Section 1.

This assignment outlines inclusive leadership with the aim of critically analysing the importance of such practise within an Early Years setting, identifying potential barriers an inclusive leader may face. The assignment will consider the issues that can contribute to the need for inclusive leadership highlighting the role of the inclusive leader and their involvement with families, children, professionals and members of the community.

Sims *et al* (2015*)* and Ferdman (2020) discuss that an inclusive leader is an individual with responsibilities that control a situation, person, a group of people or an organisation with an understanding of the importance of creating opportunities to meet the diverse needs of all involved in an inclusive manner bringing inclusion to the forefront of every day practise, where promoting participation, having a voice and a sense of belonging and advocating for equity and fairness regardless of race, religion, gender, age, social status alongside other contributing factors.

In comparison to Sims *et al* (2015) and Ferdman (2020) discussions from Cooper, (2014);Taggart, (2011); Newstead and Isles Buck, (2019) suggests that leadership is embedded throughout the workforce where leadership is part of everyday practice when working with children providing good quality childcare ensuring everyone feels valued, respected and welcome. This is apparent where practitioners are able to identify a need for change and takes steps to implement the change needed to positively impact those they are working with, an initiative that has previously been considered to be the role of management, and those within early years care were considered low skilled and an extension of motherhood rather than a role capable of leading and producing change.

Pacey (2021) agree that an inclusive leader aims not to treat children equally but identifying their individual needs and ensuring they can access provision equally by adapting to suit their needs providing fairness for all. Similarly, Clough, and Corbett. (2000) discuss that the process of inclusion within education revolves around participation and the removal of practises that result in exclusion however small it may seem; no child shall be left out or unable to access provision should there be barriers influencing access. An inclusive leader aims to remove the barriers or provide additional learning provisions to support access to education and maximise participation (Welsh Government, 2021).

Inclusion and inclusive leadership is key in keeping with the human rights and the rights of the child where no one has the right to exclude anyone and that barriers that influence inclusion are challenged through inclusive leadership with the goal to allow every child to access provision with minimal impact on their well-being as a result of their differences (UNCRC, no date; Clough, and Corbett. 2000). Alongside the basic human right of inclusion there is also the right where everyone has the right to quality education and learning, without inclusion this right is at risk of not being upheld. It is important to create an inclusive space where regardless of need, race, religion, and affordability children are given opportunities to reach their full potential, also in keeping with the United Nations (no date) sustainable development goals ensuring education is inclusive and of high quality allowing for lifelong learning opportunities (Reva, 2021;Unicef, no date).
With inclusion and inclusive leadership at the forefront of early years practice a specific scenario comes to mind that reflects how a practitioner has used their role within setting to draw upon their inclusive leadership skills facilitating the inclusion of a parent new to the setting.

During the spring term a young girl joined the early years setting, she had recently moved from another county with her dad, an older brother aged 6 and new-born sister. Dad is a single dad with full custody of all three children who fled a situation of domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Maternal contact has been court ordered to cease until further instruction whilst mum is incarcerated. Dad previously worked for the royal navy and has postponed his career to take care of his family, where he was previously deployed for long periods of time. Often dad will drop off and collect at the very last minute and appears to want to avoid contact and conversation with practitioners and other parents. He only engages with practitioners when absolutely necessary and has yet to attend the stay and play sessions on offer often giving the feeling of lack of confidence.
The little girl has experienced some difficulties settling in, tending to dominate the play with her peers displaying frustration at times when play does not flow the way she intends it to. All children are clean and tidy, and the older two greet their dad with great excitement at the end of their sessions. The little girl has difficulties when being dropped off at setting and will cling to dad often crying but will quickly settle with a practitioner. It has also been noted other children avoid playing with her, and

refer to her as too bossy, at home time children can be seen pointing to the little girl and their dad and the other parents do not seem to want to engage with the family nor do they seek to converse with dad.
After witnessing the above events and noticing over time the dad's confidence and participation continuing to be low, a practitioner within the setting identified the need for change due to being trained and skilled in identifying sociological factors that impact children and their families. Identifying this factor of isolation from peer groups, society and that of the parent-child relationship including maternal, allows for effective inclusive leadership to inspire change and work towards improving the quality of life for the family. (Nicholson *et al.* 2020).

The inclusive leader approach led to the practitioner inviting the children's dad to a one to one stay and play session with the vision of connecting with the family on a more personal level, removing the barrier of potential social anxiety that may come with events where all parents attend. This then allowing for dad to feel comfortable and at ease within the setting giving him and his child the experiences other parents have been able to access but at a level that came with less social pressure, giving the family equal access at a support level meeting their specific needs (Ferdman, 2020). Hayes, Halpenny and O'Toole (2017) draw upon how theorist Bronfenbrenner's supports this inclusive leader approach where practitioners are aware of the microsystems within development that are interconnected, influencing each other therefore influencing development. This system involves the child at the centre, who then is surrounded by those in their microsystem such as family, friends, school, neighbours and surrounding communities, all whom are influencing growth and development. Povey *et al.* (2016); LINC, (2020) agree that there is clear evidence to support the systems that surround children such as parents have an influence over the outcomes of learning where higher attainment, behaviour and wellbeing levels are seen consistently when parents are engaged with their child's learning.
As a result of this intervention, facilitating a more inclusive approach the dad felt accepted within the setting and began discussing his concerns surrounding his daughter's development, reaching out to the practitioners within setting for advice on where he could access additional support. He disclosed that despite being a dad for 6 years most of that time was spent on deployment and that he was scared he

wasn’t doing things correctly for the children, especially his daughters as he grew up in a predominantly male neighbourhood.

It is evident that on this occasion inclusive leadership proved to be successful in managing to establish a connection and a start to relationship building with the dad, understanding the parents emotional and well-being state surrounding this time of significant change for all and important factor when understanding what influences child development (Newstead, and Isles-Buck, 2012).
On this occasion inclusive leadership has taken paths to a successful relationship being established between the practitioners and the family, however this is not always the case, working with families can come with barriers such as the beliefs the family hold and their own experiences within education contributing to their perception on what this should look like (Wilson, 2016). Hornby and Blackwell, (2018); Murray, Mereoiu and Handyside (2013) and Wages (2016) demonstrate this through discussing how families can lack the understanding of the benefits of partnership work and collaboration, additionally families may not perceive the settings attempts to inclusion to be genuine or may misinterpret the attempts to be included as the setting interfering with their family life. To overcome this barrier strengthening parent partnership and collaboration, a strong inclusive leader is needed who has an open mind with connection at the forefront of their practice. An inclusive leader will take steps to create positive experiences for all families to enhance their perspective on education and collaborating with professional with the goal of creating an atmosphere and feeling of belonging (Myende, and Nhlumayo, 2022; Nakamura, Milner, and Milner, 2020).

Care Council Wales, (2016); Education Scotland, (2019); Ferdman, Prime and Riggio, (2020) and outline that in order to strengthen practice, a strong inclusive leader is required, this however can present with challenges such as confidence in leading. Professional development is essential to enhancing practitioner’s leadership skills in turn increasing the confidence required to identify concerns and facilitate change to alleviate the barriers causing the concerns. Professional development will allow practitioners to update their knowledge in response to the continually developing community around them improving standards and quality and supporting practitioners to provide inclusive leadership.

Moving forward with the steps taken to aid the dad in the scenario to feel included and accepted, which resulted in him opening up about his struggles, an inclusive practitioner is skilled to understand the theory surrounding how the change within a child's environment will impact their development and future steps need to be taken to support the family in overcoming there trauma they have experienced (Hayes, Halpenny, and O'Toole, 2017). Using the Family Gateway early help and intervention approach the inclusive practitioner can refer the family to receive additional support targeting the areas of development that are being impacted as a result of potential ACES (adverse childhood experiences), working on promoting secure attachments and supporting pathways to improve mental health which not only targets the mental health of the child but the family as a whole including the parent (Early Help, 2020).

Additionally, working to integrate the family into the community could aide in improving the mental health of the dad and help the children feel included and make friends. To facilitate bridging the gap an inclusive leader could arrange an event where families could be invited into the setting to share their culture, job, or a family tradition. Should the dad feel comfortable he could discuss with the children his job and talk to them about his role within the navy. Inviting parents to this event could allow for families to gain a better understanding of each other with the goal of accepting one and other allowing the family to feel part of the community (Gov.UK, no date).

In conclusion, a confident inclusive leader can facilitate the change needed to make a difference in the lives of the families they work with facilitating a more inclusive approach. This will not come without barriers however continued professional development will allow practitioners to further their knowledge, improving their practice and give the community a wider range of opportunities to grow and succeed (Social Care Wales, 2017).

## Part 2

Within this section inclusive practice that is informed by policies within Wales will be analysed and evaluated. A policy is a document created from a set of ideas and used

with an intention of decision making. Policies are a used for making decision on how those responsible for upkeeping the policies would like practice to look like (Baldock, Fitzgerald, and Kay, 2013). The significance of policies is to reflect the values of the organisation writing the policy, providing a structure and guidance often to comply with legal requirements (Das, and Mandal. 2020).

Policies belong to organisations or settings such as schools, nurseries, charities, government or businesses amongst others with a purpose of committing to a specific action with a collection of ideas that are to be adopted by those within the organisation and often a guide for how to deal with specific issues, situations or practice expectations (Baldock, Fitzgerald and  Kay, 2013).

The chosen policy is An Anti-Racist Wales: The Race Equality Action Plan for Wales. This policy came about as a response to previous policies and approaches failure to succeed in tackling racism systemic and institutional. Those policies were created following the Macphearson Report in 1999 which defined institutional racism as a failure to provide appropriate professional service to members of society as a result of their colour, ethnic origin or cultural background. Additionally, systemic racism is a form of racism embedded deeply within systems and law where established beliefs and conduct reflects through the unfair treatment of people within the community due to the race, culture or colour of their skin. (Welsh Government, no date; Braveman *et al* 2022).

The policy claims ensure Wales is an anti-racist nation by 2030, where anti-racist is different from not being racist, it is a movement and shift in how racism is viewed within in society focusing on inequality those of black, Asian and other ethnic minority experience in comparison to white people. Anti-racism is the implementation of change, change of perspective and understanding that not being racist is not enough, society should work together to stand strong against racism working collaboratively to create change and a system that is fully inclusive (Inclusive Employers, 2023; Welsh Government, 2022a).

One way in which this policy aims to improve inclusive practice for those within the black, Asian or other ethnic minority communities is to eliminate the pay gap by

2050, due to the unacceptable gap in pay those of ethnic minority receive compared to those who are white. The policy discusses the plan to review progress in their fair work outcome measures and for the Welsh Government to offer a safe, positive, inclusive environment for all addressing any racial discrimination (Welsh Government, 2022a).

The wording within this section of the policy gives a strong feeling of inclusive practice using such wording as ‘eliminating’ which leads the reader to believe the plan will be to put an end to the pay gap by 2050. However, using the term eliminating could be seen as ambitious when considering the previous approaches by Welsh Government had not been successful in tackling racism, and that before the pay gap can be eliminated firstly racism needs to be eliminated (Welsh Government, 2022a).

Diem, and Welton. (2020) discuss a significant barrier to implementing an anti-racist approach is teamwork and collaboration. Alone leaders and policy implementors cannot eradicate racism, it requires a strong team of inclusive leaders to set example by implementing policy throughout embedding an anti-racist practise themselves, setting example for others to follow, also being capable of challenging concerns should they arise. Alongside implementing an anti-racist approach within Wales, the Welsh Government pledge to improve the diversity within the education workface and utilised professional development to embed anti-racism. As an early year’s practitioner exposing children in setting to a variety of cultures including having practitioners of all cultures can aid children in understanding different views, developing a greater understanding of different perspectives (National Day Nursery Association, no date).

It is evident that this policy strives to enable inclusive practise and the Welsh Government can be seen to already be implementing professional development for practitioners in the bid to tackle racism. The commitment the Welsh Government has in meeting their target of an anti-racist Wales by 2030 is evident in steps taken to broaden pupils understanding through the use of DARPL a diversity and anti-racism professional learning partner who has developed resources, guidelines and training

for professionals within education to broaden their knowledge and help inform their practice (DARPL, no date; Welsh Government, 2022b)

Understanding that policy influences practice, practitioners are compelled to adhere to the policies within their setting, however challenging polices can ensure inclusive education is upheld. Pather, and Slee, (2019) and Nutbrown, and Clough, (2010) outline that there once was specific definition of inclusive education and that inclusive practice related to disabilities within the education, however, it has become more apparent that within Wales the Welsh Government strive to take a holistic approach to inclusive practise by implementing such policies as An Anti-Racist Wales, alongside the New Curriculum for Wales where education will be bespoke to the individual child and a pupil centred approach in addition to inclusive practice seen within the ALN bill (Welsh Government, 2016).

With this in mind it can be seen that Wales and the education system are taking positive steps towards becoming a fully inclusive practice, addressing all areas of inclusion opposed to focusing on a specific area of inclusion. The policy An Anti-Racist Wales appears to have considered the barriers to the implementation and are taking steps to ensure it meets the goal of an anti-racist Wales by 2030.

Section 3.

Inclusive leadership is a key element when working within an early years setting, understanding that parents and practitioners are the main contributors within a child's microsystem of development influencing the outcomes as they grow. Together they play a crucial part in how the child progresses and engages, an inclusive practitioner will allow for the child and family to feel welcome, valued, included and creating a sense of belonging. (Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, no date; Hayes, Halpenny, and O'Toole, 2017; Siraj and Hallet, 2013).

With the understanding of the impact on growth and development those responsible for the care of children has, an inclusive practitioner can embed this approach throughout the setting by responding to concerns, difficulties or the risk of isolation

as demonstrated within the previous scenario (Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio, 2020). Whitters, (2020) agree that promoting inclusion in the form of providing additional support to the family mentioned, can enable practitioners to build a relationship with dad will allow trust to be gained. It is apparent from the family history that the children have experienced some adverse childhood experiences and the little girl has been experiencing attachment difficulties, where attachment is associated with good mental health early intervention will allow for repair and the rebuild of developmental foundations with the goal of helping the child become resilient.

Involving family in the learning of the child and allowing the child to observe that the family trust the practitioners will allow for a secure attachment to form between the child and practitioner. Therefore, this will enable to the setting embed their inclusive practise by working closely with dad to support him and the family signposting him to other services that can help with helping the family overcome the adverse childhood experiences they have faced (Lindon, and Lindon, 2011).

As a practitioner within the early years professional development surrounding inclusive practice can inform practice, moving towards inclusion for all moving away from what has been inclusion for those with additional needs for a significant amount of time. It is not to say inclusion for children with additional needs has changes or the importance of it decreased, however a clear understanding of inclusion for all and how practitioners can impact families and the community when steps are put in place to allow for everyone to have a sense of belonging otherwise described as Cenefin a place we can all belong with familiar sights and sounds (Nutbrown, and Clough, 2010; Nation Cymru, 2020).

In conclusion promoting and embedding inclusion within the early years will allow for children and their families to gain a sense of belonging, feel comfortable knowing that their children’s needs are being met and their sense of identity will be embraced ensuring the families wishes are also being listened to and supported. Partnership working with families will enable practitioners to maximise inclusion for all.

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