

Section 1

This section will evaluate the critical role of an inclusive leader within a specific scenario in an early years setting. Whilst considering issues that may provide opportunities or barriers to inclusive leadership in the areas of working with children, families, professionals and communities. According to Booyesen (2014), inclusive leadership can be defined as a practice that fosters respectful relationships and allows both individuals and groups to actively contribute to a unified purpose. It involves promoting commitment, and direction towards shared goals, ultimately benefiting everyone involved. Importantly, inclusive leadership also emphasizes the importance of maintaining authenticity and recognizing the unique contributions of each individual. Several factors play a crucial role in developing participative and inclusive notions of leadership. These factors include establishing a sense of community, cultivating respect, valuing colleagues, and embracing diversity according to Hadfield *et al* (2015).

Randel *et al.* (2018) says that inclusion is crucial to harnessing the benefits of diversity. Merely assembling a team or promoting individuals from minority groups to leadership positions is insufficient to guarantee positive outcomes, such as employee well-being and innovative behavior (Choi, Tran & Kang, 2017). According to Randel *et al.* (2018), inclusive leadership plays a unique role in enabling the benefits that other forms of leadership fail to sufficiently address. Inclusive leadership is instrumental in developing the collective capabilities of team members, fostering inclusive environments, and enhancing overall group performance. Jin, Lee, and Lee (2017) also support this notion. However, inclusive leadership can sometimes be elusive and particularly challenging due to inherent tensions and the absence of clear guidelines, as well as the hierarchical nature of intergroup relations states Ferman (2021).

According to Pacey (2021), Childhood International (2021) and Bortini *et al* (2016), inclusive leadership does not involve treating all children in the same way. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the individual needs of each child. Whilst also recognizes and responds to the unique requirements of every child, ensuring they receive the support and accommodations necessary for their optimal development and inclusion. Bowlby (1969) Tillet and Wong (2018) emphasises the

importance of 'Belonging' in the early years in that when a child feels they 'belong' it significantly influences the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children. Also, it has a profound impact on various aspects, including transitions, attachment, and even the children's beliefs in their own potential and capabilities. Creating a sense of belonging for young children fosters their overall well-being and lays the foundation for positive growth and development in various areas of their lives.

The scenario which is being reflected on relates to a 5-year-old boy named Harry whose father has overcome alcohol addictions and has been assessed as being able to care for his son again on his own as mum is not involved at all with the child and has moved away. Harry is doing well at school, but it is noted that he does not have many friends inside or outside of school. Mothers have been seen to acknowledge dad on the yard at home time but do not engage in conversation with him though he is always standing alone. Teachers have noticed his nervousness around them too.

Inclusive leader working with the child

Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004 mandates that services and individuals must prioritize child safeguarding and promote child welfare (UK Gov Legislation, no date). The boy's lack of friends outside of school limits his social interactions, further exacerbating his feelings of being left out. Moreover, it should be noted that the boy's anxiety around the teacher may arise from witnessing his father's similar behaviour, as children often mirror the emotions they observe in adults (Child Mind Institute, 2021). In line with Robinson (2019), Bandura's social learning theory suggests that children are greatly influenced by and tend to imitate the behaviours of individuals who are in close proximity to them. Buddy systems can be set up in the school at breaktimes to help Harry socialise and have friends as the Welsh Government (2015) specifically encourages this to increase inclusivity. Going on to emphasize the importance of equal opportunities and tailored support for all children, with schools understanding diverse needs and making appropriate adjustments. Dewey (2020) suggests that an inclusive leader should possess qualities such as empathy, patience, and encouragement when creating an environment that allows the voice of the child to be heard. Harry can be recommended for ELSA support in school to give him that one to one support, though he is academically fine, it also helps and to

reach their potential socially and emotionally states Elsa support (2023). With practitioners collaborating and engaging in this way, the inclusive leader can help to enable the child from feeling incapable to feeling enabled and appreciated resulting in the partnerships being formed stresses Rouse (2012).

Inclusive leader working with the dad

To truly engage parents, it is important to establish trust in the relationships between them and the practitioners says Fenton *et al* (2017). Kingston *et al* (2013) agree and through their study states that having parental involvement gives a positive impact to a child's education and achievement. However, engaging with practitioners can pose a challenge for certain parents and caregivers, particularly those who have experienced a challenging relationship with education during their own schooling years says Freud (no date). For dad it is challenging that he had his child taken away, but support could have been given to prevent the regression through guidance from Public Health England (2021). The historical mistrust that some parents may have due to past discrimination needs to be acknowledged and addressed and one way to build trust is to be reflective and transparent about one's own unconscious biases_states Fenton *et al* (2017).

Estyn (2020) & Anna Freud (no date) summarises how settings value the close collaboration with parents and carers. Practitioners know that they need to include parents fully in their children's learning and experiences at the setting to help them learn for life. They use different ways to share information with families to suit their needs and preferences. Having a positive relationship with the dad will help facilitate open conversations and give an opportunity for dad to communicate any issues that arise as he is made to feel welcomed as the essence of inclusion lies in the extent to which individuals feel valued, secure, and respected according to Ferdman (2021) & Anna Frued (2023).

According to Bourke and Titus (2019), inclusive leaders should exhibit qualities such as an open mindset, empathetic seeking, and non-judgmental understanding and listening. However, not communicating well with parents creates barriers as well as the variation of the attitudes of practitioners states the Welsh Government (2015). Moreover, Parents and children may hesitate to seek help or disclose parental

substance misuse due to the fear of social work intervention and potential removal of children from their homes according to Public Health England (2021).

Families impacted by parental alcohol and drug use often require substantial support to address the lasting impact of stigma and exclusion. To overcome these challenges, both children and parents may need assistance and encouragement to gather the courage to seek and accept help, as well as engage in open discussions about family issues (Public Health England, 2021).

Inclusive Leader working with professionals.

Harry's mum is not involved with his life at all and has moved away. Therefore, this might prevent inclusion as mums are more prevalent at the school gates. The absence of Harry's mother in his life and her relocation may hinder inclusion, as mothers are typically more present and active at the school gates. According to Freud (2023) gender inequality still exists in early parenthood, and services can often still reflect more traditional family structures. This situation could create a sense of exclusion for Harry and his father, as they may not receive the same level of engagement and interaction as families with both parents present. Inclusive leadership would involve recognizing and addressing this potential barrier to inclusion, ensuring that Harry and his father feel valued and included within the school community despite the absence of Harry's mother. It would also involve actively promoting a supportive and inclusive environment for all types of families.

Fenton et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of educators dedicating time to learning from families, understanding the communities they come from, and to utilize their knowledge about children. This approach recognizes the valuable insights and perspectives that families can provide, allowing educators to build stronger relationships and create more effective learning environments.

In the given scenario, it is observed that other parents do not engage or invite the father into conversations, potentially due to intersectional stigma. The father's status as a single parent, belonging to a low socioeconomic background, and being a recovering addict may subject him to stereotyping and stigmatization. Bardsley (2013) supports this view, noting that single parents often face stereotyping and stigmatization, leading to challenges such as low self-esteem and reluctance to seek help. Furthermore, it is worth considering how the father could potentially benefit

from the Families First innovative program. Described by the Welsh Government (2016), the program's objective is to provide support to families in meeting their unique needs. The program encompasses effective communication with the professionals involved, ensuring that the support is tailored to individual requirements. Several factors can hinder collaboration between different agencies and professional groups, including poor communication among professionals and the diverse professional languages and conversations they use according to Aubrey (2011).

Being an inclusive leader and recognizing dad's background of being in poverty, can also recommend to dad the free breakfast club provision at school. Its aim is to offer children a nutritious breakfast before the school day begins. By providing this opportunity, children can benefit from improved health and have a greater chance of reaching their maximum educational capabilities and help them to socialise (Welsh Government, 2022). According to Allen et al. (2018), schools can foster a sense of belonging among children by actively promoting an inclusive environment.

A recommendation can be made for the dad to join the parents and teachers' association (PTA) to help engage with other parents. However, as per the Welsh Government (2016), many parents and caregivers perceive Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) as exclusive and "cliquey." This perception, along with feeling that the school environment may be unfamiliar and not inclusive to individuals like them, can act as a barrier to schools' efforts to engage the father and encourage his involvement. These preconceived notions may hinder the father's participation in school activities and impede the establishment of a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Inclusive leadership should address these barriers by actively promoting an inclusive and welcoming environment, breaking down stereotypes, and ensuring that all parents and caregivers feel valued and included in school-related activities and discussions (Early years alliance, 2019).

Inclusive leader working with the community.

Estyn (2020) explains how settings connections with the local community are important to practitioners as they help to make the child's learning environment better as well as enriching their learning experiences. However, the Welsh

Government (2016) explains that schools can create barriers by not offering a range of opportunities through which parents can get involved.

Dad could be put into contact with Team around the family (TAF). Its approach aims to provide individuals and families with the extra help they may need for a happy, healthy, and successful life. TAF brings together a group of professionals and support networks who collaborate to make a positive impact. Unlike statutory services, TAF does not involve working with a social worker, and individuals have the flexibility to change their involvement as desired states Family Information Service (2023). Going on to address how TAF offers assistance and support across various areas, including concerns related to education, school, behavior, health, housing, and more. The focus is on addressing specific needs and ensuring individuals and families receive the necessary help and support tailored to their unique circumstances. Referrals to multi agencies are made by schools to help support the child's needs further says Lloyd (2018). Practitioners can look into play therapy for Harry for example.

Barriers to the recommendation of the engagement of team around the family for example can be the dads lack of confidence through the fear of being judged by other parents or practitioners (Welsh Government, 2016).

A recommendation for the dad to join a parenting class to meet, engage and improve his social skills could be provided. However, it is not uncommon for men to feel out of place or perceive a lack of role for themselves in parent classes or activities that are predominantly attended by women and held during the day. Creating a sense of gender imbalance, exclusion and the perception that these activities are not designed to cater to their needs or interests explains the Welsh Government (2016).

To conclude, this scenario highlights the importance of inclusive leadership in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for Harry and his father, whilst recognizing the need to address social isolation and ensure that they feel valued and included. Promoting open communications and collaborations between parents, teachers, and the wider school community. By fostering a culture of acceptance and belonging, an inclusive leader can facilitate opportunities for Harry and his father to develop meaningful relationships and enhance their overall well-being. This scenario

calls for an inclusive leader to address the social and emotional needs of Harry and his father, creating an environment where they feel appreciated, safe, and respected.

Section 2

This section will focus on policies and the New Curriculum for Wales. It will be critically evaluated to see if it enables inclusive leadership to take place. According to Baldock (2013), a policy is both a declared intention and a course of action implemented by individuals who hold responsibility. The Welsh Government, for instance, formulates policies and puts forward legislative proposals in areas within its authority. These powers are granted to Welsh ministers through legislation enacted in the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) and the UK Parliament states (Senedd, 2021).

The emergence of challenges such as rapid digitalization, growing inequality, and disruptions caused by climate change, pandemics, and conflicts necessitates the development of resilient and sustainable policies and strategies for establishing efficient, relevant, and transformative education systems. (UNESCO, no date). From macro to micro level, Ferdman (2021) stresses that leaders must consider inclusion at all levels. Effective leaders should possess knowledge and understanding of each level within the organization or system they lead. By recognizing and addressing inclusion at every level, leaders can create a more inclusive and equitable environment that benefits individuals at all levels of the organization or system.

Education policies are vital for supporting lifelong and life wide learning, as well as promoting successful social and economic integration. These policies translate vision into actionable, measurable, and accountable strategies and actions (UNCRC, no date). According to Watts (2022), policies in schools serve as formal documentation of procedures and values. They play a critical role in creating a safe environment where children can learn and thrive. Welsh Government (2017) states that all childcare settings should have an equality policy where everyone in the setting including families should be treated with equal respect, feel valued and welcomed.

However, implementing education policies faces challenges including coordination issues, resource inadequacy, and resistance to reforms. Addressing these challenges is crucial for successful policy execution (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

The need for a more inclusive curriculum was recognized from the Donaldson report and the new curriculum for Wales policy aims to develop more ethical and informed citizens who are prepared for lifelong learning, whilst celebrating the diverse cultures of society. (Welsh Government, 2020 & Donaldson 2015). With schools, teachers and other stakeholders being given a leading role in developing it (Senedd Research 2022).

Inclusivity in early years education previously showed that inclusive leadership had only been related to disability states Besic (2020). Whilst the early years education policy could be seen as only favouring the 'ideal learner' who was self-directed and a good learner (Bradbury, 2013).

However, Viennet and Pont (2017) argue that the challenges of implementing educational change have evolved due to the increasingly diverse and vocal nature of education stakeholders as they now have higher expectations and greater ambition regarding the desired characteristics of education systems. This shift in stakeholder dynamics adds complexity to the process of putting change into practice, requiring education systems to be responsive to a wider range of perspectives and demands.

Furthermore, the new curriculum realises the progress of learners will vary individually, and this is particularly true for those with additional learning needs (ALN). The rate of progression for learners with ALN may not align with the typical two-to-three-year progression steps outlined in the descriptions of learning. It is important for professionals working with learners with ALN to assess and evaluate their pace of progression. In a broader sense, as schools and educational settings develop their curriculum, they should be mindful of the diverse ways in which learners may progress at different stages of their learning journey and over varying periods of time. (Welsh Government, 2020a).

Tindall et al. (2015) suggests that teachers may face challenges in becoming inclusive leaders due to a lack of confidence, competence, or necessary skills. Consequently, if the staff members do not fully grasp the significance of inclusion, designing a curriculum specific to individual schools may lead to a less inclusive policy. It is crucial for educators to understand the importance of inclusion and possess the required knowledge and capabilities to effectively implement inclusive

practices within their educational institutions. However, the OECD (2020) did commend the fact that the new curriculum in its design was co constructed from stakeholders including practicing teachers, TA's and other early years practitioners.

Diversity and inclusion have failed according to the Welsh Government (2022a) and a new plan has been set up to tackle the issue. However, to support the vision of diversity and inclusion, the Welsh Government (2020) emphasizes the importance of providing support to every teacher, enabling them to develop curricula that reflect and recognize the diverse contributions of all groups and individuals. This approach aims to ensure that the curriculum encompasses a broad range of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and fostering a sense of belonging for all learners.

However, In Wales, three quarters of teachers have not received anti-racism training, resulting in a lack of confidence in recognizing, reporting, and supporting instances of racism. Efforts are needed to provide comprehensive training to teachers to address this issue and promote inclusive environments (show racism the red card, 2020).

To conclude, the new curriculum for Wales (2020) allows for inclusive leadership in early years provision. Education policies play a vital role in creating a safe and inclusive environment for children, families and practitioners. There has been progression of the importance of inclusivity and of the child's individual and holistic progress in the curriculum. Though lack of diversity is being tackled via a Welsh Government initiative regarding anti racism.

Section 3 – Blog – How to promote inclusive leadership in Early years setting.

Inclusive leadership plays a vital role in shaping the minds of children during their early years (OECD, 2019). Practitioners in early years are required to promote an inclusive environment in the setting, gaining understanding and knowledge of the different aspects of cultures in which every individual feels fully respected, accepted and valued (Ryan, 2014, Giglets Education, 2023) UNICEF (no date) agrees and stresses the importance that every child has the right to quality education and

learning. Promoting inclusive leadership is essential as a lack of inclusivity negatively affects children's psychological and emotional well-being, leading to feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging (OECD, 2015). Tillett & Wong (2018) explains that when a child feels like they belong, it impacts their socio emotional development in a good way and heightens their belief in themselves.

Pacey (2023) suggests that children thrive in an atmosphere that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusivity. One effective way to promote inclusivity is through culturally inclusive books. These books act as powerful tools by offering diverse perspectives, help to develop empathy, and celebrate differences. By incorporating culturally inclusive books into early childhood education, a generation of compassionate and open-minded individuals can be cultivated (Carus 2022).

Early childhood educators address the importance of cultural inclusivity by introducing diverse books to young children, aiming to create classrooms that embrace different cultures (Bennett et al, 2018; Kim et al, 2016; Klefstad and Martinez, 2013). Adam and Harper (2016) emphasize that providing diverse literature helps challenge stereotypes and racial misunderstandings. Incorporating these narratives into social and emotional learning (SEL) allows children to explore their own identities and develop empathy towards those who are different from them (Kim et al., 2016). This approach fosters compassion and a deeper understanding of diversity.

The new curriculum in Wales strives to ensure that children become informed and ethical citizens who possess a comprehensive understanding of their culture as individuals within a diverse society (Welsh Government 2020a).

Research shows that in 2021, 20 percent of children's books that were published featured a minority ethnic character. An increase from the 4 percent reported in 2017 (Carus, 2022). Giglets education (2023) describes books as one of our greatest teachers. Reading in various formats (small groups, one-on-one, or as a whole class) promotes communication, language, literacy, and a broader worldview.

However, it is essential to ensure that these books are accurate, respectful, and avoid stereotypes. It is important to note that, as an Early Year educator, you have the opportunity to stop bias from ever forming (Fenton et al, 2017). By being culturally inclusive, you're showing each and every child that diversity is something

to be celebrated. Welsh Government (2015) advises that a multilingual reading club could be set up with parents and children with interpreters translating or taking dual language story books home.

Inclusive leadership in early childhood education is crucial for promoting diversity, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Culturally inclusive books serve as catalysts for this process, helping children embrace differences, celebrate diversity, and develop a global perspective. By intentionally building a culturally inclusive library, educators and parents can provide children with a rich literary experience that reflects the world's diversity. The benefits of such an approach extend far beyond the early years, shaping the attitudes and values of future generations.

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