

Catalytic Leadership

Part 1

Catalytic leadership is to influence and encourage others to strive towards change and reach their full potential according to Toomer *et al.* (2018). Irrespective of a person's managerial status, a catalytic leader does not need to have a position of power or authority agrees Clark, (2012) and Cooper, (2014) also suggesting, that this leadership style can create animosity and reluctance to change. A catalytic leader will guide change through small steps, collaborating with others. An early year's practitioner is in an influential position, and therefore needs to adapt and lead change during everyday practice. Continually reflecting on practice, taking into consideration the needs of the setting and each child.

The early year's is a continuum of development, consequently, early year's practitioners are the catalysts for change. Moreover, Sims *et al.* (2015) and Nicholson *et al.* (2018) states, that catalytic leadership in the early years is essential for future development, as addressing challenges that may occur from the root, can enhance further learning opportunities and growth. However, somewhat new with no defined theory. Postmodern theory of, working with others, sharing ideas, utilising the more knowledgeable other to lead change in particular areas can be an effective practice. Additionally, direction from a position of power can also be efficient. Further research needs to be carried out to facilitate confidence, change and reassurance with practitioners to validate and assert themselves as catalytic leaders for the early years. In addition to this, Gandolfi and Mills, (2022) suggests, that practitioners can feel under pressure by assessments that need to be carried out. Instead of focusing on improving and changing towards a new cultural, inclusive education, their attention can be spent on ticking boxes and enhancing the appearance of the setting by meeting targets.

According to Nagar, (2021) school is the second largest influence on a child's development. However, their family, the experiences, and beliefs they practice outside of school have the biggest influence. Consequently, Conn and Murphy, (2022) suggests, that inclusion leadership in the early years setting, can create positive relationships with learners and colleagues. Practitioners in the early years setting, need to be knowledgeable about diverse cultures and how they can impact on a child's development suggests Huang, (2018). Their first language may differ from the

settings, therefore, creating a barrier for the child's development. Whereas some settings have practitioners that can converse in many languages, ensuring the child can be heard and understood. In settings where this is not possible then practitioners can engage with the family and community to develop collaboration, and gain knowledge and understanding to influence change into the setting (Department for Education, 2021).

The Welsh Government, (2016) inclusion guidance policy states, dissimilarities are learning experiences. Therefore, practitioners need to ensure that understanding and knowledge, of the diverse culture is conveyed to all learners, children, and adults, within the setting, making a catalytic leader. For example, introducing foods from around the world into an early year setting. Encouraging all learners to participate in the activity, enhancing sustained shared thinking between peers and adult to child, where the more knowledgeable other, which may be the child from a different culture, can share their knowledge with their peers according to Brodie, (2014).

This inclusion can make a child feel safe and secure by the positive relationship between practitioner, family, and peers. As Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory suggests, starting to give them a sense of belonging by incorporating their culture into the setting. However, McLeod, (2022) also suggests, that Maslow's theory of meeting the lower needs in order to acquire higher needs, is not always the case. People who were not having their basic needs met as a child, have later successfully developed, acquiring the higher order of needs. Therefore, are the needs in the correct order, or can a lack of a basic need drive success in other needs. In contrast to this the Welsh Government, (2022) have incorporated inclusivity into the new curriculum for Wales. To develop confident learners, is to include their beliefs and culture. Without this, a child can feel rejected or doubtful about themselves, causing detrimental effect to their confidence, wellbeing, and their ability to reach their full potential. With this in mind, Wales are working on a culture strategy plan, to improve knowledge, understanding, health and wellbeing for the people of Wales suggests Bowden, (2022).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2022) suggests that over half of the adult population, within their survey, have been exposed to an adverse childhood experience, known as ACE's. This can range from a form of abuse, to suffering the loss of a significant person in their lives, whether that be through death, incarceration, or abandonment. Over 10% of these people suffered from four or more ACE's during their childhood. ACE's can have a detrimental affect to a child's development, by

causing long-term stress, thus, affecting a child's brain development. A child's brain develops at a rapid pace, however, stress can cause the wiring of a child's rational thinking, memory and emotions to be distorted. Play is a way practitioners can help and support a child suffering from long-term stress. Play can encourage the development of dealing with situations they may feel uncomfortable in, usually take the fight or flight method. Additionally, physical exercise can improve the front part of the brain, helping to develop a child's rational thinking according to Lewis, (2019) and Shafer, (2018).

Over time with the right support a child can alternate the development of the brain. A catalytic leader in the early years setting can orchestrate these initiatives, by interacting with the child, their home support network, other practitioners, and other outside agencies that may or may need to be involved. Positive play sessions with a practitioner who has or can work on a good relationship with the child can build the child's confidence in the setting, making them feel safe and secure to start the learning process, states the University of Arizona, Global Campus, (2022). Moreover, catalytic leaders can build a relationship with the child's support network, by regular check-ins, open conversations, and offering help and support from outside agencies. This can limit or even stop the continuum of ACE's affecting the family, which then affects the children. For example, a family dealing with trauma, In Alaska (Centers for Disease and Control Prevention, 2013 and the State of Alaska, 2015), they have rolled out a resilience program for adults and children, training practitioners and health care workers techniques to encourage families to build strong bonds in order to reduce the effects of ACE's.

According to Ella Baker's theory of catalytic leadership (Parker, 2020), Alaska have recognised the detrimental effects of Ace's on children, therefore, have worked together as a state, to educate, train and roll out an initiative to area's that can have the most impact. This could be a clear definition of catalytic leadership, however, there are many theories of what leadership can mean to different people. Through the years leadership has changed from a dictatorship, to recently thought of as a team effort. The superior person, the person with the idea or more knowledgeable person, will listen and communicate with their team, to work towards a shared goal states Northouse, (2021). Consequently, suggesting that any or every person has the ability to become a leader. Whereas, Grantham-Caston and DiCarlo, (2021) and Talan, Bloom, and Kelton, (2014) state, that practitioners need to possess high educational

achievements and leadership qualities, thus empowering the theory of self-determination, also agreed by Vallerand, (2000). Early years practitioners need to possess self-determination, this catalyst can influence practitioners to gain knowledge of individual needs, of colleagues and children, hence the importance of an inclusive education. Additionally, Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, (2015) believe, there are many factors that have to be taken into consideration when working in the early years. There are different theories and leadership styles, for example, autocratic, this is a dictatorship, or democratic, a collaboration from the group with a final decision maker. Also, the setting, the families that attend, the location and the practitioners, all play an influential role on the child's development. Mountcastle, (2020) recommends that early year's practitioners should share the leadership role, to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child. Collaboration of knowledge and understanding should be shared, and delegation of responsibility should be allocated to the more knowledgeable other, as practitioners will have a range of their own knowledge and experiences. By delegation of responsibilities, known as distributed leadership, early years settings should be organised and knowledgeable about their pupils, with a collaborated goal of achieving the best possible learning opportunities for the ever changing, diverse early years. However, according to Heikka and Hujala, (2013), for this leadership style to be successful, all practitioners need to be accountable and for their position and engage with their team, for example, all practitioners need to have the children's needs as a priority, and ensure they are working to their best ability, but not overpower the team. This leadership could be classed as catalytic leadership in the early years, with all staff are working to their full potential, in order to ensure the children, have the best opportunities, despite their sociological challenges they arrive at school with, they have knowledgeable practitioners there to support and encourage growth and development.

Part 2

The inquiry by Lord Laming, (2003) regarding the abuse, which resulted in the death of a child, whom was in the care of close family members, and the inquiry into the Waterhouse care homes, where children were being abused by adults who should have been caring for them, (The Telegraph, 2014), set about a list of recommendations to prevent these failing reoccurring. One recommendation was for an organisation to be formed to protect and care of children and young adults under the age of 18 (or up to the age of 25 if in full time education) in Wales. This was also in line with the Care Standards Act, (2000) and the Children Act, (2004). The office was named, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Comisiynydd Plant Cymru. Peter Clarke became the first commissioner in 2001. The core purpose is to ensure the rights of the child, formed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), are being upheld and all children and young adults have a voice for them, in a position of power, according to Towler, (2013), Children's Commissioner for Wales, (n.d.) website and the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act, (2001). The role of the children's commissioner is a catalyst for change, listening to the voice of others and then reacting, in order to driver change for the great of the child. However, the Children's Commissioner has legal rights to influence change. Ella Baker, a human rights activist, whom was not in a position of power, suggests Ella Baker Centre for Human Rights, (n.d.) yet still managed, to listen to the voice of the people and lead them into change, by collaboration and great determination, some might say an inspiring catalytic leader.

Sally Holland was the third children's commissioner in Wales, she was a qualified social worker, and imparted her knowledge and experience to others. However, in New Zealand, the commissioner for children voiced concerns over newly qualified social workers going out to work, with a concern that they were under-qualified in other areas affecting children according to Beddoe *et al.* (2018).

Sally Holland was appointed in 2015, after the Children and Families Act, (2014) obtained the right for children in care or leaving care to be supported by the children's commissioner, to ensure that their rights are being adhered to. Furthermore, a domestic law was passed that new or amended policies written after April 2011, had to take into consideration the rights of the child (Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011). With this role came great responsibilities and a seven-year action plan needed to be devised suggests Holland, (2015). The commissioner spoke

to thousands of children and young adults, a recurring topic was that of bullying. The first children's commissioner recognised that tackling bullies was an area of concern, and in 2003 the Welsh government introduced the 'respecting others' guidance, however, Bodden, (2013) reported ten years later that the area was still in need of improvement. In 2016 this became a matter of importance in Sally Hollands seven-year plan, and the report, Sam's Story was published by the Children's commissioner for Wales, (2017) in order to improve, how bullying is dealt with, and awareness, knowledge, and understanding the effect of bullying can have.

The effect of bullying can cause devastation on a person, long-term or worse. For a child it can have a detrimental effect on their growth and development. They may have a short attention span, leading to lack of access to the learning opportunities, therefore, resulting in regression with their development according to Kreps, (2018) and Office of Communications, (2017). Anti-Bullying Alliance, (2011) describes bullying in the early years as a behaviour that is directed to another child, which is consistently and knowingly upsetting for that individual. For example, child A repeatedly hits child B for no apparent reason, it could be as little as once every couple of days, but it is consistent and upsetting for child B. With this in mind, bullying cannot be described as an individual act nor as controversy between children, unless the hierarchy of one side starts to continuously over-power the other.

Sally Holland wanted all children, in this day and age, to have the opportunities to reach their full potential, with the roll out of the new curriculum for Wales, and the recommendations in the Sam's Story report (Children's commissioner for Wales, 2017), schools should be working towards an environment where bullying is recognised and tackled using a whole school approach. One of the recommendations was for the Welsh government to ensure that schools are recording acts of bullying, these records can be used to ensure that the incident was dealt with fairly, for reflection when updating future policies, or when dealing with other bullying incidents. Therefore, the Welsh government, (2018) under section 14 of the respecting others – Schools guidance policy have implemented that incidents need to be recording, this can also identify triggers, as to why the bullying is happening, when analysing the reports. Schools will need to take a whole school approach; therefore, funding is needed to train staff and develop a new initiative. Children and parents/carers will need to be involved and engaged in this new initiative, which may result in a barrier from the parents/carers. Fulltime working families may find it difficult to attend meetings, others

may not want to get involved as they may feel it is the school's responsibility. Parents/carers that will be involved, may misinterpret the initiative due to their own difficulties, others may be over passionate and want to amend it, according to Humphrey-Taylor, (2015). There is a lack of funding in schools resulting in under-qualified practitioners having to carry out initiatives without the relevant training suggests O'Reilly *et al.* (2018) and Jayman, (2022). Additionally, both agree that the whole school approach can achieve the best results.

Another recommendation from Sam's Story (Children's commissioner for Wales, 2017), is that children would benefit from open forums, where they can talk about things that make them feel a certain way, which can improve their mental health and wellbeing, and according to the Children's commissioner for Wales, (2021) over £9 million has been accessible to train practitioners in supporting children to overcome their concerns. Jigsaw is a mindfulness initiative to support teachers during their Personal, Social, Health and economic (PSHE) lesson. Wolstenholme and Willis, (2016) indicates that these lessons are where children get the opportunities to express their feelings if they choose to do so. It helps develop emotional literacy from early childhood, builds resilience, and create opportunities for discussion. In contrast to this, practitioners found that some topics could benefit from being simplified for early childhood. Activities could be very time consuming, as progress needed to be recorded by children and practitioners, therefore, practitioners could not manage to get through the whole activity in one lesson, so parts were being missed out, which can have an effect to the mindfulness target. Parsonson, (2012) believes that fun, structured activities can help to manage behaviours and enhance the ethos of the classroom. To give clear boundaries, expectations, goals for the session, and for all participants, children and practitioners, to focus on positive behaviours. This can create a pleasurable learning experience, which falls in line with the jigsaw activities. Whereas a child with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), can be more aggressive towards others than themselves, will not take part in this activity. This behaviour can develop from early childhood, with the reluctance to becoming independent from the main carer, or that the behaviour is learnt. The child achieves their needs from displaying bad behaviour, this then becomes intrinsic within them, suggests Ehmke, (2023). Lavigne *et al.* (2015) agrees, yet believes that focusing on the positive behaviour, as explained in the jigsaw activities, can increase the child's oppositional behaviour, therefore, using a mixture of strategies, like praising the positives, and allowing the

child to join or leave an activity can reduce conflict. There would need to be boundaries set as to what the child can do when not participating and have clear guidance of the consequence for behaviour that is not acceptable.

Practitioners feel that cyberbullying and the more physical side of bullying have intensified the aspect of bullying and over the years making it more challenging to deal with. Practitioners' workload demands are increasing, time and funding for training is difficult to manoeuvre and in some cases parents can seem unsupportive of practitioners strategies. Additionally, changing initiatives frequently, for example every year, can leave practitioners feeling unmotivated as new training will need to be undertaken and little evidence will be available on the success of a previous strategy states Cunningham *et al.* (2015). However, the recent story, of a young child losing their finger, whilst trying to escape from bullies is devastating. Children were physically hurting a child on the school premises. The children's commissioner, states that racial bully was on the new action plan, as recent events, like talk of terrorist attacks and migration may have inflamed racial bully, moreover, this case has made the matter urgent reports McCarthy, (2022). Jones, (2018) and Cifuentes, (n.d.), agree, stating that the new curriculum for Wales includes the UNCRC rights of the child and has a key message for practitioners, to ensure that school life is a place of diversity and inclusion for all. Therefore, the children's commissioner for Wales, will be listening to the voice of the child to ensure that is happening.

Part 3

A sociological issue that can have detrimental affect on a child's health, wellbeing and development is poverty. Poverty is categorised as families living 60% below families classified, as earning around the middle wage in the country. In 2021, statics show that just over a quarter of children in an average class of 30, are living in poverty according to Child Poverty Action Group, (2022). Furthermore, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2022) states, there are varying degrees of poverty, from living just below the poverty line, where families are managing to pay bills, have food, clothing, run a vehicle, and children can attend most excursions with their school. However, will have to juggle finances if an unexpected payment occurs. The level below, is where families are just about managing to have their basic needs met, like food, clothing, housing, yet still must monitor finances, in order to ensure they prioritise their needs, the children may not be able to attend many, if any of the excursions with their school. Then there are families in complete deprivation, these families are unable to pay bills, are unable to eat regular, and keep good hygiene levels, children will not attend school excursions.

Mcfarlane, (2022) worryingly suggests, that practitioners feel children living in deprivation has drastically increased. Children are attending school unable to concentrate, this may be due to lack of sleep, hunger, or even worry about their family. The parents worry about being able to afford to eat, the upkeep of a home, pay bills, can cause depression, anxiety, stress which a child can become attune to. The National Institute for Health and Care Research, (2022) correlates with this, suggesting that parents suffering with their mental health can lead to the child having developmental issues. Interaction may be limited, with little or no emotion expressed from the parent, resulting in the child feeling unwanted, this will also in turn affect the child's development of their expressive language and affect their social and emotional skills. The Welsh Government, (2022a) have designated funding to address the issue of poverty in Wales, however, with the Covid pandemic, the decision to leave the European Union and the UK Government having power of the welfare system and tax in Wales obstructs the plans. All of these areas increase the expenditure of Wales. Harper, (2021) states that since the Covid pandemic, three million more people have started claiming universal credits, which has doubled the figure from the previous year. Moreover, the issue of poverty and families living under the minimum income standard,

has been an ongoing issue, which was marginally recognised during the pandemic, when families were allocated a further £20 a week. Furthermore, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2021) concurs stating, as the sixth most financial country in the world, families should be able to live within the minimum income standard, which will allow them and their children to be able to access many opportunities available, for example, going on excursions with their school or attending swimming classes.

Although Wales have had obstacles to overcome with their strategy plan, the go ahead with the initiative to ensure all primary school children receive free school meals by 2024, is a step in the right direction. Practitioners can ensure children are having a health meal, learn social skills whilst developing fine motor skills by using the cutlery according to the Welsh Government, (2022b). However, in England, there are some area's that are not able to access this initiative, the children there are living in poverty just like other areas that can access it, this is not equality. Practitioner have reported that children arrive in school hungry, the lunch they have been provided from home is inadequate, maybe due to lack of funds available at home. If a child arrives at school hungry, they are unable to concentrate, may feel tired or lethargic. The thought of eating will be consuming their thoughts, therefore, unable to access any learning opportunities suggests Cohen, (2022). Alternatively, practitioners in some schools, states Early Education, (2020) are supporting children and their families with furniture, food and even the washing of clothes. These practitioners can be creating an environment in school that is homely, makes the child feel safe and secure, therefore, the child will be ready to learn. This feeling also needs to be created at home, so practitioner will support families in poverty out of kindness or otherwise known as professional love. Davis, (2021) describes professional love as the care practitioners give to the children and families within their school, in order for the children to reach their full potential, by having their basic needs met.

Flying Start, is another Welsh Government, (2017) initiative, used to support families in disadvantaged area's of Wales. The rationale behind this initiative is to improve the quality of life in the early years. This is when children absorb information and start their path of development, to become professional working adults in order to give back to society, in the hope to break the poverty cycle. With the offer of quality part-time childcare for children ages two and three years old, can firstly, give them social, emotional and cognitive development opportunities from qualified professional practitioners. A qualified practitioner will have the knowledge and understanding that

children living in poverty will have their own unique development needs. Furthermore, qualified practitioners will have more security with their role, as there will be government funding, which is recommended by Butler and Rutter, (2016). Additionally, to further increase the funds for childcare providers in order to secure professional practitioners. In contrast to this initiative, Butler, (2016) raises concern over the age and area restriction, children living in poverty are of all ages and live in all areas. These children do not have the support from the government or the care and guidance from practitioners. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2016) also states the early years in childhood are the most importance and experiences during this time can shape a child's future. Even though steps are being taken in order to improve childhood poverty there is still a long way to go.

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