

Catalytic Leadership

Effective leaders, according to Priest and Middleton (2016), are people who inspire and influence others to attain a personal or group goal. A leader is someone who seeks to encourage others to engage in attaining continuous improvement for effective practise. A leader can be anyone who is responsible for others and is not necessarily in a specific function like a manager (Duggal, 2023). To conduct effective leadership, the practitioner can use catalytic leadership, which involves influencing both adults and children to make beneficial changes (Clark, 2012). According to Acton and Glasgow (2015), a catalytic leader has a duty to encourage and inspire others to support change that practitioners perceive.

Ella Baker asserts that "strong people do not require strong leaders" because she thought that the best way to influence change is to inspire and uplift others. To this end, she collaborated with others and the community by incorporating transformative co-active spaces (Cantarow, 1980, p.53 cited in Parker, 2020, p.80). According to Toomer, *et al.* (2018), a catalytic leader is someone who fosters curiosity and innovative thinking by cultivating a positive environment that includes mutual respect and trust. Additionally, according to Skosana and Monyai (2013), effective catalytic leadership delegated tasks in accordance with each practitioner's individual capabilities enables practitioners to feel like a member of the team and confident in contributing to the environment with their skills and expertise. The catalytic leader can address this by evaluating each responsibility and implementing continuous professional development (CPD) strategies to enhance practitioners' knowledge and comprehension through participation in activities like training (Patton, Parker and Tannehill, 2015).

According to Ferdman and Deane (2014), CPD helps practitioners to raise the calibre of their work in line with ongoing exploration and growth of the most effective ways to scaffold children's learning. According to Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio (2020), practitioners can actively improve the environment for children by successfully scaffolding them and addressing their specific requirements. Using catalytic leadership, the leader may scaffold both adults and children because it's their job to provide support that's tailored to each person's needs. This enables the leader to recognise the support tactics that will be most helpful to each person individually

(Leyva, *et al.* 2015). According to McLeod (2022), the Vygotskian theory emphasises the importance of understanding children's development areas to guarantee that each child receives individualised support because every child has unique abilities that need to be scaffolded by a more informed adult. According to Shabani and Ewing (2016), practitioners can benefit from the scaffolding provided by a more experienced person when it comes to the development and expansion of their own knowledge. fostering awareness of the fact that a catalytic leader's duty is to use, promote, and implement the learning theory during their leadership job in order to enable others to deliver CPD (Shabani and Ewing, 2016).

Furthermore, Shabani and Ewing (2016) also discuss how collaboration in CPD helps practitioners to share their own knowledge and experiences, allowing all practitioners to feel represented, fostering interpersonal interaction, and giving everyone the chance to be a catalytic leader. According to Douglass (2019), this can be difficult for the practitioners if they lack the confidence to share their knowledge and experiences with others since they could believe that their level of expertise isn't high enough. However, this could be avoided by encouraging and motivating all practitioners, regardless of their backgrounds, to contribute because each practitioner has a special skill set that will be helpful to the setting (Blaylock, *et al.* no date). According to Hayes, O'Toole, and Halpenny (2017), the practitioner's engagement and interaction with the environment can have an impact on how they view the world and interact with others. This is discussed in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Being inclusive is one of a catalytic leader's responsibilities since it makes sure that each practitioner and child feels represented and included in the setting, allowing everyone to participate fully and preventing practitioners from feeling excluded (Shen, *et al.* 2015). A welcoming environment encourages the development of constructive relationships and effective communication, which empowers others and acts as a catalyst for practitioners to work together and bring about positive change (Cologon and Mevawalla, 2017). Although it is improbable that all practitioners will get along well and they will inevitably differ, it is the duty of those practitioners to make sure that their relationship does not adversely affect their practise when helping each other and children (Lazzari, 2012).

Additionally, according to Clark and Murray (2012), professionalism and ongoing engagement inspire all practitioners to become catalytic leaders who create neural

connections by having a positive outlook and being receptive to fresh notions and ideas for successfully scaffolding children. According to Hanson, Bangert, and Ruff (2016), a practitioner with a growth mindset and openness can be open to expanding their practise by being receptive to material that questions their values and capacity for assisting children. A catalytic leader should, according to Clark and Murray (2012), make sure other practitioners feel valued even when there is a dispute because they should be receptive to other people's thoughts and opinions.

According to McDowall Clark (2012), catalytic leadership is about enabling others to get inspired to act to change and improve a part of their lives. According to Balkar (2015), empowerment gives practitioners the impression that they are improving the environment and the lives of the children, which makes them feel good and motivates them to keep working toward excellence and efficiency. Because they are more assured that others on their team are there to help one another, practitioners are more confident when contacting others during potential issues (Sennett, 2023). Therefore, practitioners may collaborate to address issues, which boosts each person's confidence as they contribute to finding answers and assigning responsibilities according to each person's skill (Douglass, 2019). As Barry and McManigle (2021) discuss, a leader must make sure they are exhibiting positive behaviour and leadership skills when assisting others to become a catalytic leader. Practitioners must guarantee they can engage in self-reflection. The catalytic leader engages in CPD during a self-assessment to pinpoint areas for growth and increase their own knowledge while being self-aware of how their actions affect those around them (Barry and McManigle, 2021).

Additionally, a positive catalytic leader values other people's perspectives and acts to change and better. As such, during a self-assessment, a catalytic leader can ask others in their team what they think the catalytic leader should improve on (Venus, Stam and Knippenberg, 2013). By critically evaluating oneself, a leader also demonstrates their desire to grow and become a better practitioner by demonstrating that they are open to receiving any helpful feedback (Clark and Murray, 2012). The catalytic leader may doubt their own talents as they consistently evaluate their skills, therefore this can make critically analysing oneself difficult (Venus, Stam and Knippenberg, 2013).

Furthermore, to combat this, it must be acknowledged that it is equally crucial for the practitioner to recognise their areas of strength because doing so encourages them to engage holistically and lowers the risk of burnout (Mérida-López and Extremera, 2017). A psychological disorder known as "teacher burnout" makes practitioners unable of practising at their highest level of effectiveness due to weariness, depersonalization, and diminished teacher achievement and self-worth (Bousquet, p.19, 2012). It is crucial to make sure that all practitioners are aware of both their own areas of strength and their areas for development (Mérida-López and Extremera, 2017). A practitioner should also make sure they set boundaries and engage in activities they enjoy rather than constantly concentrate on their employment role to reduce the danger of teacher burnout (Tapp, no date).

Additionally, it can also be difficult for other practitioners, especially those who have become accustomed to certain events, to adopt new ways of thinking or methods. This can be a difficulty for practitioners who are catalytic leaders (Lovejoy, 2017). Change is inevitable, according to Kershner and McQuillan (2016), but once it happens, people may not want to engage because they have grown accustomed to using certain techniques. However, as stated by Ylmaz and Kılçolu (2013), the main reason why people may perceive change as frightening, is that they may lack knowledge on the subject. As a result, the catalytic leader must put strategies in place to increase practitioners and children knowledge before implementing the changes in order to help people adjust to the change.

Transitioning into change is more effective than adopting it because it allows practitioners, children, and families to become used to it gradually rather than having them feel overwhelmed by it because it is unfamiliar (Department for Education, 2017). To help practitioners, children, and families adjust to change, the catalytic leader can also solicit their input on what should be altered and how it should be implemented. This will allow them to participate in the process of bringing about change (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013). Fitzgerald and Kay (2016) contend that by incorporating individuals who will be affected by the change, the catalytic leader may build a good, trusting relationship in which everyone feels valued while addressing the worries that the practitioners, children, and families have.

Physical Punishment

According to Toomer et al. (2018), change occurs continuously around the world, and it is the job of leaders to make sure that good change is encouraged and carried out. Early years professionals (EYPs) should make sure they take on the responsibility of becoming a catalytic leader in child settings, according to McDowall Clark (2012). A catalytic leader influences others rather than speaking with authority because motivation is more potent than unfavourable attitudes and dynamics. As discussed by UNICEF (no date) and Donaldson (2015), children must be given the opportunity to develop their full potential.

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 new measure and the changes that have occurred to implement the new measure will receive most of the attention. The new law is being implemented to ensure that children have the same legal protection against violence as adults do, and that adults who hurt children will be held accountable (Welsh Government, 2022). Furthermore, according to the Welsh Government (2022, p. 1), this safeguards children from "smacking and shaking" among other things since "it will provide children the same protection from assault as it does adults". The UK is a member of the European Court of Human Rights and forbade corporal punishment in settings in 1985, it is unlawful (Council of Europe, 2006). However, the European Court of Human Rights at the time said that it would be against the rights to the privacy of family life to forbid corporal punishment outside of child settings (End Violence Against Children, 2018).

Children were considered as small adults prior to the establishment of the ban on corporal punishment. However, unlike adults, physical punishment of children was not only permitted but encouraged as a method of discipline (Durrant and Ensom, 2012). As discussed by Glicksman (2019), physically punishing children for misbehaviour can have a long-term negative effect on their holistic development since it teaches them to resolve problems using physical aggressiveness. Physical punishment, according to Gershoff and Lee (2020), may have the opposite impact of what is intended when it comes to correcting the child; they think it may raise the likelihood of aggression and lead to potential legal action for unlawful behaviour. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which came into effect in 1989, emphasised the prohibition of physical punishment even more (UNICEF, No date).

The Welsh government has a responsibility to advance children's rights, including ensuring their safety, according to the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2022). The Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 was put into effect in Wales to ensure the performance of these obligations. The Care Standards Act of 2000 just skimmed the surface of a children's commissioner's duties and obligations, thus the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act of 2001 was put into place to increase the breadth and depth of knowledge and comprehension of those duties. Presently, there has been three commissioners for Wales and in 2023 a new commissioner was introduced: Peter Clarke (2001–2008), Keith Towler (2008–2015), Sally Holland (2015–2022), and Rocio Cifuentes (2022- present) who has become the fourth commissioner for Wales and continues to fight for children's rights in accordance to the United Nations of the Rights of a Child (Welsh Government 2022b: The Commission on Justice in Wales, 2019) and (Children's Commissioner for Wales(2023).

Nursery World (2007) examines Peter Clarke, the first children's commissioner for Wales, promoted Article 12 of the UNCRC on behalf of children because he thought children should not only have a voice, but also have their voice heard, listened to, and respected in all facets of their lives. Furthermore, Peter Clarke noted a problem with the police chiefs not paying attention to kids who were reporting crimes, which led to kids not reporting any crimes they encounter and an unfair judicial system (BBC NEWS, 2002). This prevents the promotion of Article 19 of the UNCRC as an uneven justice system can increase the amount of violence that children suffer, whether it comes from their community or a family member (UNICEF, no date).

Furthermore, according to Wales Online (2012) Peter Clarke was focused on minimising bullying in schools because he wanted to keep shielding children from harm. The UK government updated the previous Children Act 1989 to become the Children Act 2004 during Peter Clarke's administration because it was determined that there needed to be more structure regarding local authorities regulating safeguarding practises as well as a better understanding of adult responsibilities. The Children Act of 2004 emphasises that every decision that affects a child's life should be done with a child-centred approach since it ensures that children's needs and skills are considered when making decisions. Also, the Children Act of 2004 helps professionals understand their responsibilities both as an organisation and as individuals since they must make sure that children are safe and protected from violence and potential injury

(HM Government, 2018). Peter Clarke made sure that the Children Act of 2004 and all other policies and procedures were implemented positively by creating an interview panel made up of children who were then in charge of interviewing staff. He also made sure that there were numerous meetings with children to make sure they felt like there had been positive change in schools (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2006).

Keith Towler, who was appointed as Wales's second children's commissioner in 2007, has concentrated on advancing children's rights because he thinks that without the Welsh Government's strong leadership, children may be in danger (Thomas, 2021). Thomas (2021) adds that during Keith Towler's term, he initiated inquiries and investigated possible child abuse in the 1970s and 1980s that had not been looked into at the time. According to BBC News (2012), Keith Towler took a multiagency approach to the probe because he thought it should be a top priority to make sure the allegations weren't ignored and the adults who had been traumatised had closure and a fair justice system. Welsh Government (2022a) explains the rationale behind the measure's implementation as being to ensure that there is greater emphasis on ensuring that children are given their rights regardless of the circumstances and that each practitioner has a duty of due regard in adhering to children's rights. As discussed by the Welsh Government (2022a) and UNICEF (no date), the Implementing the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 promotes Article 42 of the UNCRC in respecting the rights of children and young people because Wales has included a measure that outlines the framework for ensuring that children are given their rights. Keith Towler also concentrated on assisting the youth since he thought there wasn't enough support for children and young people's rights (Thomas, 2021).

The third children's commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland, took office in 2015. Throughout her time in office, she worked to ensure that children received the same level of protection as adults (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022a). The Welsh Government, in Sally Holland's opinion, is not dedicated to ensuring that children are given their rights and are safeguarded from harm in accordance with Article 19 of the UNCRC (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022a). Similar to Keith Towler's opinion. Sally Holland intended to make sure that corporal punishment was prohibited everywhere, including private homes (Morgan, 2020). The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 was consequently put into effect in Wales in March 2022. Children are to be protected from violence and free

from abuse of any kind, according to Article 19 of the UNCRC. However, before the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 went into effect, children were not completely protected from violence because adults could justify their actions. The new regulation forbids adults from adopting a "legal defence of fair punishment," which would have previously allowed them to justify their actions by claiming they struck, shaken, or slapped the youngster (Morgan, 2020, p.1). According to the North Wales Safeguarding Board (2021), all physical punishment is now forbidden, allowing for the protection of children from all types of violence and enabling each kid to be safeguarded correctly with a much clearer awareness of what is expected of adults. Additionally, North Wales Safeguarding Board (2021) claims that as communities implement laws that detail detailed expectations for adults to have with children, it gives communities confidence in their commitment to supporting children's rights.

Impact of the Coronavirus on Poverty

Economic poverty, which is particularly common because of the coronavirus epidemic, is one socioeconomic disadvantage that children may encounter (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). When people lack the essentials of life, they are considered to be in economic poverty. As a result, they may live in subpar conditions and eat poorly, which can make them regularly ill since they lack the necessities of life (Economics Online, 2020). Unemployment, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), low salary, a lack of education, or a lack of access to resources are all potential causes of poverty (Hair, *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, Lee, *et al.* (2021) pointed out that child poverty can lead to ACEs because of the circumstances in which children live or are exposed. As a result, practitioners have a duty to help children and families lessen the influence that ACEs have on them. According to Boullier and Blair (2017), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are negative or traumatic events that a child has had, and which are likely to have an impact on them throughout their lives, including their social and emotional development and having a significant impact on their resilience in coping with challenges. Hughes and Tucker (2018) contend that poverty is an accumulation of ACEs because the child is exposed to multiple unfavourable experiences at once. Toxic stress brought on by financial hardship, dysfunctional households, poor health due to living conditions, and a lack of exposure to safe environments are just a few examples.

Furthermore, the likelihood that these children would participate in risky behaviour, abuse drugs, have terrible relationships, and have a low education, it is likely that parents and families have also gone through ACEs (Steele, *et al.*, 2016). According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), the coronavirus pandemic caused an additional 700,000 people to drop below the poverty line as a result of job losses, 90% furlough pay at the current minimum wage, and a lack of childcare services. Before the pandemic, a quarter of Wales's population lived below the poverty line, and the pandemic made their situation worse. As a result, many people and families fell behind on their rent and utility payments, which left them without access to food and heating, two basic human needs covered by the Human Rights Act of 1998. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). As a result, there would be an increase in children during the coronavirus pandemic who had negative childhood experiences that might have an effect on their long-term development (Treanor, 2020). Welsh Government (2021) believes that in order to lessen the effects of the unpleasant experience, this impact should be acknowledged, and help should be developed for the neighbourhood, families, and kids. Flying Start, a government-funded initiative aimed at reducing the impact on children and families who are in low-income neighbourhood areas, is one method of preventing the effects that poverty has had on children and families, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic (Welsh Government, 2017).

Flying Start is an intervention that supports the children by giving them access to various possibilities for positive learning, which are provided by practitioners (Blaenau Gwent, no date). Every practitioner working in the Flying Start programme has received specialised training in identifying children's potential extra learning needs (ALN) (Welsh Government, 2014). According to Camarata (2014), early detection of potential ALN enables practitioners to intervene early to guarantee that children's development is not slowed down or begins to regress due to their ALN. Also, according to Raspa *et al.* (2015), early identification reduces developmental delays because children who receive a diagnosis too late may find it difficult to cooperate and interact, but if they receive the individualised care they require, they can be treated fairly. The Vygotskian theory highlights how crucial it is to make sure that children are scaffolded with an understanding of their overall needs and talents because it enables a child-centred approach where the child's specific needs are supported by the more experienced adult (Kurt, 2020).

According to Liu (2012), inexpensive housing for people in poverty typically has a dangerous environment in the neighbourhood because the parks and areas around aren't consistently cleaned, maintained, or examined for hazardous materials and are therefore inappropriate for children to play alone outside. Flying Start seeks to give children access to safe environments and opportunities that they might not otherwise have in their homes or communities. For instance, many people living in poverty might not have access to a back yard or a park where they can play without fear of being attacked (Welsh Government, 2014). Children's development can be improved holistically by giving them safe spaces to explore and engage in self-discovery, which, according to Piaget and Montessori, is more successful for children because they are having hands-on learning experiences (Twinkl, No date). According to Kalogiannakis, *et al.* (2018), hands-on learning helps children develop resilience and complex thinking abilities because it lets them learn by doing rather than by being told how to do something. It also lets them make mistakes and understand how to overcome challenges they may encounter.

Supporting the parents and families of the child is a responsibility of Flying Start practitioners, and working together and helping the parents enables the child to be given the best opportunities (Welsh Government, 2017). Additionally, practitioners are aware that ACEs may have affected the children's families during their formative years and that this is a possible cause of the children living in poverty (Liao, *et al.*, 2021). In order to support parents, Flying Start practitioners will establish a good rapport with parents since this fosters mutual trust, which facilitates ongoing participation and communication (Welsh Government, 2017a). Furthermore, practitioners will pay attention to parents' input, encourage them to participate in activities that will advance their knowledge and skills, and integrate many agencies into the environment to offer the parents individualised support (Ceredigion County Council, 2023). Due to the coronavirus epidemic, it can be challenging for Flying Start practitioners to interact with parents and children effectively since they must follow government rules for preventing and lowering coronavirus cases (Spark, 2022). Flying Start overcame this obstacle by releasing an app that allowed practitioners to continue supporting children and families during the pandemic by using multi-agency approaches, activity booklets for children to use, ongoing communication with parents, and informing parents of activities and groups they can join (Exchange Wales, 2021).

In conclusion, socioeconomic issues, such as poverty, which was exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, might affect children's development over the long term, however it is recognised that practitioners must reduce the potential effects that it may have on the children (Welsh Government, 2017). Programs like Flying Start are in place to help children and families through socioeconomic considerations, and they can give parents the confidence to aim for new objectives that will be advantageous to them and to their children (Welsh Government, 2014).

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