Inclusive Leadership: working together to support families.

Section 1:

What is inclusive leadership (IL) and why is it important?

At the core of inclusion is how valued, safe, engaged and involved people feel; authenticity matters (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2012). Consequently, contributors give fully when they experience true inclusivity, both as individuals and as people of various identity groups, without fear of changing who they are (Ferdman, 2021). When people feel included, they sense belonging without needing to consider their unique differences (Ferdman, 2017). IL is essential to support this, they are advocating for equality by encouraging different contributions and acknowledging individual worth, confidently. This includes receiving the harvest of those individual efforts regardless of differences, and while highly regarding togetherness (Bortini et al. 2018; Ferdman, 2021). Furthermore, the IL supports individual progression, engagement, and self-autonomy (Ferdman, 2017). According to Bortini *et al.*, (2018) and Ferdman (2021) an IL is successfully effective when there is an evident understanding of, and the skillset to create change that provides opportunity for diversity; resulting in a shifting of individual, group, and societal interactions. This is to influence, value, and integrate unique differences, and to disturb the pattern of societal inequality and the impact it has on people, resulting in everybody feeling a sense of belonging.

IL is an important ongoing journey, and it consistently requires self-reflection, continuous learning and adapting (Darpl, 2023). Furthermore, humility – an openness to feedback, challenging individual biases and regularly reviewing assessments, policy, and practise, ensuring the setting is one where all children grow and succeed (Welsh Gov, 2015).

As an Early Years (EY) practitioner and IL, it is important to promote diversity by celebrating all children regardless of name, age, gender, race, culture, religion, ability, or social-economic status (Newstead and Isles-Buck, 2012; *Equality Act 2010*). Furthermore, working with children, families, professionals, and the wider community can successfully achieve positive outcomes regarding a child's sense of inclusion and belonging (HM Government, 2018; Department for Education, 2021; NSPCC Learning, 2023). This assignment will consider a scenario about a mixed-race boy, by critically evaluating the experience of the role of the IL, by reflecting on the opportunities, challenges, and barriers they might face.

The reflective scenario:

A 4-year-old mixed-race boy named, Imani, has both Welsh and Kenyan heritage. Imani comes from a loving and nurturing family home; he attends after school clubs and has lots of family interactions and positive relationships with his wider family and friendship circles both

here in Wales and through video calls with family in Kenya. Imani's mother is black, and his father, White. Imani attends school where he is the only child of his colour within his class. All the other children are White, and the boys have short, shaved hair while, Imani has a light brown skin tone and dreadlocks.

On his first day of school, Imani went home with a painted portrait of himself, but his skin tone was not acknowledged and so his face had been painted with dark brown. Imani explained to his mother that there wasn't a colour for his face. Furthermore, when Imani first arrived at school with his dreadlocks, he wore them with pride, however, his mother soon expressed concerns about his self-confidence. Parents on the playground during pick-up were confusing him for a girl because of his hairstyle, and his friends could not understand why his hair was different from theirs. Consequently, children were teasing him, by touching his dreadlocks, laughing, and running away at playtime. Imani no longer wanted the hairstyle that he loved. He began asking his parents to tie them back so his hair would look short, until he could have a haircut like the other boys. During this period, Imani was excluded on 3 occasions by his teacher, by receiving 'time out' for retaliating behaviour. He lashed out at the teasing children but was not given opportunity to ensure staff understood the situation fully. Moreover, Imani told his father after receiving his class photograph, that although he loves his mother's Black skin, he wanted to be White like everyone else in the photo. Imani has started asking his mother to call him Jacob instead of Imani because his friends think his name is funny.

Overall, Imani is a confident child who loves school and generally interacts well with his peers, but mum's concern is that he might begin to feel inadequate in terms of his racial identity. Mum also avoids school run because she does not feel included or involved with the other White mums, she feels uncomfortable and lonely. Furthermore, she does not know how to approach the subject of unconscious bias because she doesn't feel like anyone can understand. Consequently, she has expressed that she would like to move to a city, where her son and her family can be placed in a school with more diversity – staff, parents, and children.

<u>Children:</u>

Inclusive leadership means children will benefit from learning experiences that are broad and balanced, without lowering expectations based on background (Welsh Gov, 2020). One of the major barriers Imani was faced with every day, in both his setting and his community, was a lack of ethnic representation due to living in a less diverse area of Wales. This was reflected in the resources and activities planned for each day compared to more diverse and multicultural areas (Welsh Gov, 2022). Therefore, an enabling environment was needed to

facilitate the development of the children's curiosity about Imani, to encourage them to value his similarities and differences (Welsh Gov, 2015; *Equality Act 2010*).

When Imani's mother made the school aware of her child's situation, teaching staff realised the need for providing children with opportunities to adopt an awareness and respect for inter-racial families, therefore supporting the developing knowledge of diversity beyond the community surrounding Imani's setting (Brentnall, 2017; Welsh Gov, 2015). They started to introduce resources, activities, and verbal interactions including multiculturalism, for example the exploration of stories representing people of various ethnicity, culture, and traditions; multicultural dolls and toys were integrated into the setting; and celebrations were planned for, to facilitate inclusivity that encouraged the development of empathy and a sense of belonging (Embrace Race, no date; Pacey, 2023; Welsh Gov, 2023). However, by 4 years of age, young children already have shaped attitudes towards other's different from themselves, a growing bias was already present (Gov UK, no date); even Imani rejected the black doll and chose stories representing the White majority. This resulted in Darpl (2023) support through staff training to encourage staff to reflect on their practise to ensure a more inclusive, welcoming environment, embedding anti-racist practice influencing children's growing confidence.

Another challenge Imani was faced with was the lack of understanding reflected by teaching staff concerning his retaliation when children were teasing him about his hair. Imani's voice should have been heard (Unicef, no date) and therefore, correct behaviour management that would remove any inequalities in the treatment he received. Consequently, Internal exclusion policies were reviewed, and staff received training including the use of restorative justice approaches with the children (Brentnall, 2017). This supported Imani by creating a space where he would feel safe to share and ask questions concerning his racial identity, but also support the children to understand the value of differences (Unicef, no date).

<u>Families:</u>

According to Moya (2022), inclusive leadership can be successful when the school produces respect, recognition, and gratitude for the varying needs of children and families; therefore, a child's family plays a key role in developing the inclusive culture of the school.

According to NSPCC Learning (2022), challenging experiences including racism, bias, stereotyping and cultural misunderstandings on an individual, institutional, or societal level could be displayed both consciously and unconsciously towards mixed-race families, impacting children from a young age (Embrace Race, no date). For example, Imani's teacher not appreciating his skin tone when painting a portrait; parents associating his common

Kenyan male hairstyle with British female hairstyles; and children laughing at his Swahili name. Therefore, upon reflection, it was understood the importance of working with his family to gain knowledge and understanding about their unique identity, their mixed heritage and race, to ensure their sense of belonging and inclusivity within the school (Freud, 2023; Welsh Gov, 2023). It is important to prioritise this partnership because it supports the achievement of meeting Imani's needs by appreciating the connection between his home life and school (Welsh Gov, 2015). Furthermore, his parents will feel valued by the acknowledgment that they are Imani's first educators regardless of race and culture (Gov UK, no date a).

Teachers wanted Imani's family to feel included (Welsh Gov, 2015), and since Imani had travelled to Kenya for Christmas, they planned for him to share his experiences in class. His mother who generally avoided the setting, was excited and proud of his opportunity to share, taking time to write details on the backs of the photos to encourage and support her sons' recollections. Furthermore, Imani felt his unique identity had a place of belonging (unicef, no date) – he proudly talked about and pointed out his Black Kenyan cousins, aunts, and grandparents, excitedly recalling his memories. The children listened and asked questions about the differences they could see, and later children were observed playing with the Black and Brown dolls and voluntarily choosing books with children different from them. Based on Imani's photos, staff noted that dance was something Imani and his family loved, and traditional attire. They took some time to learn more about Kenya with the children and then invited Imani's parents into school for a session, to teach the children in his class a traditional Kenyan dance. They accepted the invitation, and fully dressed in Kenyan attire, they celebrated and shared their cultural diversity (Welsh Gov, 2015), and everyone had a wonderful time. Photos and videos posted on the school's website encouraged positive conversations between parents, children and staff, and Imani's mother expressed her relief to finally be herself. Imani's father expressed his relief that his wife finally felt acceptance and belonging within her son's school; and Imani watched his parents with pride – proud to have a mixture of his father's White skin and mother's Black skin in a community where they are a minority.

IL overcame these barriers by building trustworthy professional relationships with Imani's family over time (Pacey, 2023). Furthermore, they facilitated an enabling environment that supported and encouraged diversity within a non-judgmental space, sensitive to a mixed-race family's unique identity, and empowering them to confidently walk in their own skin, without fear, and instead of hiding their unique differences (Welsh Gov, 2015; Ferdman, 2017). This racial awareness and understanding resulted in Imani's mother taking him to school more frequently and she began interacting with the other White mums confidently

after their encouragement, even joining the schools PFA team. IL broke through the challenge of open discussions about racial identity due to the cultural norm, lack of awareness and discomfort (Darpl, 2023).

Communities:

According to NHS England (2023), building relationship with people and communities is significant to creating a healthy service which tailors to the unique and individual needs of everyone. Involving the community is important for IL, including people from diverse backgrounds; they can use their life experiences to share and create strategies for the development of a culturally sensitive and inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong. (Darpl, 2023; Williams, 2021).

Upon reflection of Imani's story, it was crucial that reaching out to the wider community to engage in training sessions and workshops to educate the staff, families and children of Imani's school concerning culture differences and implicit biases. Darpl (2023) got involved and a training day was planned for the staff across the school concerning anti-racism practise. All staff had to work through the Darpl (2023) Bitesize, Welsh Government funded training sessions, including, but not limited to: Developing anti racism as an educator; Developing Knowledge and Language connected with anti-racism, and Contribution of minority ethnic community to the history of Wales. Furthermore, senior staff enrolled on the Darpl course, senior leaders on their anti-racist journey. However, in recent parental feedback evaluation forms, a barrier was highlighted, which is often what frustrates parents concerning inset days. They felt they were being informed about all sorts of information from dinner money, uniform rates, and recycling; but when it came to what really mattered to them which was how these training days would better their child's education, they felt like they were in the dark. It was acknowledged that if growth was to be achieved then parents must be well informed and included in the content of the training days (Sellgren, 2014).

Therefore, the school sent parents information about the training day, explaining the anti-racist focus, and they were sent the anti-racist Wales action plan, to educate themselves too (Welsh Gov, 2022). Moreover, families were invited to a coffee morning with Darpl professionals who volunteered their time to share their lived experiences; this was also accessible to parents who could not attend as it was agreed to be recorded, stored, and emailed to all adult stakeholders (*Data Protection Act 2018*). Furthermore, the coffee morning was such a success, the communications strengthened parental involvement, parental networking, and social capital of parents (Stam, 2022). Imani's mother's feedback was that she could relate; furthermore, she was signposted to the Race Equality First Charity (no date) and began attending their Healthy Minds Project, delivered across South Wales for

BAME people aged 18 and over. She was able to address her own issues through counselling sessions, mental and physical wellbeing activities, creative expression sessions and community education. She expressed that she had found a safe place to share with like-minded people without judgment or fear of stigmatisation.

Professionals:

Regular meetings with Imani's parents and further team meetings with other staff encouraged open communication adopting a joint approach to all staff actively involving themselves in Imani's care and learning journey. These experiences produced awareness, care and empathy and had a positive impact on the school environment for example, changing the racial inequality in education associated with attainment, policy, practise, curriculum, and the workplace; furthermore, the acknowledgment that more Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority staff should be employed by schools (Williams, 2021; *Equlity Act2010*).

Involving Imani's parents within professional meetings meant seeking their input in the decision-making processes involving their child; they felt respected when their culture, values and practises were acknowledged. It built trust and deepened the relationship between the staff, other professionals, and the family (Welsh Gov, 2015).

It was observed early on that Imani appeared to have a speech delay. However, it was noted during a meeting with his parents, that he has 2 primary languages – English and Swahili. Through professional collaborations with his parents, and understanding his language acquisition and bilingualism, meant provision could be arranged for a qualified interpreter to give a holistic assessment of Imani's speech, language, and communication skills. Furthermore, it was not a disorder, and they were encouraged to continue with the language that is most natural to speak, to ensure a rich language environment for him. (NHS Kent Community Health, no date).

Additionally, Counselling was arranged for Imani to support his emotional well-being. They worked together with him and his parents to identify, explore and support the navigation of challenges he had faced associated with racism and discrimination (NSPCC, 2023). According to NSPCC (2023) if a child is treated differently because of their differences, this can be upsetting for them and potentially contribute to feelings of isolation, depression, anger and shame about their skin colour and identity. In 2020/21, Childline carried out 285 counselling sessions where racism was the issue. 36 calls to the NSPCC helpline were from worried adults. However, children can fear talking during a counselling session, worrying about what people might think, therefore it could have been an unsuccessful experience for Imani. On the other hand, it was highlighted that his class teacher had observed his

enjoyment around music. Consequently, music and play therapy was used with him, and was arranged by the school and is something Imani looks forward to (Young Minds, 2023).

To conclude, accepting and embracing diversity and fostering an ethnically sensitive and equitable atmosphere in Imani's school and classroom meant that, IL is at its best; facilitating children and their families to adopt a robust sense of identity, respect for others and self, and the skills to thrive in an ever more diverse world (Welsh Gov, 2015; *Equality Act 2010*).

Section 2:

Critical Evaluation - The Childcare Offer for Wales, Policy.

According to Welsh Gov (2021) The Childcare Offer for Wales, policy provides a government-funded childcare scheme for working parents of 3 – 4-year-old children; 30 hours a week can be allocated for up to 48 weeks of a year, minimum of 10 hours a week of education, and up to 20 hours of care, (Vale of Glamorgan Council, no date). The policy acknowledges the importance of giving children the best start in life, by means of early learning opportunities while parents maintain work, which could encourage and support their positive outcomes including school readiness (Welsh Gov, no date). Throughout this evaluation, a critical examination will explore its effectiveness in facilitating IL within EY; one might argue that it is not inclusive at all.

According to Welsh Government (2023) the childcare offer impacts families on lower incomes significantly by means of financial accessibility and parental employment – 75% of parents said they were able to work because of the offer; and 37% explained they would need to work less if funding was unavailable. The policy recognises that the offer, supports working parents to maintain their employment, enabling continuous professional development to further their careers, and therefore, improving their economic status, ensuring financial security for their families (Welsh Gov, no date a). However, Kings College London and Working with Families (2021) suggest that working mother's often miss important opportunities such as continuous professional development, due to flexible working hours. This means policymaking concerning 'family friendly' places of work, overlook them regarding job security and growth. Furthermore, WENWales (2021) suggests 53% of mothers feel the offer provides a constraint coverage which limits their career development too; they cannot increase their hours and, in many cases, cannot resume work because their child is under 3. Therefore, the offer is excluding unemployed parents, and all other children who could benefit from free EY education and care, consequently forming inequalities in access and opportunity for struggling families (WENWales, 2021).

Moreover, Welsh Gov (2023) suggests the rate of unemployment across Wales for people aged 16 and over is the lowest it has been since 1996, when records first began. According to HM Treasury (2023), 6.7 million people of working age are economically inactive. 1.6 million reports to be parents who cannot afford childcare costs therefore they stay home and look after their families without employment. 97% said childcare is too expensive in the UK (HM Treasury, 2023; Topping, 2021). Consequently, the poorer physical conditions and lack of educational services due to eligibility, could result in poor educational outcomes for the 3–4-

year-olds who cannot access the free funding because of their age and social-economic status (Mooi-Reci, 2019). On the other hand, Welsh Gov (2023) provides exceptional Flying Start childcare for 2–3-year-olds living in disadvantaged areas across Wales, to ensure positive outcomes for younger children and their families, including parenting support, enhanced health visiting services and support for speech and language. However, the sessions are limited to 2.5 hours a day and are term time only (Welsh Gov, 2023), which limits time for parental employment (Senedd Research, 2022). Additionally, barriers include lack of knowledge and misinformation about the funding, therefore, material must be circulated better within those areas for these families to even access the services they are eligible for (Welsh Gov, 2013).

BBC News (2023) suggests childcare costs in the UK are amongst the highest in the world, with ongoing plans in England for expanding their childcare schemes over the next 2 years. Consequently, budgets have risen by £204m this year, and £288m next year – a 30% increase. Another barrier could include capital and sustainability due to the need of ongoing adequate funding to achieve the successful implementation of the offer, but Hunt (2023) suggests this plan is to benefit the economy in the long term, by encouraging parents to go back to work as soon as maternity ends. HM Treasury (2023) suggest the government want to create more policies that would influence the inactive population of unemployed people to see their vital working role within the wider community. However, cuts are being made in other areas with decisions been received negatively by practitioners who work on the ground within this industry. Consequently, raising childcare budgets means dropping adult: child ratios for 2 years olds from 1: 4 to, 1:5, which is a concern to staff working in group settings who are concerned for the wellbeing, development, and progression of children in their care, and the overall quality of care they provide (HM Treasury, 2023). Furthermore, 70% of settings suggested they would not change their ratios regardless, to ensure health and safety standards continued. Additionally, 45% said they would be unlikely to change anything concerning ratios (Department for Education, 2023).

To conclude, the Childcare Offer for Wales Policy is a scheme that benefits only 3–4-year-old children and eligible working parents, it is not inclusive of all families (Welsh Gov, 2021). Due to the requirements of the policy, many parents cannot work because childcare is too expensive (BBC, 2023) in Wales, consequently, many mothers feel they miss opportunities to progress within their careers (WENWales, 2021). Furthermore, the children from low-socioeconomic status families miss out on opportunities that would benefit their academic attainment and school readiness (Welsh Gov, no date). Although Welsh Gov (2023) provide additional sessional childcare for 2-3 years old children, this is only inclusive of those

families who live in Flying Start areas, the deprived areas of Wales. Furthermore, information needs to be circulated better to make those families aware, so they can access it and be included in what they are eligible for. On the other hand, Hunt (2023 outlines in his speech and throughout the HM Treasury (2023) that childcare budgets will enable funded EY education and care directly after maternity leave by September 2024 in England, suggesting inclusivity to all regardless of circumstances which will benefit parents, children, and the economy, by encouraging parents to go back to work (Hunt, 2023). However, it is not clear if this is inclusive of families in Wales.

Section 3 – Blog:

Promoting Inclusive Leadership in the Role Play

Inclusive leadership fosters one's sense of belonging, diversity, and equality (Ferdmon, 2017). Enabling environments can present experiences to promote such practise (Welsh Gov, 2015). Role play can offer these opportunities, supporting the children by encouraging explorations of varied identity, culture, and perspective (Pacey, 2023). This blog will consider the importance of inclusive leadership and give applied approaches to develop inclusive role play corners, successfully. Furthermore, potential challenges and possibilities for improvement will be addressed.

To begin, do we understand inclusive practise?

Children need to feel safe and welcomed (Welsh Gov, 2015). Furthermore, a facilitating adult, environment and experience is important to ensure children feel valued, respected, and represented (Department for Education, 2021). So, as practitioners, are we celebrating diversity and recognising the individual uniqueness of each child in our care (Pacey, 2021)? Moreover, is discrimination being addressed and equality being encouraged (Darpl, 2023)? Children need to be empowered to accept and love their unique differences and the unique differences of others (Welsh Gov, 2015).

So, how can we encourage inclusive practise in role play?

1. Multi-cultural Resources and Diverse Role Models

Dolls and small word figures can represent diversity and promote inclusivity very well for young children, for example, different gender, race, ability, and culture. Furthermore, books, clothing, props, and artwork can reflect a wide range of cultures, traditions, and languages (Pacey, 2023). Additionally, by encouraging children to explore these differences, we are supporting their growing empathy by teaching them through play experiences, to appreciate diversity while promoting cultural awareness and understanding (Welsh, Gov, 2015; *Equality Act 2010; Unicef, no date*).

2. Involving Children in the Planning

The environment is for the children; therefore, we should be involving them in the decision-making process (Unicef, no date). What would they like to see in terms of themes, props, and rules? Who chose the home corner, was it the children or the teacher? What about the Gypsy traveller child who lives in a caravan? Or like my friend growing up, who lived on a boat! Encouraging the children to share ideas, perspectives and preferred environments gives them ownership and promotes inclusivity (Unicef, no date; Welsh Gov, 2015).

3. Enabling Adult

It is crucial early years practitioners actively engage in role play situations, modelling behaviours that are inclusive and welcoming to all (Department for Education, 2021). Observation is important and being aware of bias actions or exclusions demonstrated through play, and ensuring such experiences are addressed well (Estyn, 2021; Welsh Gov, 2022). However, according to Welsh Gov (2022) in their summary of response to the new Race Equality Action Plan, 89% expressed reservations about the success in delivery. For example: the size of the Plan; missing actions; inadequate or no reference to monitoring, evaluation, and lack of accountability.

Additionally, let us discuss more challenges that can become barriers to the immense potential for promoting inclusive practise in role play:

1. Cost

Education and Skills Funding Agency (2022) suggests the Government offers grants to local authorities for their school's improvement, which could support the financial cost of these essential resources. However, according to Ofsted (2020) schools are under heightened financial pressure, and with varying needs within the different schools, spending money can look very different between settings. Therefore, this can limit inclusive experiences, because resources and materials can be very expensive and the perspectives on high priority needs can differ from school to school.

2. Availability

Furthermore, encouraging diversity that accurately represents the different identities and culture is important (Welsh Gov, 2015), but it can be problematic when there is a lack availability of resources and materials (Enabling Education Network, no date). I am a white mother with mixed-race children, and at 2 years old my daughter told me she didn't want brown skin. I took her to the big supermarkets to buy her a mixed-race doll that represented her, there was only one amongst numerous white dolls, pushed all the way to the back of the shelf! No wonder she wanted to be white! Where are the accessible black dolls, when we live in a diverse 21st century with resources available to us at the click of a finger?! Limited access can hinder how effective a role play area can be (Historical Association, 2015). On the other hand, EEN (no date) argues a great point: we say inclusive resources are not available with a fixed idea of inclusion, this results in a fixed idea about resources. Therefore, could we foster a more flexible idea of inclusivity and result in a flexible response towards resources? If I cannot buy a black doll from a supermarket, could I make one?

To conclude, role play is an important element of promoting inclusive leadership in an early year setting. They support and encourage diversity by providing resources and materials that are multi-cultural. Collaboration with the children in important to understand their unique wants and needs and adult interactions are vital, including the recognition and important teaching surrounding anti-racist practise. Barriers include cost and availability; however, budgets are overspent, and schools are under pressure financially. Furthermore, availability and access can be problematic. On the other hand, a flexible practitioner can overcome such barriers through creativity.

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