

Section 1

Robinson (2016) describe the impact leadership can have, whether that be good or bad leadership, as unprecedented. Further stating that the role of a leader is to create a sense of direction and inspire others to believe in themselves and follow that vision. Whilst Drucker (2020) state that leadership is about doing the right things as opposed to doing things right, aligning with catalytic leaders such as Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Eglantyne Jebb who although strived to make changes to improve lives of others found themselves in prison for their actions.

McDowall Clark (2012) state that the process of being a leader, or leading others, is complex within early years and the terminology is just as complicated, as a practitioner might be a leader of a small group or of a room without actually being defined as a leader, for example a senior practitioner. However, further state that no matter what a practitioner's formal position anyone can be a catalytic leader. Cooper (2014) discuss the misconceptions of being a leader within early years, suggesting the subject is often avoided due to confusion. Further stating that leadership is an everyday practice as practitioners influence and empower children, families and communities every day, which is imperative for effective provision, without realisation. Cooper (2014) further suggest that leaders are not those necessarily with titles but those practitioners who lead within their everyday practice. Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) (2010) further state that the expectation of an early years practitioner is to inspire others around them and lead practice.

McDowall Clark (2012) further state that to support practitioners to work as agents of change, in a catalytic leadership style, will develop practice and drive settings forward. CWDC (2010) agree that this non-directive style of working which includes leadership where small incremental changes are built upon instead of a large change will benefit settings and allow change agents to grow and make a difference.

Toomer *et al.* (2018) defines catalytic leadership as an accelerated process of achievement created by fusing teamwork and leadership which enhances the performances of all involved and creates overall team success. Eckert (2021) agrees that catalytic leadership accelerates good work as responsibilities are shared and others empowered to take on new roles.

Toomer *et al.* (2018) further state that to create a catalytic effect amongst the team credibility must be built, whilst creating cohesion and momentum and being open to reflection and supporting others to engage in continuous professional development. Further stating it is not

about a position of authority or power but personal credibility, which is defined as a person who is trusted, respected, offers advice and is approachable.

Reed and Canning (2012) state that catalytic leadership can derive from anyone within the organisation, usually someone with a new energy with new ideas and enthusiasm to motivate others, starting with small steps to make changes and improve practice. McDowall Clark (2012) describe catalytic leadership as practitioners who inspire change without necessarily a position of power, and encourages every practitioner to introduce their own ideas to inspire change in others, such as sharing training with others when only some practitioners have received the training. However further states that for practitioners to be afforded this change of leadership within a setting, the environment must allow for this, to welcome new ideas and reflection which will therefore make a difference.

Whalley (2011) states that the evidence of great leadership is how the setting operates, how children are involved with decision making and how practitioners interact with parents and carers and the wider community.

Heffernan (2015) discusses how social connectedness is key to improving any team as through these positive relations ideas flow and grow between peers, however state that time must be afforded to aid these genuine connections. Further stating that helpfulness is key to a successful team and practitioners understanding that giving and getting help from others can improve the team will benefit the team as the social connectedness drives helpfulness. This aligns with Toomer *et al.* (2018) who describe how catalytic leadership and therefore teamwork improves overall performance as people grow, develop and share their skills and experience with others.

Siraj and Hallett (2014) agree that for leadership, within the early years, to be effective it is imperative that positive relationships are created in a respectful environment to ensure all members of the team feel confident enough to express their voice and opinions, knowing that they are going to be heard and valued. Further stating that a high-quality setting will include care, respect and trust amongst practitioners. This aligns with Heffernan (2015) who state that the people in an organisation are the ones who can make a difference, and it's the relationships that those people form which boost team work and therefore improve outcomes. Robinson (2016) further agrees that in an education setting it is the people, and the relationships they build in that setting and the community that will ensure success. Amanchukwu, Stanley and Olotube (2015) further suggests that the relationships between the team are paramount to creating a positive environment. Robinson (2016) further contrasts the education system with

Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem where the teacher will set the necessary environment so that children flourish; the head teacher will afford the teacher to flourish and so on to local authority and governments, demonstrating the influence government has on everyday settings.

In early years settings Parker (2020) states that strong leaders are not necessary, as if the ethos and the environment of the setting is enabling to take people forward, and space and time is given to support this, with open communication then strong leaders are not needed.

Ankrum (2016) discusses how positive relationships within a setting and its community ensures maximum success for the setting and can be a catalyst for change within that community. Further stating that practitioners who are allowed open communication, and are given the time to reflect, will strengthen the setting therefore having positive outcomes for children.

In recent years the early years workforce has been transformed with minimum qualifications being transformed within the early years sector as outlined by Welsh Government (2017) meaning practitioners finding themselves in positions of 'authority' and leading a team without perhaps the knowledge and understanding of how to do that. Northouse (2016) state that changing to a leadership role leads to practitioners reflecting on their personal traits and skills. Furthermore, Talan, Bloom and Kellan (2014) suggest that many talented practitioners find themselves promoted to leaders due to their skills without the knowledge of leadership. Sims *et al.* (2015) agree that practitioners often move into their new role due to reward of practice in current role and are therefore ill prepared for their leadership role which leads them to fall into styles of leadership which are not conducive with an early years setting, therefore impacting on their ability to promote change and improve quality. Leaders and practitioners can consider experience and qualifications as a status and might not allow a catalytic leader to bring the valuable insight that might be needed. McDowell Clark (2012) agrees that due to a great emphasis on early years and a drive of excellence within that and highlights the need for trained, skilled leaders within the early years to be supported.

A further barrier is the lack of support shown to these new leaders in ensuring they learn the desired skills for leadership as opposed to the authoritative style of leadership. Grantham, Caston and Fontcuberta DiCarlo (2021) state that leadership and how that leader leads is paramount to any setting and can be unmotivating if a style of leadership used that is not effective in creating an environment of opportunity. Zachery (2011) compares authoritative leadership styles to the military and found that few results were achieved from this method, further stating that a positive behaviour change would achieve better results. Zachery (2011)

further state that organizations need to invest particularly in leadership development at all levels, and must not focus any leadership training on one person. Sims *et al.* (2015) state that leadership is imperative to improve early years settings and the intention of highly skilled and trained practitioners mentoring staff to improve practice, in line with Blatchford (2008) EPPE report which discusses the positives to upskilling early years workforce. However, state that the concept of leadership is unclear and practitioners are unprepared for the task.

Another barrier to catalytic leadership in early years can be the pace of everchanging education. Pugh (2010) acknowledges that there has been a vast change to early years practice, particularly policy changes. Recently the pandemic and changes to curriculums have led to changes in practice, especially if the training is not available to ensure all practitioners fully understand the changes. Funding can also be a particular barrier for continuous professional development especially in the non-maintained sector as there is a lack of non-contact time for practitioners as any significant training results in a setting closure and therefore a loss of income. Toomer *et al.* (2018) state that the leadership and teamwork must keep pace with this continual change and ensure all practitioners are keep the pace with these changes. However, practitioners who have been in position for a long time and are resistant to change could be challenging when implementing change therefore limiting the progress made of a catalytic leader.

Practitioners working as a catalytic leader can empower children, families and communities to make positive changes in their lives. Culp and Cox (2002) state that as a result of catalytic leaders who plant new ideas and provide support for others may change individuals, families or even communities' opinions to work towards a new mindset. This is particularly showing in such interventions as Parent nurturing, a Flying Start (no date) initiative, which provide adults and children with the skills, ability and understanding to lead emotionally healthy and happy lives. Aligning with Baker (1972) who suggest that what is needed is the empowerment of others, ensuring others succeed and supporting them to do that in the development of people. This further aligns with Eckert (2021) who defines catalytic leadership as empowering and helping others and it not being an 'all about me' concept.

Section 2

The social context regarding how we live our lives and how children are treated and viewed has changed dramatically over time with evidence and research stating that children are active participants in their lives, their families, communities and society. Further suggesting that the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) which is the most widely adopted international human rights treaty has been the catalyst for affording children this change in how they live their lives (UNICEF, no date b).

Fox Harding (1996) agrees how children and childhoods have changed and states this is due to major historical events such as World War 1 where children were not protected, where humanitarian aid wasn't allowed to get to those needing it most and children were left starving. Kerber-Ganse (2015) researched how Jebs civil society organisation pressurised the British Government to remove the blockade allowing much needed supplies to starving children and protested in London demonstrating the pain and suffering caused to those children. Further stating that following WW1 Jebs formed Save the Children as she feared that Childrens mortality and life experiences were declining.

UNICEF (no date a) state that international standards have improved dramatically over the past century and began with The League of Nations adopting the Geneva declaration on the Rights of the Child which was drafted by Eglantyne Jebb in 1923, setting the first milestone on the way to a Childrens rights treaty, and included rights such as children being a priority for any necessary relief and protection from exploitation. Jebb (1929) stated that these were basic requirements for children which should not be forgotten and must be satisfied.

Save The Children (2017) describe Eglantyne Jebb as an inspirational catalytic leader who has fought for all children, saving thousands of lives. Mulley (2010) further states that Jebb saved the lives of millions of children who were left starving after WW1 and permanently changed the way society view and treat children today. Further stating that Jebb is still saving Childrens lives as well as affording them a better life style due to the efforts she put into Childrens rights which were enshrined by the UNCRC in 1989, and then ratified by the UK in 1991.

UNICEF (no date b) state that when governments across the world adopted the UNCRC they recognised that all children, without discrimination, have the right to be protected, whilst being treated with fairness and dignity and are able to participate fully in their lives to reach their full potential.

History demonstrates how Childrens rights have not been considered and why changes are needed, Humphries (2011) uncovered the organised deportation of one hundred and thirty thousand children in care to commonwealth countries, between 1920's and 1967, leaving them 'orphaned' and open to abuse and slavery. Suggesting that such Childrens rights violations,

who were instigated and covered up by governments, demonstrates the need for such a worldwide treaty to be sanctioned.

Children's Commissioners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2020) state that The United Nations Committee recommended that the UNCRC be incorporated into domestic legislation, however Wales was the first and only nation in the United Kingdom to embed Children's rights in its domestic laws within the *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011* which make it a legal obligation for everyone to consider and abide by the UNCRC. It must however be noted that there is no due regard on public bodies therefore the convention does not have superior status over policy. Holland (2017) has published a practical guide to ensure all public bodies adopt a Children's rights approach, assisting them with integrating Children's rights into every aspect of decision making, policy and practice.

UNICEF (no date b) state that it is pivotal that every child is aware of their rights and have the understanding of them which should be supported by Governments, schools and the media.

In 2001 Sweden appointed Lena Nyberg as Children's Ombudsman to promote the rights and interests of children as declared by the UNCRC and supported Wales first Children's Commissioner Peter Clark and was an influential figure in the inset of the Children's Commissioner.

The Waterhouse (2000) report following the inquiry into the abuse in children's homes in North Wales recommended that a Children's Commissioner for Wales be appointed to prevent further future scandals in the. Subsequently the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 was established with the principal role of the commissioner being to safeguard and promote the welfare and rights of children in line with the UNCRC.

Scott (2004) describes how the UNCRC made a strong recommendation in 2002 that the United Kingdom Government provide children Commissioners for all its children. However, the Children's Commissioner (England) (2022) was only created following a recommendation by Laming (2003) following the abuse and death of Victoria Climbié and established initially under the Children Act 2004 and Professor Al Aynsley-Green was appointed in March 2005. Philpot (2007) stated that Peter Clarke, Wales' first Children's commissioner, focused on listening to children and finding out what they wanted and needed from a Children's commissioner. Further stating that Clarke included children on his interview panel, empowering children to be part of the decision-making process, hearing and valuing their voice and opinions, aligning with Article 12 state that every child has a right for their voice to be

heard, valued and respected as stated by UNICEF (no date b), This method of including Children in recruitment decisions is still prominent today with Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (no date) stating that it offers improved outcomes for children as well as offering them a range of skills and experience and affording them feelings such as respect and empowerment.

Clarke (2002) stated that the Childrens commissioner's role was to safeguard and promote the rights of children and young people in Wales who understand what those rights are. As well as promoting Childrens voices and opinions and ensuring that all Childrens voices are heard. Clarke (2002) further state that to do this, children must be placed at the heart of everything, listening valuing and respecting their opinions. This thread has continued throughout the Childrens Commissioners in Wales; Towler (2009) whose term ran from 2008-2015 pledged to raise the profile of the Childrens Commissioner, visiting all local authorities to listen and promote the role of the Childrens Commissioner and the rights children should be aware of. Furthermore, giving children the opportunity to influence and help prioritise the Childrens Commissioners plan of action and therefore ensuring Childrens opinions were at the heart of his work throughout his term.

Current Childrens Commissioner Sally Holland who finishes her seven-year term of office this year and is unable to renew that term. Scott (2004) discusses how this compares to Northern Ireland who's Childrens Commissioner stands for a four-year term which is renewable once and Scotland's Children commissioner who has a five-year term which is again renewable once.

Holland (2021a) who held the Childrens Commissioner role between 2015 and 2022 has strived to ensure that Wales protects their Children by ensuring that their views were heard by engaging with them digitally throughout a global pandemic which changed Childrens lives. Holland (2021b) engaged with 44000 children and young people through coronavirus surveys, gaining the opinions of how children felt and determining what could be done to support them, offering a roadmap to Welsh Government on how best to do this. Within the Coronavirus and Me survey Holland (2021b) engaged with 19737 children and young people. However, the views were only asked of children between three and eighteen, excluding any child below this age. Cross (2015) review for the Childrens Commissioner of Scotland discusses the importance of gaining views and opinions from all children to ensure participation in article 12 of the UNCRC to influence their experiences and environment as the first three years of a Childs life are a social interactive time which is of significant growth, suggesting a focus for future engagement to ensure a complete picture is gained. Furthermore, within the survey only 510

children and young people identified themselves as disabled 85 percent identified themselves as white, Welsh or British. This figure demonstrates that the voices of ethnic minority children and disabled children were not all heard, and potentially will need addressing by the next Children Commissioner. Welsh Government (2022) state that Rocio Cifuentes, the chief executive of ethnic minorities and youth support team (EYST) who will begin her tenure in April 2022 will have the background and knowledge to ensure inclusion and diversity for all children in Wales.

BBC News (2022) state that Cifuentes childhood experiences shaped her life today, motivating and driving her to strive to improve Childrens life experiences and achieve greater social equality for all Children in Wales. Further stating that her first aim is to ensure children have an equal start in life, describing how the pandemic has increase the inequality gap between children economically better off and those not so better off.

Cifuentes (2022) further state that during her role as Childrens commissioner she aims to ensure that covid does not have a long-term effect on a whole generation of children, as those long-term effects of school closures and lack of socialising could be life changing for children. Children's Commissioners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2020) furthermore condemn the initial pandemic response in England of reopening shops and hospitality before ensuring schools were open for children.

Towler (2009) states that the Commissioners role is to ensure that Children are active participants in decisions that affect them, aligning with UNCRC article 12, and that at every opportunity the Childrens Commissioner must adhere to this through methods such as questionnaires and face to face engagement. Towler (2014) questionnaire regarding advocacy provision in 2014 involved 384 children completing a questionnaire, compared to Holland (2020) annual report which received 7404 responses from Children and young people to its second rights survey, Furthermore, Towler (2014) engaged with 6200 children at events during 2013-2014, through workshops and meetings compared to Holland (2020) engaging with 15504 children during 2019-2020. This demonstrates the development of the role and the progress made from Childrens Commissioners.

Articles 19 and 37 state that children should be treated with respect and no adult should punish a child through physical or mental violence as stated by UNICEF, as discussed by NSPCC (2021) state that in 2020 Scotland became the first country to put legislation into place to give children equal protection from assault which was passed in 2019 under the (Equal Protection

from Assault) (Scotland) Act. Subsequently this was followed by Wales who introduced The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 to end physical punishment in Wales by removing the 'reasonable punishment defence. However, considering that Clarke (2002) raised the campaign to remove the defence of reasonable punishment which he strongly agreed with, in his first annual report as Childrens Commissioner in 2002, and it has been subsequently addressed by each Childrens Commissioner for Wales, it has taken many years to transpire. Childrens and Young Peoples no date b). Commissioner (Scotland) (2022) similarly have demanded children to have the same rights in Scotland against assault as adults, since 2004, further stating that previous measures violated human rights. Clarke (2002) further suggest that confusion lies with the term of 'The smacking ban' being about children having a 'tap on the hand'. However, state that even a 'tap on the hand' can escalate towards further violence if the initial punishment does not suffice.

NSPCC (2021) further state that England and Northern Ireland are yet to be introduced to ensure all children are better protected. NSPCC (2022) recent survey in England found that 68% of people think that physically punishing a child is not acceptable whilst 64% state that the law in England needs to change to protect children. NSPCC (2022) further state that England need to follow Wales and Scotland to tackle this anomaly and offer children the same protection against assault as adults.

The 'smacking ban' has now been instilled in 60 countries, beginning with Sweden in 1979 and has been met with criticism however abuse statistics are now lower in Europe than anywhere else in the world, and with NSPCC (2021) stating that evidence suggests that Childrens punishment can escalate into abuse the criticism is unwarranted.

Section 3

Unicef (no date) estimate that 385 million children live in extreme poverty worldwide. Suggesting that poverty denies children their fundamental rights and diminishes their ability to build themselves a better future. Which aligns with UNCRC articles 6 that states a child has the right to life, article 24 having the right to health and health services, article 26 the right to financial support and article 27 the right to an adequate standard of living as discussed by

UNICEF (no date). The United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 with the intention of ending all poverty and inequality by 2030.

According to Trussell Trust (no date) 2.5 million emergency food parcels were given in the UK to people in crisis over the last financial year 2020 to 2021, an increase of 128% since 2016. 980000 of these food parcels went to children with 145828 handed out in Wales.

Children's Commissioners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2020) state that deep and persistent inequalities such as poverty remain throughout the UK and greater investment is needed in early interventions as an approach that prioritises prevention before crisis would be beneficial. Early Intervention Foundation (no date) state that early interventions improve the lives and the outcomes of children and young people who are at risk of experiencing poor outcomes, by identifying and providing effective early support for children and families to prevent problems from happening or to tackle them before they get worse. Furthermore, stating that it is imperative to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors, such as improving wellbeing and resilience amongst children.

Welsh Government (2017b) state that poverty is a risk factor which may cause a child, young person or family to need targeted support. Further suggesting that disabled parents, parents who misuse alcohol or illegal drugs and refugee or asylum seeker families often experience a range of challenges such as poverty which can lead to a child or young person displaying behavioural problems, poor mental health or well-being and poor attainment. It is imperative that these factors are addressed and resilience is built to help children and young people achieve positive outcomes in life.

Poverty can be a lifelong detriment, affecting generations of families. Bradshaw (2016) discusses the health detriments poverty can have on children from pre-birth, as foetal development has great implications for Children's Health, cognitive development and educational attainment. Bradshaw (2016) further states that poverty is linked to poor mental health, poor outcomes for adulthood and therefore can lead to a continuation in generations. Harvard University (2010) agree that poor health in children, due to poverty, can lead to higher rates of chronic diseases in adults, such as cancers, diabetes, depression and addiction.

Welsh Government (2021) state that the percentage of people living in poverty in Wales has remained at 23% for 15 years, which is the highest in the UK. The BBC (2015) stated that this figure of 23% of people living in Wales in poverty was of deep concern considering such interventions as flying start and deprivation grants and insist there is a lack of progress which

needs to be addressed. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) state that poverty levels will increase as the economic fallout from COVID-19 intensifies, after widespread job losses. Further stating that universal benefit claimants have doubled within the year in areas which are already struggling with poverty, pre pandemic. The Bevan Foundation (2021) agree that covid 19 has affected low-income families unprecedentedly with figures stating that one in ten households live in insecure housing and 80,000 households already being told they have to find a new home. This will lead to a lack of uncertainty for children and will affect their wellbeing.

Save the Children (2018) state that the implications to children living in poverty may never be rectified, stating that by five years of age, 35% of children living in poverty are already falling behind their peers. With half of children in the lowest performance groups at the start of primary school never catching up.

Hunt *et al.* (2022) highlight that the attainment gap has widened since covid-19, and although these figures are derived from England, covid-19 is a global pandemic therefore similarities can be seen between the two countries. The statistics state that in 2017 35% of children were considered to be living in long term poverty, however in 2020 that figure rose to 39%. Research has highlighted the effect covid-19 has had on Childrens outcomes for disadvantaged children however pre-pandemic research highlighted that and progress made in reducing the attainment gap had stalled, even suggesting it was increasing. Hunt *et al.* (2022) further suggests that children living in long term poverty for most of their education, receiving free school meals for 80% of their school life, then train their peers by 1.6 grades on average at GCSE. Furthermore, those children living in long term poverty for their entire education had risen from 19% in 2017 to 25% in 2020.

Children's Commissioners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2020) state that there were 4.2 million children (30%) living in poverty in 2018/2019, an increase in 600,000 from 2011/2012. The report further shows that 28% of children in Wales live in poverty, 27% of children in Northern Ireland and 24% of children in Scotland in 2019. Furthermore, 1 in 4 children who lived-in long-term poverty were from Asian/other households, 1 in 5 children were from black households compared to 1 in 10 children who lived in persistent poverty were from white British households, suggesting that inequalities between different race groups which need to be addressed.

Free school meals are an intervention which help children from low-income households with Childrens lunches during school. However, covid 19 saw many parents struggle to feed their

children with the lack of free school meals when schools closed due to lockdowns. BBC Sport (2020) describe how Marcus Rashford campaigned to the UK Government to extend free school meals to include holidays and initially the covid 19 lockdowns. This has been implemented by the Welsh Government (2020) in response to the covid 19 pandemic who state that this extended intervention will reassure families and have a positive impact on Childrens lives, improving outcomes for children.

Williams-Brown and Mander (2021) discuss how there are ways in which a practice can generally support a Childs wellbeing which will in turn support their resilience and enable them to deal with life situations such as poverty. These include a focus on outdoor learning with risk taking promoting resilience, the importance of child led play within a strong caring and supportive team that understands the need of the children in their care. Dodge *et al.* (2012) describe high levels of wellbeing and resilience as a protective factor against adversities such as poverty, further defining a stable wellbeing as a child who has the psychological, physical and social resources they need to meet a particular challenge. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 focus on the present and future lives of children and focus entirely on wellbeing.

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