

As described by Cambridge Dictionary (2023) the meaning of catalyst is when someone causes a significant change to occur. A leader is defined as someone who takes charge inspiring others along the way (Vocabulary, 2023). Combine both meanings together and a catalytic leader can quicken decisions and actions that need to be reached so goals are achieved effectively (Toomer et al., 2018).

‘The world is changing, and it is changing fast. Leadership at all levels must keep pace’ (Toomer *et al.*, 2018, pg. xxi). Toomer *et al.* (2018) indicates that the effect of catalytic leadership is formed by both direction and a teamwork dynamic with positive and consistent individuals raising each other’s performance to improve team success. As stated by Reed and Canning (2012) catalytic leadership does not come from those with higher authority but does however, come from anyone as having an effective leader is essential to help grow the success of the team and management, expanding certain qualities like motivation, support and encouragement which are essential to have in a work environment (Cheqin, 2022).

As presented by Nicholson (2020) being a catalytic leader is showing vulnerability while preparing to support others in taking risks both individually and as a team. Providing knowledge to others on power, understanding and accuracy can either limit or offer opportunities to all professionals in the early years and is consistent with good leadership (Nicholson, 2020, pg. 91). However, McDowall Clark (2012a) states that being a catalytic leader inspires change by leaders not relying on their position as a form of power over others. As explained by Bulgarella (2018) exercising power within the role can most likely disconnect leaders from other people causing them to lose the ability to take clear perspective. McDowall Clark (2012a) also agrees with this statement and suggests that this can create tension between the practitioners as they may feel like the position is being used as a form of supremacy over them.

Being a catalytic leader involves having a clear vision to achieve the motivation and confidence to encompass ideas and views into the work effectively involving everyone (Cheqin, 2022). In an early years setting a catalytic leader isn’t only a manager but is

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nevertheless, someone who inspires others to make a positive change developing a system that everyone wants to participate and support (Cheqin, 2022 and Early years matters, 2023). As stated by Early Years Matters (2023) successful leadership in the early years requires professionals to lead others, learn by developing their knowledge and being innovative with their own practice showing creativity. However, as presented by Nicholson *et al.* (2018) this can sometimes be difficult in settings as practitioners can often feel undervalued affecting their motivation within the setting.

Ankrum (2016) points out that, in an early years setting practitioners are most likely to become catalytic leaders as they tend to take on more responsibilities to try and improve both the setting and the community providing a high-quality provision to all (Merenda, 2019, pg. 21). As stated by Phillip (2022) early years education needs effective leadership to take place so any obstacles can be faced correctly and appropriately within the work environment. However, McDowall Clark (2012b) indicates that having the ability to effectively lead practise can be misinterpreted and defined differently by all which can affect daily routines. This can be due to practitioners taking on the leadership role without having the correct preparation causing misconceptions to arise which can disengage other professionals creating a barrier (Geeknack, 2022) effecting their practise.

According to My first five years (2023) the first couple of years are the most essential for children's development as they begin to explore and discover, not only themselves but the world around them evolving their social, emotional and communication skills. However, many sociological factors can impact children's development and learning (Centre for early childhood mental health consultation, no date) especially in these first years. There are a variety of factors that affect children's social and emotional development and some of these are, the environment in which they live in, parental conflicts, parent child relationship, mental health, culture, equality, and race (City Guilds, 2019). This has relations to Ella Baker's work. As pointed out by, Payne (2000-2023) Ella Baker was dedicated in building associations that helped to support and guide social change while encouraging all to independent progression and empowerment within communities. Parker (2020) cited in Fraser et al (2022) explains that Baker's style of effective catalytic leadership was to show successful

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communication by working in partnership with communities This section will briefly touch upon two of these sociological examples.

Child and youth well-being (2022) states that, when children experience discrimination, they can begin to doubt and show negative views about their race, culture, or appearance, which can lead to the child feeling depressed, anxious, or stressed having an adverse impact on their health, affecting their education and development. These effects can be long term for children significantly affecting them in the future (Harvard University, 2023). Brown (2015) indicates that suffering discrimination especially in a setting environment can cause children to have a unenthusiastic attitude towards their school work, academic performance and their overall motivation to achieve well. As pointed out by Savel *et al.* (2020) a study has shown that children who go through discrimination are more likely to drop out of school and are at a higher risk of getting involved with drugs in the future. Even though children can experience discrimination differently to adults the feelings and emotions do not differ because of the age (Savel *et al.*, 2020).

Another sociological factor that impacts children is parental conflicts.

Hazell (2022) points out, how having parental child relationship difficulties can lead to more family fights where a set structure and discipline will be missing due to the no communication barrier. Having these difficulties can sometimes be due to parent conflicts where the child feels stuck between both parents. Children can begin to show distress about their parents fighting from a young age and can express their emotions by being hostile or anti-social with their parents and other people (Sutherland, 2014). Sutherland (2014) suggests that, by children experiencing this it can affect their future romantic relationships as they recognise them as negative due to their past experiences. Having these conflicts can also strain the relationship with the child as well as affecting the way in which they are being parented, as conflicts can always seem visible, and no set agreements can be made to benefit the child (Sutherland, 2014).

As explained by Centre for early childhood mental health consultation (no date) sociological factors need to be considered especially in a setting environment so that

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the support planned for the child can be beneficial to the situation. Change is very hard to avoid especially for children and as explained by Patel (1998-2023) embracing the chance to support both parents and children during this time plays a vital role in building a relationship with them both. As explained by Pacey (no date) practitioners have a role to create a nurturing environment where children and young people are educated about a diverse society, where a safe and fair atmosphere is created so children can individually progress. Practitioners can introduce diverse toys and resources into the setting to promote a diverse, inclusive, and understanding environment (Pacey, no date) so children can feel safe and comfortable.

However, challenges can arise when trying to meet certain demands while maintaining effective leadership at the same time. As stated by Parliament (2018) funding can make it difficult in ensuring early on intervention is placed to help support these sociological factors. This can be due to the lack of money provided by the government as certain programmes and early intervention methods can be deemed too expensive and out of budget in comparison to the funding that had been provided for the setting (Parliament, 2018). Parliament (2018) also points out that this can also affect the training of practitioners as there may not be enough funding for all professionals to be correctly trained within their role in the early years sector. Nonetheless, Taylor-Klaus (2023) indicates that, early intervention can sometimes be delayed due to parents being worried of stigma regarding themselves or their children which can affect long term implications. Being worried about stigma can create a barriers for families and children to seek support from the practitioners within the setting (Sheikhan et al., 2023) especially when trying to overcome sociological factors.

As explained by Towler (2013) the Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent organisation that's focuses on children's rights and was first recognised in 2001. Children's Commissioner Office (2023) states that, the Children's Commissioner post was first initiated following the Laming report regarding the Victoria Climbe inquiry and was initially introduced to allow the Commissioner to gain responsibility to promote the opinions and interests of all children.

As presented by Children's Commissioner for Wales (2023a) Rocio Cifuentes is the new children's Commissioner for Wales. Davies (2022) explains that Rocio Cifuentes is the chief executive of the ethnic minorities and youth support team for Wales. Rocio has the duty to inform people about the rights of the child and the importance they have, while also looking at how decisions along with legislations, policies and procedures made by the Welsh Government will impact on children's rights (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023a and Welsh Government, 2022).

The children's Commissioner for Wales aim is to safeguard and indorse the welfare of all children and young people across Wales in line with the Care Standards Act 2000 (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023b and Towler, 2013, pg.1). The Commissioner also takes into consideration The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child regulation within their role (Towler, 2013). Children's commissioner for Wales (2023b) points out that, the Commissioner has the power to act but should always consider that her practise of authority is consistent with the priorities that have been displayed. According to Children's Commissioner for Wales (2023b) following the Care Standards Act 2000, the term child is referred to anyone under the age of 18. However, if needed the Commissioner can act on behalf of an adult up to 25 years in certain circumstances, an example of this is if that person has been in care (Citizen's advice, 2023 and Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023b).

This section is going to critically explore The Right Way report published by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023c). Children's Commissioner for Wales (2023c) points out that, The Right Way report was

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published to show practical tools and models to support public figures in considering the rights of children following the Working under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The Right Way Approach was created with advice from the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of children and young people and looks closely at following the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Social care institute for excellence, no date, and Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023c). The Right Way report consists of four main principles to be considered

The Right Way report argues the significance of leaders developing a children's human right approach within an early years setting (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021). Under the section of a children's human rights approach, it focuses on embedding children's human rights at the core withing a setting environment (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021). In this section there are mentions of practitioners and leaders developing their own knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC regulations so that the requirements of the new curriculum can be followed correctly (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021). As presented by barber (2019) developing own knowledge relating to children is key for practitioners to understand the needs of all children and how they can be supported throughout their holistic development. As discussed by Early Childhood Forum (2007) having accessible access to a culturally and developmentally suitable curriculum where practitioners understand how to support the child's learning and growth about themselves and the world around them while following regulations like UNCRC is essential to children's development.

Referring to the section above of the The Right Way report it is vital that training of practitioners focuses on supporting the UNCRC and their articles as this will ensure that the rights of all children are understood by all professionals and practitioners (Early Childhood Forum, 2007). However, following this can be difficult for some practitioners due to a lack of funding available, as explained by Early years workforce Commission (2021) this can be due to the role of practitioners still not being recognised as critical within the community affecting the funding provided to settings. This section also describes how parents should be aware of their children's rights. However, this can be difficult to achieve if parents and practitioners do not have an effective mutual

relationships. As indicated by Paccaud *et al.* (2021) this can also be due to the lack of training for practitioners to learn and understand the best way to communicate and build a relationship with the parent and family of the child impacting the relationship between them.

The right way report also discusses the importance of equality and non-discrimination within an early year's environment and how it is essential to prevent and battle this (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2021). This is in line with article 2 of the UNCRC where children have the right to not be discriminated against (Children's and young people's commission Scotland, 2006-2023a). Tower hamlet council (2017) states that all early year's practitioners have a duty to encourage understanding and diversity within the setting. Tower Hamlets council (2017) points out, how it is essential for all practitioners to provide an equal opportunity for all children, families and outside agencies who is involved with the setting as it creates an atmosphere where professionals can develop a greater understanding on how to support the different needs of all. This is following the Equality Act 2010 (Tower Hamlets council, 2017, pg. 7).

However, in the Right Way report, each section is worded differently but a variation of language should be considered throughout the equality and non-discrimination section of the report as pointed by the Equality Act 2010 (Government Legal Department, no date). This section uses the word 'aim' which is referred to as directing it to people who will influence or achieve greatness (Cambridge dictionary, 2023) within the setting environment. This can be difficult to achieve in certain occasions as every child and family live in different environments where they are growing up in socio economic conditions which can affect a child's social, emotional and language development even before they begin to attend the setting (Cattan et al., 2022). Mistry (2023) also states that, this can be a challenge due to different cultural principles within the practitioners in the setting as all they all hold different values, which can cause conflict between them making it difficult to decide on the best approach to support the child and family.

According to Education Endowment Foundation (2019) settings are constantly wanting to better their practice by embedding new approaches to better benefit the

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children in their care. Implementing new guidance's is an important aspect of how a setting can improve, therefore, applying The Right Way report may positively impact the knowledge and understanding of practitioners allowing them to improve their own practice (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). However, Education Endowment Foundation (2019) does indicate that, sometimes new guidance's can be introduced too rapidly into a setting without much thought on how it can effectively be implemented without being too much of a transition for children and practitioners to quickly adapt too.

According to Unicef (no date) poverty can be reduced through continuous attention and action from everyone. However, in line with the most recent data available close to four million children were living in poverty in the United Kingdom in 2020 to 2021, averaging nearly thirty percent of the children population (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023a). Save the Children (2017) states that, there is current findings that suggest a child's experiences and environment can impact their cognitive learning and development negatively. As presented by Oppenheim (2021) the factors of today's expectations and reality have highly begun to impact the way in which children are growing up affecting their chances in life.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) explains poverty as the meaning of being unable to heat your house, pay rent, or buy the necessary essentials for yourself and your children. Where families can face certain uncertainties regarding decisions about money. Brunswick Canada, 2008-2009 also states that, poverty is not having enough money to meet the basic needs of yourself and your family, for example, food or shelter. However, the term poverty can be defined in more ways than just money and will depend on the situation of that individual (Brunswick Canada, 2008-2009 and Muinujin *et al.* 2006, pg.483). As presented by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) there are various reason that can cause poverty, for example, unemployment, high costs and abuse or trauma suffered by the child or even the parent themselves. Minujin *et al.* (2006) describes how child poverty can differ from adult poverty due to it having different effects on the child or young person which can impact them later in life.

As presented by Oppenheim (2021) if children experience poverty from the early stages in their life's it can be quite damaging with results that will have a long-term effect on their well-being and future opportunities. Child poverty action group (2023b) states that, poverty can influence the relationship between the child and the parent. The particular reason for this can be the high levels of stress the parent may be going through due to low income they may receive which can be affecting the dynamic of the family causing a restriction in the relationship between the parent and child (Child

poverty action group, 2023 and Haynie, 2014). Children can also suffer stress due to poverty and long periods of stress can impact brain development negatively which can possibly lead the child to having a cognitive impairment (OACAS, no date). OACAS (no date) also points out that, certain factors of poverty including stress can risk the child to develop mental health problems impacting their attitude towards themselves and others.

According to Haynie (2014) the child's ecosystem can have secondary results in affecting poverty for children and their families. Compassion International (2023) states that a child's environment can influence the challenges they may endure as well as the opportunities available daily. This can be due to the housing conditions the child is living in which can be directed from the community in which they reside, affecting the danger levels for the child as well as any enrichment activities that may not be provided within that area (Haynie, 2014). Evans (2004) points out that, living in a poorer community can be more dangerous for both the family and the child which can restrict the time in which the family interact and socialise with others around them.

For an intervention this section will focus on free school meals.

Impact on Urban Health (2023) explains that every child has the right to be healthy no matter their living conditions, including the access to a nourishing food diet. However, children living in poverty may have easier access to detrimental food options and can cause them to experience physical health issues like obesity which can lead to mental health problems (Impact on Urban Health, 2023). Noona-Gunning (2023) indicates that, having free access to school food is critical in protecting children's physical and mental well-being and their learning. Welsh Government (2022b) states that they have an aim to ensure that all children in primary schools will receive free school meals by 2024.

As stated by Welsh Government (2022a) extending free school meals to all of the primary school children will allow for an intervention to take place in relation to child hunger and child poverty. Free school meals offer families essential support if they are struggling with the demands of the current cost of living (The Food Foundation, 2022). As explained by Impact on Urban Health (2023) having these healthy school meals

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available during the school day enables children to thrive and learn sharing the same opportunities as one another. It has been found that having these free school meals has improved the children's learning achievement along with their health and social skills (Impact on Urban Health, 2023). Having the ability to provide all children with a free school meal will help to manage the tackling of unfairness, especially to families who are living in poverty and don't qualify for free school meals and aren't able to afford a packed lunch everyday (Child poverty action group 2020). Child poverty action group (2020) points out that having this intervention in place will create a universal environment where no child is missing out on a healthy meal.

However, according to Careers and JFF (2021) it was discovered that over forty percent of primary school children in Wales were not entitled to free school meals as their parents did not fit the eligibility criteria created by the Government. Which resulted in many children not receiving the foods and nutrients they needed to reach their full potential (Careers and JFF, 2021) not following article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Children and young people's Commissioner Scotland, 2006-2023b). Careers and JFF (2021) state that, free school meals criteria are limited and should be expanded to families who are receiving benefits or are living in poverty. As pointed out by both Careers and JFF (2021) and School food matter (2022) Wales is the only country within the UK that still uses the means-tested form on children which is driving many families into dinner money debt.

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