

Section 1

Inclusive leadership is important for creating supportive and effective educational environments. Achieving inclusivity relies on the presence of inclusive leadership within the setting. An inclusive leader values everyone's contributions and fosters innovation by including individuals who are at risk of social exclusion (Bortini, *et al.*, no date, p.5; Curriculum for funded non maintained settings, 2022, p.50). This includes individuals who may have a disability, come from a refugee background or have fewer opportunities due to living in remote areas suggests Bortini, *et al.* (no date, p.5). Implementing inclusive practices in pedagogy is important because it helps children and families develop a sense of belonging, feel valued and have equal opportunities to thrive (Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings, 2022, p.44). Bortini, *et al.* (no date p.24) suggests, that inclusive leaders act as role models who others follow to lead to more inclusive actions. Similarly, according to the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.44), an inclusive leader guides practitioners to recognise and support the diverse experiences of children and their families, ensuring that children feel confident in who they are.

Scenario

James is 3 years old and has found his parents' separation tough. The split is quite acrimonious. James is cared for jointly by both parents. James's mother is involved and speaks openly with the staff; however, his father is perceived as difficult and disliked expressing challenges after their time together. You would like to meet with other professionals and parents because you have noticed James's development regressing in recent months. James's father also dislikes you.

How the practitioner can achieve inclusive opportunities for James.

In order to support the family in this scenario the practitioner will actively encourage James's dad to collaborate with the setting, while also encouraging the mum to continue her engagement. Family involvement within a setting is important for supporting James, as Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.282) indicate that when families are involved in early childhood education alongside professionals, it significantly benefits children's holistic development.

However, James's dad might be reluctant to communicate with the school due to him not liking the practitioner and being unwilling to communicate. According to Campbell (2011, p.11), this reluctance often arises from personal factors rather than with the school itself. A possible reason why James's dad might be disinclined to engage with the setting and practitioner, as noted by Estyn (2018, p.21), is that fathers who work often struggle to find the time to participate in their child's education. This lack of availability could lead to feelings of exclusion. To address this barrier, PACEY (2024) suggests that practitioners need to be flexible in their communication approaches to parents to meet the diverse needs of different families. This flexibility is important when working with parents to ensure they feel valued and included in their child's development at school.

Engaging in all forms of communication that involve active listening and efforts to understand other perspectives will help the practitioner connect with James' parents and lay a strong foundation for building relationships and inclusion within the setting (Bortini, *et al.*, no date, p.34). This study is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which states that children's development is influenced by interactions with their primary caregivers, including practitioners and families (Oke, Butler and O'Neill, 2020, p.284). To support this theory, it is the responsibility of the inclusive leaders to ensure that staff are well equipped to foster inclusivity by having an awareness of potential barriers faced by individuals at risk of exclusion, such as James's dad. For instance, important information given to the mum face to face can be communicated to the dad via ClassDojo. According to Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.291), online communication tools such as ClassDojo enable practitioners to support the child's home learning environment by sharing information about children learning and development, which families can then apply at home. This crucial for supporting James, especially since his dad may sometimes be reluctant to communicate with the school. Using tools like ClassDojo allows his dad to stay involved and support James' learning at home effectively, due to parents having shared care of James. Similarly, this ensures that both parents are equally informed and engaged demonstrating and inclusive approach to communication.

According to Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.283) communicating with families from diverse backgrounds can be challenging due to their limited time, employment obligations and varying expectations of practitioners. However, as an inclusive practitioner, in the meeting with multiple agencies, it is important for the parents to understand that James's well-being and development are the foremost priorities. This is important because according to Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.283), families that fear their child will not benefit from their participation are less likely to collaborate. To foster inclusivity in this situation the practitioner should schedule the meeting at a convenient time to ensure James's dad can attend and be present too. It is important that both parents are included in the meeting regarding James's regressing development as the multi-agencies can offer family support groups they can attend in the local community.

Settings can also enhance inclusive opportunities for James by offering play therapy sessions. At 3 years old, James may find it challenging to articulate his emotions and how his home life, particularly his parent's acrimonious separation, affects him. According to the Association for Play therapy (no date), play therapy provides James with a way to express his concerns through play, as he may not yet have the verbal skills to communicate his thoughts and feelings. This approach is inclusive in supporting James because it can be conducted during school hours without requiring parental involvement. Providing this support for James exemplifies the role of the inclusive leader, who actively builds bridges with various teams to effectively support children and families within the setting (Bortini, *et al.*, no date, p.33).

How community can achieve inclusive opportunities for James.

The community can support the family in this scenario by providing parent and child support groups. These family support groups are important for supporting James's development. Without the necessary help, his family might struggle, making James susceptible to developing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Welsh Government, 2017, p.1). Welsh Government (2022, p.45) asserts that exposure to adversity and trauma, such as parental separation in this scenario, can significantly impair children's ability to learn and develop.

Positively, these groups provide a safe and inviting environment for those caring for young children to meet, make friends, seek assistance and form local networks suggests Pen Green Centre (2022). Helping James's and his family feel a sense of belonging and inclusivity in the community is essential for their overall well-being. Also, creating an environment where they feel welcomed and supported can significantly contribute to James's development possibly preventing James from developing ACEs.

However, to create and execute effective services for families, the inclusive leader must have a comprehensive understanding of the families living in the local area states Welsh Government (2017, p.7). This deep understanding of community needs aids the inclusive leader to provide targeted training to support group practitioners based on local requirements. By doing so, the community can create more inclusive opportunities for James, creating an environment where everyone can thrive.

The local community could also offer playgroups to support James's development. According to Commerford and Robinson (2016, p.3), these playgroups are designed to include all families and provide opportunities for children to learn and grow through play. Given that James is 3 years old, attending this playgroup will be important for supporting his regressing development, as the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.15) states that children learn through play and play-based experiences. Additionally, , Article 31 from UNCRC (UNICEF) asserts that children have the right to play.

However, the leader of the playgroup needs to have a clear understanding of how children learn through play. This is because Commerford and Robinson (2016, p.16) highlight that the facilitator's level of training is an important factor in supporting family attendance rates, which in turn significantly influences the benefits families receive from the playgroup. This implies that the facilitator must plan experiences and environments that are meaningful and relevant to children's interests. Ensuring that playgroup leaders are well-trained and knowledgeable can enhance the overall effectiveness of the programme, leading to better developmental outcomes for children and greater support for their families states Commerford and Robinson (2016, p.16). However, James's potential development improvement depends on the playgroups being scheduled at time convenient for parents who work. Time constraints significantly impact parent's ability to engage in their child's education as

noted by Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.288). On the contrary Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.289) argue that by recognising these barriers, an inclusive leader can encourage families to be more proactive in their child education.

How the family can achieve inclusive opportunities for James.

One way the family can support James is by ensuring the practitioner is included in all information concerning James. This collaborative approach helps ensure that the practitioner has a comprehensive understanding of James needs and circumstances, enabling them to provide targeted support and interventions. Lohmann, Hathcote and Boothe (2018, p.25) suggests that parental involvement in schools and communities is linked to higher academic achievement in children.

Involvement can be fostered by families attending coffee mornings organised by practitioners for the community. The role of an inclusive leader is crucial in creating a safe environment where parents can express their emotions and feel accepted says Bortini, *et al.* (no date, p.33). According to Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.289), coffee mornings enable parents and practitioners to communicate and build relationships in a more relaxed environment compared to multiagency meeting. This relaxed environment may encourage parents to become more involved and discuss any concerns they have. This approach supports James' development, as Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that children thrive when there is harmony between the microsystem and mesosystem. According to Oke, Butler and O'Neill (2020, p.289), these systems are distinguished by strong relationships build on two-way communication between the family and the early childhood setting.

This will also ensure James has consistency between both parents. When parents have a consistent approach, it provides children with feelings of security. According to Burleson and Thoron (no date, p.2), safety needs are found within the child's environment whether at home or at school. Consistency from both parents is crucial for James, as inconsistent parenting may compromise his sense of security at home potentially hindering his developmental progress as Maslow's Hierarchy of needs suggests (Burleson and Thoron, no date, p.2).

Conclusion

In the future in order to support James, the family should continue participating in family support sessions regularly. Consistent attendance at these sessions helps establish a stable support system for James. This ongoing engagement allows parents to stay informed about James' progress, receive guidance on effective parenting strategies, and collaborate with practitioners on his development.

Section 2

Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013, p.3) define a policy as an effort by individuals within an organisation to think coherently about their goals and the actions necessary to achieve them. They offer clear guidelines for individuals to follow promoting consistency and efficiency across an organisation state (Levin, 1999 cited in Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013, p.2). This is important in early years as policies help maintain high standards of care and education.

The policy chosen for this section is the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022). This curriculum acknowledges the uniqueness of each child, which is crucial for fostering inclusive practices in early years settings. By placing children at the centre of the curriculum, it ensures that both children and their families receive the appropriate support for full participation in the learning process (Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings, 2022, p.44). Cologon (2014, p.4) underlines inclusive education requires protecting all children's rights while also delivering an education free of discretionary ideas and attitudes. This idea aligns with Articles 23 and 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, no date), which promote non-discrimination and the inclusion of all children, regardless of their individual circumstances.

However, the term "appropriate support" used by the Welsh Government is subjective and varies for each individual. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (no date), "appropriate" means suitable or right for a particular situation. Yet, what is deemed appropriate can differ among people based on their unique needs, experiences and perspectives. This subjectivity can complicate inclusive practice, as it may lead to inconsistent levels and types of support for children.

Additionally, the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.7) actively promotes listening to the voice of the child. Dewey (cited from Haynes, 2009, p.6-7) emphasises that children should be viewed as active participants in the learning process and considers schools to be integral parts of the community. By actively listening to the voice of the child, children can experience a profound sense of value and recognition, knowing that their opinions and perspectives hold significance. This aligned with Article 12 from UNCRC fosters inclusive practice by ensuring that every child, regardless of background or ability, has the opportunity to contribute and be heard says Estyn (2019); UNICEF (no date).

However, despite the recognition of the importance of valuing children's voices and incorporating their views into the decision-making process, some practitioners overlook this aspect of inclusive practice. For instance, Waters-Davies et al. (2023, p.2) states that not all practitioners take the voice of the child and their views seriously and act on what they have said. Also, the interpretation of children's voices is subjective and can be influenced by each individual practitioner. For example, a practitioner who values child-centred approaches and recognises the importance of children's voices in decision making may be more likely to interpret and respond to children's perspectives in a meaningful way.

Similarly, capturing the voice of the child faces a barrier, as it is common for different linguistic groups to live in the same country. However, a country's language diversity is rarely reflected in the education system (Save the Children UK, 2009, p.3). This presents a challenge for inclusive practice because children's voices and needs are unlikely to be heard if practitioners do not speak their language.

Also, the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.44) ensures that within pedagogy all children have an equal opportunity to thrive. The Children's commissioner for Wales (no date, p.8) says that equality involves ensuring every child can maximise their talents and reach their full potential, free from discrimination. Promoting equality involves acting against discrimination, which is a right under UNCRC Article 2 (UNICEF, no date) and Article 3 from UNCRPD (United Nations, no date). The Welsh Government (2023, p.3) states that this is achieved through the developmental pathways and progression steps, which ensure all children are supported to progress at their own pace. Therefore, promoting inclusivity by accommodating each child's unique learning needs and abilities.

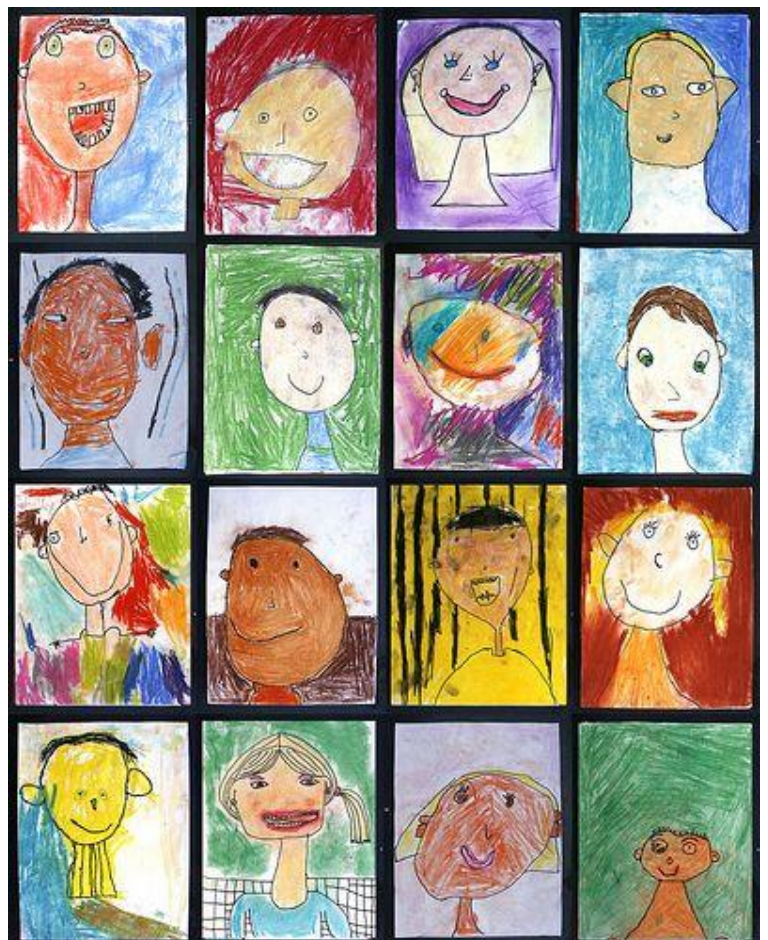
Although, the Welsh Governments use of “thrive” could be a barrier to inclusive practice. This is because using the term “thrive” could imply a high standard or level of achievement that might put pressure on children and practitioners. Thrive suggests not just improving but excelling, which might not always be realistic, especially for children with additional learning needs who may progress at a slower pace (Donaldson, 2015, p.56).

Furthermore, the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.13) advocates for inclusive practice by emphasising the importance that learning environments should celebrate and value diversity. This is important because children are influenced by their environment and the adults around them, making it the practitioner’s responsibility to create an inclusive environment that celebrates everyone (Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings, 2022, p.44). This is significant because without inclusion, children who differ from majority represented groups may not feel safe, welcomed or appreciated states Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2020, p.10). When children do not see their language and cultural backgrounds being reflected in their school environment, they can experience

feelings of isolation which can affect their emotional development.

Similarly, Anderson, Boyle and Deppler (2014, p.3) states that celebrating diversity through inclusion can lead to collaboration and shared learning experiences. This helps children develop a sense of awareness about the world around them and that other people live differently to them.

However, practitioners sometimes encounter a stigma associated with differences states Petriwskyj (2010, p.196). For example, some practitioners might hesitate to point out that a child’s skin is black when



the child is painting a self-portrait, fearing that such acknowledgement might make the child feel different rather than valued. This may result in practitioners not fully embracing diversity, leading to missed opportunities for meaningful inclusion and collaboration. This uncertainty results in children being less likely to actively participate and contribute suggests

Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2020, p.10), which is contrary to the curriculum's objectives (2022, p.4). Also, the Welsh Governments (2022, p.13) use of the word "should" when stating that the environment should celebrate, and value diversity makes it sound like a choice rather than a requirement. This ambiguity can lead to inconsistent implementation of inclusive practices across different settings implies Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013, p.3).

Section 3 – Blog

We are all different and that is beautiful.



Image: iStock (2019).

Introduction.

In early childhood education, the idea that each child is unique is more than just an acknowledgement; it serves as a guiding principle for building inclusive learning environments (Welsh Government, 2022, p.5). In this blog, I will discuss how inclusive leadership can overcome racism in early years settings.

Understanding the unique child.

Wales is an established multicultural society in which individuals of all ethnicities interact and learn from one another says NDNA (no date, p.1). This means that practitioners must recognise and accept the importance of varied experiences, cultures and backgrounds ensuring that children are never discriminated against based on race, ethnicity or religion. This aligns with Articles 28, 29 and 30 of the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, where inclusion is deeply embedded within the principles of the UNCRC (UNICEF, no date). Furthermore, Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasises the principle of non-discrimination (United Nations, no date). Both of these frameworks underscore the importance of fostering inclusive environments that respect and value diversity.

Diversity in the classroom

Inclusive leaders value and encourage participation of everyone, including those who may be at risk of exclusion from society says Bortini, et al. (no date p.5).

So as an inclusive leader in the classroom, it is critical to provide a variety of objects such as dolls, pictures and books that support diversity. This is because the content children engage with directly shapes their perceptions of themselves and others. Therefore, as Freud (2023, p.19) suggests it's important to avoid stories that reinforce stereotypical representations.

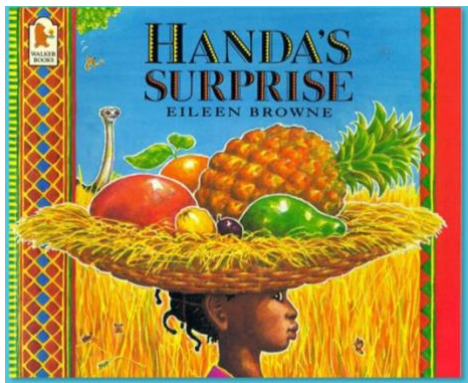


Image: Primary English (no date)

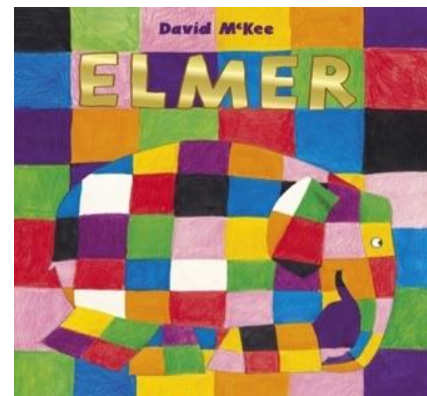
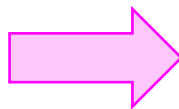


Image: Elmer (2023)

For example, in the story “Handa’s Surprise” African characters are interpreted solely as individuals carrying fruit on their heads, potentially reinforcing a narrow and inaccurate portrayal of African culture. Instead, practitioners could direct their attention to books like “Elmer”, and create an environment where diversity is celebrated, encouraging children to embrace their differences and take pride in their uniqueness.

Additionally, the NSPCC (2024) highlights that fostering conversations about differences can also serve an educational opportunity, allowing children to learn about various cultures. For instance, some children may be Muslim and celebrate Eid, providing an exciting opportunity for them to share their traditions with the class. As Freud (2023, p.7) suggests, this approach is particularly beneficial for children from racially minoritised backgrounds, as it correlates with higher self-esteem, increased pride in their identity and improved academic achievement. Like, how Maslow's Hierarchy of needs says that children must feel a sense of belonging in their environment before they can thrive and reach their full potential (Gorman, 2010, p.3). To create this sense of belonging, leaders should recognise, celebrate and build on children's past and current experiences from home and their community (Curriculum for funded non—maintained settings, 2022, p.28). This approach is a key aspect of inclusive leadership, as leaders should strive to ensure that every child achieves their best.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, it is the inclusive leader's responsibility to celebrate modern Wales's diverse culture in order to assist children acquire a feeling of 'cynefin', as stated in the Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings (2022, p.3). This sense of belonging develops strong connections with their family and school, and it can spread to the community, Wales and the wider world.

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