

Inclusive Leadership: Reflective Portfolio

Section 1:

The Children Act 2004 which was proposed in the UK, introduced integrated working in children's services, which is when services and professionals work together to support children and their families to meet their needs. This suggests leaders should include everyone throughout processes involving the children, as Hadfield, Jopling and Needham (2015) agree. Evidence has shown the impact a leader has on the outcome and setting as a whole, agreeing that effective leadership encourages collaborative decision-making, ensuring the best possible outcome, as discussed by Ferdman (2020). He states that an efficient leader requires an understanding of their team members, to ensure they are managing diversity well. Further supporting this, Stuart (2012) acknowledge the impact the leader of a team has on the outcome and setting as a whole, she states that it is essential to use an integrated approach whilst being a leader, as it encourages all members to become involved.

Welsh Government (2017) recognise the importance of working together within an early years setting, suggesting this will ensure the best possible practice and outcome for the children, therefore highlighting the importance of an inclusive leadership. Jones and Pound (2008), acknowledge the significance of the term, stating that it refers to practice which allows all individuals to contribute to situations, whilst empowering them. Rodgers and Wilmot (2012) recognise that an inclusive leadership accepts all members of the team to work collaboratively to meet goals, whilst celebrating differences and diversity. Likewise, Bourke and Titus (2020) agree that inclusive leadership is a unique approach which helps team members feel valued and motivated, resulting in an overall better outcome.

Moreover, inclusive leadership is important as, Booysen (2014) conveys that it results in the best possible, shared outcome whilst ensuring all individuals feel included and valued. This is due to the different skills, experiences each team member hold, suggesting there will be a variety of viewpoints raised before collectively working towards the most efficient solution. Supporting this viewpoint Baker, Day and Salas (2006) state that the best possible outcome will occur when a leader is supporting members of the team to utilise their skills within the setting, which is the approach an effective inclusive leader would take, Tapia and Polonskaia (2020) agree with this perspective .

Additionally, Randel, *et al.* (2018) propose benefits of inclusive leadership within early years settings, identifying that a good inclusive leader will ensure justice and equity, as well as encouraging diverse

contributions guaranteeing everyone is involved in group contributions, as Lei and Bing (2017) agree. An inclusive leader should make their team members feel welcome and celebrate diversity, whilst valuing them as an individual. Thus, will therefore result in better engagement from their employees, as Moss (2019) states.

Within an early years setting, there is a 3 year old boy, whose parents have separated. loan has regressed in terms of his development over the last few months. One parent is open, however the other does not communicate issues and is portrayed as difficult, this parent also does not like the practitioner. A meeting is necessary with multi-agencies alongside the parents to discuss concerns and aid his development.

Pacey (2020) discuss effective practice, stating that an inclusive leader strives for the best outcome for the children, however this does not mean treating all children the same, but recognising their individual needs. Leicestershire County Council (2020) strengthen this, agreeing that an inclusive leader will understand the concept a 'unique child', allowing them to cater their setting and planning to the individual. This highlights the need for intervention with the discussed scenario, to ensure loan is able to keep progressing, and also to check in on both parents.

Ferdman (2020) highlights how an inclusive leader should be able to recognise any concerns over inclusivity and be able to address these concerns with suitable professionals and individuals, such as a meeting with loan's parents. Crisol-Moya, *et al.* (2022) highlights the importance of including families within their child's journey during the setting, as the individuals primary caregiver will understand the child on a deeper level, and it also makes the family feel more involved in the setting. Therefore, the first step would be to invite both parents in for a meeting, this would be to discuss the regression in loan's development. Egersdorff (2019) strengthen this, stating that collaboration within a setting is fundamental, as it enables the professionals and also the family to propose an action plan. Scanlan and Johnson (2020) acknowledge that working in partnership with families is essential. They agree that it is a fundamental aspect of inclusive leadership, as it results in families feeling valued by the members of the setting, Jaafarawi (2017) supports this. Consequently, this will result in a better outcome for loan as everyone is working openly together in correspondence, as DeMatthews (2021) states that when an inclusive leadership works in partnership with families the result is significantly positive.

However, although it is proposed that a meeting should happen to enable open communication between loan's parents and the practitioner, barriers may occur. Jaafarawi (2017), states that parents involvement is key, however she recognises this is not always achievable highlighting the requirement for an ethical, open inclusive leader as, Rodd (2013) acknowledges. Welsh Government (2021a) portrays the perspective that in general, some parents do not feel comfortable working with settings and utilising opportunities presented due to an initial lack of engagement and communication. This may occur in loan's case, since one parent does not like the practitioner, this parent had also been described as 'difficult', implying they may not be completely open to discussion. However, it is important that the parent is not judged based on pre-conceived notions, as Bourke and Titus (2019) state that an inclusive leader should portray an open mindset, whilst listening and understanding with no judgement.

In contrast, Wheeler and Connor (2009, cited in Lindon and Lindon, 2011, p. 143) discuss how settings and practitioners often label families as 'hard to reach', whereas the parents feel as though the professionals and services are difficult to reach. Strengthening this viewpoint, Reynolds and Howard (2013) state that parents are seen as responsible and therefore blamed for poor education outcomes, which therefore makes them feel uncomfortable when working with settings. Evangelou, *et al.* (2013) recognise that families can be difficult to reach for numerous reasons, which will then have a detrimental impact on the child, since Welsh Government (2018) suggest that parents should be consistently involved about their child's progress within the setting. These barriers highlight why an effective inclusive leader is necessary, as they should be able to help the parents feel valued. Freire (2005) states that the inclusive leader must be willing to not only use their power but also share it with those around them, to support the child and also the parents, Randel, *et al.* (2018) strengthen this, portraying an inclusive leader as an individual who will facilitate belongingness.

The inclusive leader should support loan by identifying why he has regressed, and also by building relationships with his parents, making them feel valued and respected, as Hughes and Read (2012) recognise. They state positive relationships between practitioners and parents are fundamental for children's wellbeing. Further strengthening this, Estyn (2020) found that when settings include parents through daily informal discussions and act on their requests, it enhances the children's learning successfully, highlighting the need for an inclusive leader who will work in partnership with parents.

Johansson and Purolia (2021) highlight the importance of ensuring children are valued, respected and listened to, stating that practitioners should provide children with an inclusive, welcoming environment which will enable them to experience and utilise opportunities which allow them to express themselves. It is fundamental that the inclusive leader provides loan with a routine whilst in the setting, due to the changes he is experiencing at home, NSPCC (2022) discuss how adults can help children during a separation, agreeing that routines are significant, as they often make the child feel safe, as Ren, Boise and Cheung (2022) recognise. Therefore, the inclusive leader should talk to loan in a child-friendly manner and also ensure that the child feels comfortable when talking to practitioners in their setting, as Knowles (2010) states. This evidence emphasises the role of an inclusive leader, suggesting that it may be beneficial to give an opportunity for further training, as stated by Department for Work and Pensions (2021), a training programme can support practitioners in recognising how to approach sensitive subjects.

It is the inclusive leaders responsibility to introduce and supply the setting with resources which are diverse, as stated by Chalmers (2015). Further, Deiner (2013) states that by including inclusive resources within a setting, such as dolls of an ethnic minority it will help promote a sense of belonging, and also further enhance the child's journey within the setting. Early Years Alliance (2019) support this, portraying an inclusive practice as a setting which provides children with access to opportunities and resources relating to them as individuals, in order to support their development. For example, the inclusive leader within loan's setting could introduce books, which portray parental separation in a child-friendly way, this will give loan something to relate to, making him feel seen and also empowered. Lundqvist (2022), found that practice which demonstrated inclusive practice had open-minded staff, as well as open-ended, inclusive resources, this has a positive effect on both staff and the children as they feel seen, safe and provide a sense of belongingness. Ezmeçi, Akgul and Akman (2022) explore the impact of inclusive and diverse resources, they found that when diverse resources were introduced to young children, by the time they were 6, they had developed an understanding towards inclusivity and also children like loan, felt included.

However, barriers may occur when attempting to be inclusive towards every child, although it is significantly important that loan is listened to, as identified by UNICEF (2019) in the UNCRC, it may be difficult for loan to express himself due to his age and emotional regulation, as NHS (no date) state. Murray (2019) discusses how the child's age and maturity can act as a barrier to the child having a

voice and how much the practitioner takes on board, therefore as loan is 3 years old, the inclusive leader would need to have a deep understanding on the child. Langston and Doherty (2013) highlight the viewpoint, that practitioners are required to fully understand the children within their care. Therefore, the child's understanding may be a barrier, loan may struggle to express his emotions surrounding his parents separation, also making it difficult for an inclusive leader to support him without the relevant training.

Moreover, as loan's parents have separated he may be labelled, based on stereotypes. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2022) children whose parents have separated are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems, Theunissen, et al. (2017) strengthen this, as they discovered that behavioural issues were more likely in children aged 2-4 years old who have experienced their parents separation. Holland (2009) states that social views and stereotypes will detrimental effect on the child's future. Supporting this, Kim (2019) demonstrates how labelling children will affect their self-esteem and confidence, which could then have an impact on their development. Thus, is therefore a barrier as if practitioners were to label loan he may become dismissive towards them, making it difficult to fulfil the role of an inclusive leader.

Welsh Government (2016) identify that schools and early years settings do not work alone, and community partnerships often work effectively to strengthen the child's learning. During the meeting, it was proposed that the parent who is portrayed as 'difficult' attends a children group, with loan, this will not only aid their relationship but it will also allow them to make friends with similar people, enriching their sense of belonging and also improving their confidence and self-esteem, as Oberle, et al. (2019) states. Children's bureau (2018) highlight the importance of community involvement for children, stating it will provide long-term benefits, as it helps build their identify. Therefore, this is why an inclusive leader can include the community to support loan and his parent in a positive way.

Furthermore, the inclusive leader could introduce an open door policy to involve the community, Richards and Armstrong (2015) state that an open door policy portrays the school as community-based, as well as allowing easier collaboration. According to Corson (1998), an open door policy helps bridge the gap between staff and parents, enhancing the sense of belonging and creating a community rather than a setting. This could help the parent who is unsure on the practitioner, as it would give the

opportunity to get to know them informally whilst maintaining professional boundaries, as well as making them feel as though they belong to the community of the setting, as Klein (2012) discusses.

Although, it is proposed that these aspects occur to enable inclusivity in the community, it will rely on the participation of the members of the community, which cannot be monitored, as stated by Mitchell and Furness (2015). Also, if the community is not educated and does not obtain inclusive views, it will have a detrimental impact on Ioan and his parent, as Polat (2011) discusses. This could potentially harm Ioan and his parents self-esteem, if they were to feel rejected or judged by their community, which is particularly relevant for the parent who is portrayed as 'difficult', implying members of the community may have a pre conceived view on the individual. According to Weir (2012), this could make an individual feel lonely and increase levels of anxiety and depression.

In order to create an inclusive environment, the leader must work with other professionals, using a multi-agency approach, as referred to by the Alliance for Inclusive Education (2017). They state that professional partnerships are fundamental when creating an inclusive setting as they create significant opportunities, whilst ensuring the child is at the centre of the approach, as Wilson (2018) highlights. Supporting this, Hadfield, Jopling, and Needham (2015) state that when professionals work with one and other in collaboration, it helps reach the best possible outcome for the children and their families, due to the variation of skills, qualifications and experience, as stated by Flottman, McKernan and Tayler (2011). They conclude that collaborative partnerships supports inclusive practice, as they improve the outcome for the family and also enhance the staffs experience. Siraj-Blatchford and Sum (2013) emphasise this, conveying that when relationships between professionals are being supported by the inclusive leader, the practitioners feel valued due to the shared vision, which results in an overall improvement for the quality of care, which is supported by Chemanais (2009).

However, according to the Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2022), challenges such as limited training, lack of resources, attitudes and also communication issues often occur. For instance, if a practitioner has a negative attitude and is unwilling to develop their ideas with other professionals it will result in a communication issue, as O'Sullivan (2015) acknowledges. Further, The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) discovered that families who have looked to professionals for support feel as though it is a very complex system and are often experience long waiting periods, this highlights that although an inclusive leader can refer families to professionals, they are not always receiving

suitable support. Therefore suggesting the inclusive leader will not always be able to work towards the best possible outcome for Ioan and his parents, due to the challenges, such as funding, as referred to by Chemanais (2009).

Inclusive practice should aim to include children, parents, families and other professionals when necessary, therefore an inclusive leader must have an understanding on culture due to the broad range of individuals they are working with, Ang (2010) agrees that culture plays a significant role in creating and maintaining an inclusive environment. Chin and Trimble (2014) portray that an inclusive leader needs to understand their professionals culture, as this will enable them to cater to their needs when necessary. However, research conducted by Department for Education (2014) recognise that there is not a deep enough knowledge and training is not tailored to enhance professionals knowledge and understanding of culture, as there are many terms such as intersectionality, which is when an individual experiences more than on aspect of inequality, as stated by the Centre for Intersectional Justice (no date). This suggest that an inclusive leader should strive to implement training which will enable professionals to increase their knowledge, as Ryan (2007) conveys.

To conclude, an inclusive leader should create a safe environment which provides a sense of belonging. In the scenario, the inclusive leader demonstrated effective practice by recognising that Ioan has regressed in his development and arranging a discussion with his parents, as this shows they are able to work in collaboration to gain the best possible result.

Section 2:

Fitzgerald and Kay (2013) state that a policy is a stated intention and will therefore become an action taken on by those with responsibility, such as an early years practitioner. Levin (1999, cited in Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013, p.2) also discuss common elements of policies, stating that it will demonstrate commitment and also outline specific ways of dealing with issues, such as inequalities for example, as the North Yorkshire Council (2011) agree. Bell and Stevenson (2006) highlight the importance of policies, recognising that they are fundamental in ensuring consistency, as all professionals should be following the same guidance. This section will explore the effectiveness of equality policies within the early years.

Ferdman (2021) recognises that policies are multi-level and vary based upon whether the policy is macro-level or micro-level, Aizawa and Rose (2019) acknowledge that a macro-level policy is national policy which the Government have proposed. Whereas a micro-level policy is more individual to a setting and is therefore composed by the professionals and also in collaboration with parents and the children within the setting. Although these differences are acknowledged, Finnigan (2012) highlights that both policies require an inclusive leader to implement them effectively, however challenges can arise when implementing these policies and they will be discussed throughout this section.

Wales has gone through a curriculum reform, which provides practitioners with the freedom to design their own curriculum. In terms of inclusivity and diversity, Welsh Government (2021b) recognise that one of their six areas of learning, humanities is a complex and diverse aspect of learning, whilst it is fundamental in ensuring that learners become ethical, informed citizens of Wales. Welsh Government (2021b) acknowledge that the curriculum plays a significant role in supporting an inclusive environment, and therefore educating all children on the history of ethnic minority groups, will make these individuals feel included but is also educating learners on the diversity of others, as British Council (2010) agrees. They state that by including culture in the curriculum it creates a more diverse environment, which then suggests an inclusive leader is able to work effectively and develop.

However, Welsh Government (2020) found that only 3% of teachers and 12% of students in Wales identify as being from an ethnic group other than white. Consequently, this suggests that an inclusive leader may not be achieving the goal of creating an inclusive environment due to the lack of diversity in

staff members, as well as children. This evidence shows that in this case, an inclusive leader is not being enabled effectively and this barrier should therefore be removed.

Moreover, Tusla (2018) discusses the importance of early years settings developing their own policies, which would be referred to as a micro-level policy. An example is Greenacres Childcare (no date) equality and diversity policy, within this policy they discuss the aims they have, in order to create a equality opportunity and anti-discriminatory environment for staff, children and families, as Thompson (2012) agrees. Pacey (2022) highlight the importance an equality policy, stating that children flourish in settings which promote diversity, equality and also inclusion. Tower Hamlets Council (2018) emphasises the requirement of an equality policy, agreeing that it places value on diversity and promotes equality. The equality policy outlined by Greenacres Childcare (no date) states that they will strive to find the best candidate regardless of factors such as, age, race, disability and gender. If these aims are achieved, the setting will be diverse and inclusive. However, Warin, Wilkinson and Greaves (2021) discuss how only 4% of early years professionals are men, this suggests that an equality policy is not helping the setting become inclusive, due to the lack of diversity in the workforce.

However, Paananen, et al. (2017) suggests that policies, including equality polices within early years are often too general and also not sensitive enough to those individuals, this will therefore have an impact on the inclusivity of the setting. The HM Government (2018) states that practitioners are required to follow their settings policy, however, in order to do this it is fundamental that each individual has a good understanding of the policy, as well as the concepts referred to within these policies. Supporting this, Eberle (2014) acknowledges that terminology is often complex, and therefore practitioners may view things differently, resulting in an inconsistency when implementing these policies. The inconsistency of knowledge would therefore act as barriers.

Further, Smith (2020) recognises that barriers will occur when implementing the equality act, such as language barriers, although within the equality policy it states the setting will make 'reasonable adjustments' for individual children when necessary this may prove difficult, Wilbur (2016) strengthens this perspective. Save the Children (2009) acknowledge that language can be a barrier for educators, as it will make it difficult to simply converse with the child. They found that language issues were linked to more than 50% of school drop-out, this shows that the environment is not inclusive, as it is not always possible for educators to be multi-lingual. Oxfordshire County Council (2017) state that although we

often have policies to outline equality issues, such as language it is difficult to ensure these are being followed. However an inclusive leader could promote inclusivity by learning simple phrases of the language, as this will make both the child and family feel valued and also provide a sense of belongingness, as Arnerich (2022) agrees. This will therefore enable inclusive leadership and promote an inclusive setting.

To conclude, the new Curriculum for Wales allows for inclusive leadership, as it encourages both children and practitioners to develop their own curriculum based on interests and desired outcomes. Depending on how effectively policies are implemented, it could enable inclusive leadership within the early years settings. However, barriers such as funding, and a lack of diversity in the workforce result in a lack of consistency with policy and this would therefore need to be reviewed, in order to fully promote inclusive leadership within the early years.

Section 3:**Promoting inclusive leadership within an Early Years setting**

• (Source: Nursery Story, 2021)

"Inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to **participation** and **belonging**." (Early Childhood Forum, 2003).

This quote highlights the importance of leaders being educated on ways to be an inclusive leader, and also promote an inclusive setting, for the staff, children and their families. Siraj and Hallet (2013) and Open Society Foundations (2019) state that an inclusive leader should create a sense of belonging for the children and their families, resulting in the children feeling settled, safe and confident when in their care. They state that an inclusive setting will facilitate a better quality environment and care for the children and families.

What makes an inclusive leader?

An inclusive leader is an individual who is open-minded and is willing to take listen and incorporate different opinions into their work and setting, they are should be inviting, transparent and considerate, as stated by the Council for Inclusion (2022). Supporting this perspective, Brown (2019) states that an inclusive leader needs to embrace the work of their team members and employees, alongside acknowledging their own strengths and weaknesses. Korkmaz, *et al.* (2022) acknowledge that inclusion is an easy term to be used, however it is often difficult to implement this. They state that an inclusive leader should facilitate diversity within their staff and if discrimination occurs, as a leader they must deal with this situation to ensure everyone feels valued.. However, it is not only about making the employees feel included and valued, it is significantly important that the children and families in the settings needs

are being met by the inclusive leader, as they should always have the child's best interest in mind, as acknowledged by UNICEF (2019) in the UNCRC.

How to **promote** and **encourage** inclusive leadership in settings:

Mistry and Sood (2015) state that it is the leaders responsibility to provide training and educate the practitioners on how to maintain an inclusive practice, also Family and Childcare Trust (2018) convey that it is essential practitioners working within the setting fully understand and acknowledge policies of inclusion proposed by the leader, as well as having a deep understanding on the children they are caring for. Pacey (2020) agree, stating that in order to achieve an inclusive practice. Practitioners should be trained and educated to ensure they are able to gain a good knowledge of the families they care for, this can be achieved through having an open conversation with the family, as Allen, *et al.* (2021) suggests.

For example, if a practitioner is unsure whether a child's religion and beliefs allow them to celebrate certain traditional events, the practitioner should discuss this with their family, Wenham (2021) recognise that by involving children and their families in the settings planning as it helps promote a sense of belonging. Statistics from the Education Workforce Council (2022) show that within schools 92% of educators declared their ethnicity as White, with only 1.5% being Black, Asian or within an minority ethnic group. These figures highlight the need for discussion and training, as it suggests that educators may not be familiar with important events from the different ethnicities, such as Diwali. Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton (2013) support this perception agreeing that children and families will feel valued if they are listened to and can see the outcome of their suggestions. Therefore, through open discussions with families, their leader and research it will ensure events as such are being recognised, celebrated and displayed making the children feel valued, heard and represented.

Petriwskyj, A. (2010) emphasise the importance of inclusion within the early years, stating that it is a continuous journey and promoting inclusive leadership and practice within settings is fundamental. She agrees that it ensures the children, families and staff will feel valued, creating a better quality environment. Discussions with families and the children will allow practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of their beliefs and values, which then allows them to create an inclusive setting.

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