they only think of it in terms of attending to children with special educational needs. Reza (2021) agrees with Nutbrown *et al.* (2013) by explaining that historically the idea of 'inclusion' in education shows that practitioners focus on areas regarding additional

learning needs or special education. Nutbrown *et al.* (2013) states this is a closed view of inclusivity, further supporting O'Sullivan's (2009) and Rodgers and Wilmot's (2011) view, supporting the idea that inclusive leadership means to ensure all participants, practitioners and attendees in any provision feel equally valued members of a community, accompanied with a sense of belonging.

According to Lindon *et al.* (2016), inclusive leaders are important in Early Years settings because they are advocates to support children and families. Randel *et al.* (2018) explains that by practicing inclusive leadership within settings and work environments, people feel psychologically motivated and empowered to perform well. This can be applied to staff in early years settings, encouraging them to feel positive and confident in their roles to effectively support children and their families. Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) further supports Randel *et al.* (2018), but adds that there is a positive impact on the educational outcomes for children within settings. They state the correlation between efficacious educational leadership at all levels within early years settings has a positive impact on children's learning and the communication between adults.

Scenario:

"You are an early years student who has been volunteering in a local school. You have observed a 5 year old girl, Nina, often standing alone in the playground. The other children are not openly inviting her to join in their group conversations and play activities. At the end of the school day when Nina's mother – Maria – comes to collect her from the setting, she also appears anxious and unsure around other parents as they do not attempt to include her in their conversations. Nina and her family are Ukrainian refugee's and have limited understanding of the English language. Nina and her family have been a part of the community and the setting for 6 weeks."

It is part of an inclusive leaders' responsibility to ensure that every child within a setting feels welcome and comfortable, particularly refugee children as they have likely experienced trauma or hardship in their previous life in their home country (Warsi, 2017). McLeod (2022) states practitioners can accomplish this by looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs which describes what children need as the foundations to feel safe within the learning environment, including shelter, relationships and a sense of

connection. Holmes (2014) supports McLeod (2022) but further links Bowlby's attachment theory by saying children need to form attachments with adults in settings with practitioners to feel a sense of belonging and enable progression, thus also agreeing with Warsi (2017). Therefore, practitioners can apply inclusive leadership to their practice by accommodating the ideas of Bowlby and Maslow.

Nina has been observed standing alone in the playground without other children inviting her to play. Johansson and Puroila (2021) states that pupils in all different parts of the world are increasingly facing exclusion and discrimination in educational settings from other children. As an inclusive leader as outlined by Ferdman *et al.* (2021) and Bortini *et al.* (2016), it is important for the practitioner to encourage children to be inclusive, accepting and kind to other children within the setting. Tomlinson (2020) agrees, by explaining children who have empathetic and compassionate qualities are more likely to be social butterflies, build relationships and be accepting and open minded of others.

Additionally, inclusive leaders can encourage kindness and inclusion by educating the children on Nina's culture (Corbin, 2015), by softly explaining why she is now part of their setting, and how they can help make her feel welcome and safe in their classroom. By doing this, practitioners will make Nina feel safe within the school, but also help other pupils to become more inclusive themselves.

Inclusive leaders must also work towards building positive relationships with families as well as just the child (Estyn, 2017). Welsh Government (2017) states in their 'Families First' programme that it is important to support families with their differing needs so they can become confident and resilient members of the community, which will also support the child to develop and succeed in education (NALDIC, 2015).

Maria appears to feel uncomfortable around other parents at the setting which suggests she is struggling with the language barrier, feeling isolated and the transition into her new life (BRYCS, 2016). RESET (2021) explains that refugee parents may feel embarrassed and unequal to other parents as they have likely come from a difficult situation in their home country, as well as being unable to speak the language of the country they have come to. Welsh Government (2017) states that inclusive leaders within educational settings must work together with 'Families First' to identify children

and families who need additional support and thus make efficient referrals for the relevant support.

However, a barrier to offering such help is that it can sometimes be difficult to engage parents and provide them with support (Morgan, 2016). Some parents are considered to be 'hard to reach', and as a result can sometimes seem uninterested, hesitant or embarrassed and do not want to accept help from school personnel (Lindon and Lindon, 2011). According to Kwatubana and Thabo (2015), children feel more motivated to perform better academically when families are involved in their education. Therefore, inclusive leaders should try to encourage family and parent involvement to play a part in their child's progression in settings, giving them a sense of belonging and promotes shared decision making (Randel, *et al.*, 2018)

It is noted in the scenario that other parents do not attempt to engage in conversation with the mother, Maria. This could be due to the presence of bias and pre-judgement from the other adults, creating a negative portrayal of intersectionality. Phoenix (2018) and Crenshaw (1989) defines this as when the diversity of people (such as race, social class and culture) and a variety of experiences come together into one space. On the other hand, inclusive leaders in the above scenario could encourage the other parents to understand Maria's circumstances by looking through a positive intersectional lens. This allows scope for changes in the way people see others (Crenshaw, 2017) and a rise in respect and equality amongst the parents in the community in line with the *Equality Act 2010*.

Therefore, Nina's family will feel welcome and valued within the settings and the community as a result of the inclusive leaders work to bring adults together.

Inclusive leaders must guide a group of people to work together with other professionals, with a shared common goal and sense of purpose at the forefront of their rationale for change (Hadfield, Jopling and Needham, 2015). This is supported by Martin (2017), who states that inclusive leaders need to practice the '5 C's', including commitment and efficient communication when working in partnership with multi-agencies and other professionals. Pen Green Centre (2022) supports the ideas of Martin (2017) by further explaining that the development of efficient multi-agency working helps practitioners to fully support the needs of the families that use their service.

Nina and her mother need guidance from external agencies with the support of the inclusive leader in the scenario. The inclusive practitioner can offer to refer them to services such as Citizens Advice to help with housing, finances and refugee status (Citizens Advice, 2019). In addition, the British Refugee Council (2022) can provide a variety of referral services to support the whole family, including access to English Additional Language (EAL) courses to help families like Nina's gain confidence in their communication skills and enter into educational studies (Embrace Relief, 2022). Therefore, in working collaboratively with professionals, inclusive leaders can successfully support families and their diverse needs within early years settings, further underpinning a child's development and growth (Hansel, 2018).

A barrier for inclusive leaders to work collaboratively with other agencies and professionals is that an increase in different inputs may also lead to an increase in conflicting opinions (Family Connect, 2021). Because many different professionals and agencies may need to come together to support families like Nina's, it may be difficult for them to come to a final decision on what is the best path to take. This may result in power struggles amongst practitioners and other professionals which may result in the loss of focus on the best interests of the child within the setting (Article 3 of the UNCRC, UNICEF, 2019).

According to Ferdman (2017), inclusive leaders must approach diversity and culture on a societal and community level as well as just within the setting or organisation they work in. Crenshaw (1989) further explains through her definition of 'intersectionality' that the experiences and lives of people from a range of different diverse cultures and backgrounds cross in society every day. Therefore, Ferdman's (2017) and Crenshaw (1989) agree that people must approach the world through an intersectional lens with the encouragement from inclusive leaders, allowing potential for change in perspectives of the variety of cultures within communities. Welsh Government (2016) adds that children spend 14% of their time in the school environment, and the rest of the time out community. Therefore, it is important for inclusive leaders to adapt and involve individuals from the wider community within children's educational organisations.

The Glossary of Education Reform (2019) explains the school community relates closely with inclusive leadership duties of involving people from the wider area to

create a sense of family or community for all involved. For example, Governors for Schools (2022) supports this view by explaining that boards and school governor teams (such as parent governors) are made of up a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds, cultures, religions and class, to come together and form ideas with the best interest of the children and school at heart, in line with article 3 of the UNCRC (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, this supports the idea of Welsh Government (2016) as they state schools do not work in isolation.

However, every educational setting is different in its approach to community involvement. According to Gibson and Blandford (2005), some schools follow a closed door policy which means the school handles children's educational and social problems with minimal involvement from the community. This would be a barrier to progression for Nina and her mother, as this doesn't allow for varying ideas and partnership working on how to encourage other parents and the community to understand their difficult circumstances. On the other hand, an inclusive leader according to Gibson and Blandford (2005) should implement an open door policy within a school, meaning that information is freely available to parents and partners. This maximises communication and collaboration to support inclusivity for children like Nina and her family within the community (Hansel, 2018).

Monkton Priory School in Pembrokeshire has community and collaboration at the heart of its practice. It is a school where 50% of its children are entitled to free school meals, 40% of its pupils have some form of additional learning needs, and 30% of its population is made up of children from the gypsy-traveller community (Learning and Work Institute Wales, 2019). This demonstrates inclusive leadership and practice through the diverse variations circumstances of pupils attending the setting. Further to this, Monkton Priory school also helps support adults and parents of children in the setting to attend courses (Monkton Priory School, No Date). This is a positive example of practitioners promoting inclusive leadership by involving and supporting everyone linked to the setting, thus strengthening the sense of community.

Section 2

'Policy' can be defined as a set of guidelines or steps to follow in the event of a variety of situations arising within a setting that is adhered to by a group of people (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) further support this view,

by defining policy as an attempt by adults within a setting or organisation to logically process a scenario that has arisen to determine a course of action, thus resulting in a resolution or improvement towards circumstances. In addition, Ferdman *et al.* (2021) states that inclusive leadership relating to policies can be of micro and macro levels. Aizawa and Rose (2019) supports Ferdman *et al.* (2021) by defining macro level leadership and policies as national or governmental guidance. They further add that micro level leadership and policies are found in small organisations and inside classrooms.

Levin (1997) agrees, however adds that definitions of 'policy' can vary from setting to setting. He further explains that there are consistent common elements of policies. This includes 'belongingness', as a policy will be specific to an organisation and the people within it, or to something or someone, and also 'commitment', as a policy will aim to reach a resolution by setting out a course of action. Therefore, Levin's (1997) explanation of these elements within policies supports the idea that they should allow for inclusive leadership practice in early years as suggested by Ferdman *et al.* (2021).

This section will critically evaluate the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2022) and whether it is enabling for inclusive leadership in early years education. Booysen (2014) states policy allows inclusive leaders to support individuals to be a part of the decision making process, working towards a shared outcome and building on current practices.

The Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings document (Welsh Government, 2022) states its aim is to instil a sense of belonging and understanding regarding the diverse culture of modern day Wales into practitioners and children. In addition, the curriculum further aims to set the foundations for young children to work towards realising the four purposes of the new Successful Futures Curriculum (Welsh Government, 2015). Therefore, this document also aims to be inclusive of other professionals by working and communicating in partnership (Early Education, No Date) to develop children's understanding for their future learning as well as their current learning through linked curriculums (Welsh Government, 2022 and Welsh Government, 2015).

However, it is interesting to note the wording of the document. For example, it states "we should look for opportunities to share knowledge..." (Welsh Government, 2022,

p. 5) and “we should work with our relevant partners...” (Welsh Government, 2022, p. 6). There is question over the words ‘we should’ here, as it is used throughout the document. This suggests that practitioners are advised to follow these recommendations, however, gives the impression that they do not have to do so. Evans (2013) suggests that as a result of such wording, practitioners may have differing interpretations of such policies and documents which may result in lack of understanding and a variety of implementation strategies across early years settings (ESTYN, 2011). Therefore, this suggests that leaders have the leniency and opportunity to create an environment that is not as inclusive for staff and children as the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings claims to be (Welsh Government, 2022).

In addition, this document says that it “has been developed through co-construction by practitioners, for practitioners” (Welsh Government, 2022, p.3). This is a positive aspect of the curriculum document, as it confirms it has been created by professionals who work in early years settings, who can see what changes and development is needed in the curriculum through their own experiences to support all children, staff and the school, thus enabling opportunities for inclusive leadership (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021).

Manele (2019) argues that people in higher up positions such as government who create policies, do not liaise with the people who the policy is going to affect or have the knowledge and understanding of their needs. This is a barrier to inclusive leadership from a macro level filtering into a micro level environment (Ferdman *et al.*, 2021), as policy makers, practitioners, families and other professionals should be working together and sharing ideas to create such guidance (OECD, 2020). The OECD (No Date) supports Manele (2019) by suggesting policy makers who do not work in educational settings and see practice for themselves, should attain the appropriate training to ensure all professionals are of the same understanding and in a knowledgeable position to create such policies and guidance. Therefore, this would enable practitioners to practice inclusive leadership on the ground in early years settings whilst working collaboratively with government and outside influences (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014).

In conclusion, the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2022) does promote opportunities for practitioners to practice inclusive leadership within early years settings. However, it should be noted that the wording of such guidance and policies must be considered and communicated effectively by practitioners to achieve a knowledgeable understanding to include and support everybody the guidance affects.

Section 3

What can inclusive practitioners do in the classroom to ensure children feel like they belong in their early years setting?

Petriwskyj (2010) explains it can be difficult for adults to place an emphasis on diversity and inclusion within early years settings due to the difference in practitioners' understanding of what inclusion means and how to implement it. Furthermore, children's needs also differ from one another and therefore practitioners must take a balanced approach of meeting each child's individual needs (Early Years Careers, 2016a). However, Aubrey (2011) argues that people in leadership roles are often promoted or thrust into these responsibilities without the supporting training to allow them to fully understand and practice inclusive leadership. Even though, Early Years Careers (2016b) states it is important for inclusive leaders to create an environment that promotes a sense of belongingness for children, so that they can feel included and valued for who they are.

A child's voice and their rights are set out by the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019) and is central to their education and allowing them to feel like they belong in an early years setting (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2017). Under article 28 of the UNCRC, children have the right to an education and their inclusive goals, consisting of developing their respect for other cultures (UNICEF, 2019).

One way practitioners can encourage children to feel a sense of belonging within the classroom is by making the resources, furniture and equipment accessible for them to explore the environment on their own. This is supported by the ideas of the Montessori Approach (Montessori, 2019), who explains that this allows children to gain a sense of independence in the classroom by being able to do things for themselves. Gueterbock (No Date) supports Montessori (2019) as he states a Montessori setting

aims to meet the needs of the whole child, encouraging them to explore independently, therefore making them feel like they belong in the environment. Therefore, practitioners are able to practice inclusive leadership by providing resource rich, safe and enabling environments, thus creating a welcoming classroom for children to learn (Early Years Alliance, No Date).

Practitioners can also have a variety of inclusive literature within a setting. For example, Krajewski (2020) suggests a variety of children's books which have a variation of different diversity themes. By having inclusive literature within settings, children can identify different characters that are similar to themselves, as well as learn about diversity and that not all people are the same (McGeary, 2021). However, teaching children about different cultures and values can sometimes be difficult due to the beliefs and bias of individual parents and guardians within the settings. For example, some families will prefer for their children not to engage in such learning due to religious beliefs or for reasons of their culture. This makes it difficult for the inclusive leader as the requests and views of the parents should be respected (McQueen, 2022).

To conclude, there are a variety of ways inclusive leaders can create a warm and welcoming environment for children from all walks of life. It is clear that inclusive leadership in practice must interlink with supporting the children in settings, the families of the children, the professionals and multi-agencies that need to work together and also the community. Without practitioners practicing inclusive leadership qualities as outlined by Ferdman *et al.* 2021, inclusion within early years settings and in the wider community will not be accomplished.

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