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Reflective portfolio

ECEY6004-BIRM

Inclusive leadership working together to support families.

Introduction to Inclusive Leadership

Bernardo et al., (2021) define inclusive leadership to be based on different cultures to be implemented within communities with respect is the biggest task in this 21st century due to the increasing immigration levels. It is not just about understanding different communities and cultures but also giving everyone a sense of belonging, and a safe environment for everyone to thrive in their field without being afraid of not being accepted by others. Inclusivity is all about being fair with everyone regardless of their gender, disability, race, culture or poverty. Bernardo et al., (2021) also describe inclusive leadership as not just acknowledging an individual's need or valuing but acknowledging on a bigger scale, for example, communities embedding the practice where everyone feels welcome (Bernardo et al.,2021).

Betz (2024) writes in an article on inclusive leadership where he describes the concept of inclusive leadership style. According to him, an inclusive leadership style requires understanding and appreciating different races, genders, traditions, cultures or any kind of background, hence, promoting inclusion and avoiding stereotypes. Inclusive leaders welcome every one of their customers and clients by giving each one of them a sense of belonging or creating a safe cultural environment to work in. This can be achieved through work culture to include people with different backgrounds by respecting their values and beliefs. Inclusive leadership plays a major role in getting the best outcomes for workers and the work itself for example some minority groups like the LGBTQT community or different cultures feel included and supported by the leadership style (Betz, 2024).

According to Ryan (2007) in a review of 'inclusive leadership' suggests that inclusive leadership is believed to include parents, and communities to make changes at a national level, resulting in favour of a better impact on everyone (Ryan,2007).

Importance of inclusive leadership

Below here the reason why it's important to have an inclusive leadership style implemented in the UK is well explained by Devarakonda (2021) states that, due to wars around the world, refugees are seeking refuge in most developed countries, including children with their families. Nargis and Tikly (2010) agree that diversity is increasing day by day due to migration. Furthermore, Nargis and Tikly (2010) explain that migration brings different cultures, races, and ethnicities into these countries, with a significant number of children included in this process. As a result, rich cultural

communities are developing in early years settings and primary schools. So in England's DFE (2018) showed that the number of refugees has risen by 29 percent in the last 15 years, clearly indicating increasing diversity. Nargis and Tikly agree that this growth means many different cultures, races, and backgrounds are becoming part of the community. For children, the main issue is language barriers, which require teachers in early years settings to educate themselves about the children's cultures, races, and backgrounds first to teach them effectively and foster inclusivity (Devarakonda, 2021).

Scenario

Tuba is 3 years old and has joined the setting. Parents did not disclose of child being autistic, but staff has noticed there are traits of autism. Upon informing the father to discuss the autism traits we have observed, father started to avoid the staff. Recently we have noticed that tuba seems to be quite distressful and getting dropped off by father only. We have not seen mother recently and tuba is losing charm in her face and eating habits are going down badly. Upon asking the father about tubas mental health, he seemed to be not bothered to tell us the reason behind it. It is reported by other parents that tuba's mother has left them and lives with extended families.

Children

In this scenario, an inclusive leader would prioritize adhering to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFSA) (2024), specifically section 3, which addresses 'The Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements.' This framework emphasizes creating a healthy, safe, and secure environment for every child. To handle the situation effectively, the inclusive leader would engage the local safeguarding authorities to perform a welfare check on the family. This step ensures that any external factors impacting the child's well-being are identified and addressed, as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Ryan, 2001) highlights how environmental influences shape a child's development. Recognizing their responsibility, the leader would take proactive steps to address concerns and ensure the child's needs are met.

Furthermore, the leader would organize a meeting with the staff to share relevant information about the child's situation. This meeting would be conducted in line with the EYFS statutory framework (2024a), ensuring that confidentiality and professionalism are maintained. By keeping staff informed, the leader fosters a

supportive approach to address the child's challenges, enabling the motion of effective strategies to support their well-being and development.

Nutbrown (2013) defines how the setting needs to implement inclusion in practice, talks about how inclusion in practice can be implemented by the teachers having knowledge about conscious and unconscious bias and what can go wrong if not understand the issues properly. She also talks about EYFS (2024) 'a unique child' policy would be great if implemented well in the practices. She further emphasises that the best education can be delivered once practitioners recognise the individual's need. According to Nutbrown (2013), some settings see including children with special needs or any disability as a priority but some settings see inclusion in how the practitioners decide different ways to implement along with policy and procedure. Also, keep in mind and implement the UNCRC (1989) in place to deliver the right care. She adds that UK laws point to some of UNCRC points as legal rights of the child which also has been noted globally that UK corporates with UNCRC rights quite less than others. She adds that Georgson et al., (2023) says still UNCRC rights are mainly linked with children's rights with different legislation and policies .According to Nutbrown & Clough (2006) listening to children's views, and voices is all about how attentively the practitioner listens to the individual's needs and respectfully gets to know them. Chesworth (2019) agrees that it is all about understanding what the child brings to your setting, how the child lives with family, understanding the background child came from and what community the child belongs to. All this makes it a must for teachers to see each child differently and it's their duty to find out the needs of the child and implement them with the right policy and procedure in place (Nutbrown,2013).

Language barriers represent a significant challenge in this scenario. The inability of the child to communicate effectively with other children or adults prevents their social interactions, making it difficult for them to build relationships or seek the help they need. This lack of communication can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and disappointment, further affecting the child's emotional well-being. Such barriers may also prevent the child from engaging fully in learning activities, potentially delaying their development in key areas. To overcome this, an inclusive leader might consider implementing language support strategies, such as providing bilingual resources, employing staff with multilingual skills, or incorporating visual aids and gestures to facilitate understanding and interaction. These efforts would help bridge the

communication gap, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for the child.

Families

The next step would involve contacting the family. As an inclusive leader, it is essential to approach the situation with sensitivity and a genuine willingness to understand the family's culture, values, and beliefs. Rather than questioning or pressuring the father to disclose issues affecting the child, the leader should create a safe and open dialogue. This can be achieved by demonstrating curiosity and enthusiasm in learning about their background and acknowledging their unique cultural practices. Building trust is an energetic part of this process, as it ensures that the family feels respected and understood. An inclusive and effective leader recognises that understanding a family's background is the foundation for providing meaningful support. By identifying and addressing the family's specific needs, the leader ensures that the child receives the necessary support to succeed. This approach aligns with the principles of the Equality Act (2010), which dictates that all children, regardless of gender, disability, race, or background, are entitled to equal care and opportunities.

In addition, leaders must follow policies like the Children Act (2004), as referenced in the Greencoat Nursery (2022) policy, which emphasizes that children's well-being heavily depends on the care and support provided by their parents or carers. By fostering a collaborative partnership with the family, the leader can ensure that both the parents and the child receive the appropriate support, creating a holistic approach to the child's development and well-being.

In this scenario, the barriers extend beyond language differences. The father's unfamiliarity with local rules, regulations, and policies designed to support both children and families poses a significant challenge. Additionally, differences in cultural beliefs and values may delay open communication and mutual understanding. These barriers can result in the father being unaware of the resources and support systems available to him and his child.

To address these challenges, the leader could adopt culturally responsive practices, such as providing translated materials, employing interpreters, or organising culturally sensitive workshops for parents. Educating the family about relevant policies, such as the Equality Act (2010) and the Children Act (2004), in an

accessible manner could empower them to engage more effectively with the available resources. By acknowledging and linking these gaps, the leader would demonstrate true inclusivity, ensuring that both the child and the family feel supported and valued.

Professionals & Communities

Rad et al. (2022) highlighted in their study that human rights should adopt an inclusive approach, making it a legal right for every child to access the same opportunities, regardless of disabilities or differences. The outcome of such an approach would be an educational system that is accessible to all children. Similarly, Richard (2019) & Beeharry (2021) emphasise that a child's holistic development depends on the fulfilment of their basic human rights. This is particularly true for children with disabilities, for whom an inclusive approach proves to be more effective. However, Saloviita (2018) also reported that a significant barrier to successful inclusion is the lack of the right knowledge among teachers about how to adopt inclusive practices. Allan (2008) argues that educators equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills for inclusion enable children from diverse backgrounds to find the right direction, fostering their full development (Rad et al., 2022).

Additionally, Thamminaina et al. (2020) highlight that when children with special needs do not receive the appropriate help, they are often left behind academically, which significantly impacts their learning progress (Thamminania et al., 2020).

Hanline and Correa-Torres (2012) agree that inclusive strategies for children from non-developmental backgrounds leave a significant, long-lasting impact. Hanline and Correa-Torres (2012), Unterhalter (2019), & Addey (2021) emphasise the importance of collaboration between caregivers, teachers, and medical professionals in creating programs tailored to meet each child's needs based on their level of disability (Hanline & Correa- Torres, 2012).

As reflective practitioners, it is important to apply Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory when implementing an inclusive approach.

According to Knowles (2018), Maslow's model provides a framework to ensure that a child's basic needs are met, beginning with their physiological needs. In this scenario, it is important to assess whether the child is receiving the right care at home. For children to thrive and reach the ultimate stage of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization, they must first grow in an environment where their basic needs are

fulfilled. The practitioner must ensure, under the EYFS (2024) framework section 1, 'the learning and development requirements,' that the child receives appropriate support. This involves collaborating with family members to understand why the basic needs are unmet and how to support the parent in overcoming these challenges (Knowles, 2018).

The next step is addressing the child's safety and security by following the EYFS (2024) guidance under section 3, 'the safeguarding and welfare requirements,' which is important for their overall development and long-term well-being. This involves reaching out to family support services and social care to organise developmental programs that ensure the child receives appropriate care. This is their legal right according to the legislation 'Children and Families Act' (2014). By following these inclusive practice steps, practitioners can help the child develop self-confidence and achieve their full potential once all foundational needs are satisfied.

To implement this strategy, the practitioner began by approaching the parent respectfully to understand their reluctance to discuss the child's unsettled behaviour in class. During the initial meeting, it became evident that a language barrier caught up in effective communication. To overcome this, an interpreter was arranged, offering the family options: the setting's interpreter, a staff member from the same community, or their interpreter. The father disclosed that they had no friends or family in the UK due to their recent relocation and agreed to use the setting's interpreter.

During the conversation, the father revealed significant challenges, including unemployment, homelessness, and living in a shelter with the child. The mother, suffering from depression, had moved in with a friend. Cultural differences also surfaced, as autism was viewed as a shameful condition within their community. The practitioner responded with empathy and inclusivity, respecting the father's beliefs while organising a program to educate him about autism. This program highlighted the benefits of early intervention and practical strategies for supporting his child's cognitive development.

Building trust between the father and the setting was essential to ensure the child's basic needs were met. Resolving the language barrier through the interpreter was a main step in establishing this trust. To address cultural barriers, the practitioner engaged the father respectfully, encouraging him to share insights about their cultural background.

Inclusive practices were integrated into the curriculum to foster a sense of respect and belonging for both the father and the child. For instance, nursery rhymes and animated stories from the family's cultural background were introduced, and relaxation periods incorporated familiar cultural elements. Practitioners also made an effort to learn basic words in the family's language, using them during daily interactions to strengthen communication with the child. Recognising the child as having English as an Additional Language (EAL), targeted support was provided to help them learn English while preserving their native language and cultural identity. Through these reflective and inclusive practices, practitioners demonstrated respect and empathy while addressing the unique needs of the child and family. This approach not only built trust but also ensured the child's holistic growth and development within a nurturing and supportive environment.

The child's autistic traits were understood as stemming from trauma caused by the confusion of relocating to a new country, navigating a new language, living without a stable home, and experiencing separation from their mother. Under the Equality Act (2010), autism caused by trauma may not qualify as a long-term disability but is recognised as a temporary condition that falls within the description of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Practitioners ensured that the child received the necessary support, aligning with the legal framework to uphold the child's rights and promote their well-being.

Conclusion

This case illustrates the profound impact of reflective and inclusive practices in addressing the complicated challenges faced by both the child and the family. The practitioner's approach underlines the importance of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and proactive problem-solving when working within diverse communities. By taking the time to understand the father's experiences and barriers, such as language, cultural beliefs, and social isolation, the practitioner was able to foster trust and create an environment that was both welcoming and supportive.

The use of interpreters was an important point, demonstrating the setting's commitment to overcoming communication challenges and ensuring the family felt heard and valued. Moreover, the practitioner's effort to incorporate cultural elements into the curriculum and daily interactions highlighted the significance of promoting a sense of belonging and validation for families navigating unfamiliar environments.

These inclusive practices not only empowered the father but also created a positive effect, enriching the child's experience within the setting.

Addressing the root causes of the child's unsettled behaviour, such as the trauma of relocation, homelessness, and separation from the mother, was key to understanding their developmental needs. By viewing autism in this context and aligning their support with the Equality Act (2010) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) frameworks, practitioners ensured that the child's rights were upheld. This legal compliance provided a strong foundation for meeting the child's individual needs, while also emphasising the importance of adapting interventions to account for both temporary and long-term challenges.

The practitioner's efforts to educate the father about autism, its management, and the role of early intervention demonstrated how knowledge-sharing can transform perceptions and empower parents to take active roles in their child's development. By building this bridge of understanding, the practitioner not only supported the child's cognitive growth but also strengthened the father's capacity to advocate for and nurture his child.

Ultimately, this scenario highlights the important role of practitioners as inclusive leaders who adapt their approaches to meet diverse needs. By addressing barriers, fostering open communication, and embedding cultural respect into their practices, they create environments where children and families feel valued and supported. Such efforts not only promote the child's development but also build a foundation of trust and collaboration with families, ensuring lasting positive outcomes. This case serves as a powerful reminder that inclusivity when practiced with dedication and respect, has the potential to transform lives, uphold equality, and nurture resilience in the face of adversity.

Policies

The EYFS (2024d) policy is grounded in the Children Act (2006) and integrates updates from significant legislative advancements. It provides a comprehensive framework for professionals working with children, offering guidance on their responsibilities to ensure children's rights are prioritised. While mandatory for registered group providers and early years educators, childminders are excused from following. However, all practitioners must familiarise themselves with its requirements and implications.

The policy emphasizes the importance of delivering high-quality care to children aged 0–5, a critical developmental period. Practitioners are instructed to create safe, nurturing environments that address children’s holistic needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The EYFS (2024d) aligns with the 0–25 SEND Code of Practice, outlining collaborative approaches with local authorities to safeguard and support children’s development effectively.

Despite its importance, compliance with the policy often weakens, with many settings treating it as an online reference rather than integrating it into everyday practice. This lack of implementation can prevent children and families from receiving necessary care and support. The policy underscores the value of community involvement and partnerships with parents, advocating for inclusive practices that respect diversity. Under Section 1, ‘Communication and Language,’ the policy encourages maintaining bilingual children’s home languages alongside English to enhance cognitive and vocabulary development. Practitioners are guided to foster respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, tailoring support to children’s unique learning styles. Regular training and collaboration with local authorities are essential to ensure practitioners remain informed and equipped to handle diverse scenarios effectively. However, barriers such as inadequate practitioner knowledge and miscommunication with families can delay successful implementation. Addressing these challenges requires building trust with parents, particularly in sensitive situations involving domestic abuse or trauma, to ensure children receive the care and support they need.

The DfE (2014) 0–25 SEND Code of Practice sets high expectations for early years practitioners, emphasising their role in supporting children with special educational needs. Practitioners are required to identify and log individual needs within the SEN system and collaborate with local authorities to provide appropriate support. This policy ensures equitable access to education and care for children with SEN, preventing their exclusion from activities. However, practitioners often face challenges such as heavy workloads and time constraints, which can delay timely reporting and hinder access to necessary interventions (DFE,2014).

The Department for Education (2010) highlighted that successful policy implementation often depends on those in authority addressing issues effectively. Delays in decision making and resource limitations in certain areas remain significant barriers to achieving policy objectives.

Rix and John (2014) noted discrepancies in the EYFS framework, citing differences between statutory and non-statutory guidance. They argue that while the EYFS framework prioritises child development, its coherence and transparency could be improved. Development Matters in the EYFS (DfE, 2012) aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), affirming that children have the right to reach their full potential regardless of their background or abilities (Rix & John, 2014).

Effective implementation of the EYFS (2024d) requires practitioners to adopt inclusive leadership styles, fostering environments that celebrate diversity. Incorporating cultural and linguistic elements into daily practices helps create a sense of belonging for children and families. Regular training sessions and partnerships with families and local authorities are critical in effectively ensuring practitioners can address children's unique needs.

In addressing challenges, practitioners must remain vigilant, particularly in safeguarding situations, to protect children from harm. They must also support families in overcoming barriers to collaboration and fostering trust and understanding. By adhering to the EYFS (2024d) and 0–25 SEND Code of Practice, early years practitioners can fulfil their legal and ethical duties, promoting children's rights, safety, and development (EYFS, 2024).

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