

Catalytic Leadership: Rights, resilience and social change

Section 1 - Catalytic leadership

“Catalytic leadership is a type of multidimensional leadership that facilitates cross-sector collaboration to enact systems and policy changes within communities.”

(Tsuchiya *et al*, 2012)

A good catalyst leader will provide opportunities for stakeholders within their work, and facilitate the process of collaboration between individuals of the organization and stimulate partnership alliances through encouragement and stimulate stakeholders to work effectively and progress together. A catalyst is defined as a person that signals change and provokes a fast reaction efficiently, and someone that sparks an action with the goal of enabling their team to progress. Within their practice they will problem solve, facilitate, negotiate and mediate by identifying shared outcomes and developing strategies in order to achieve desired outcomes. (Tsuchiya *et al*, 2012, Noramon, 2012 and Jeffrey, 1998).

The work of Cooper (2014) suggests the notion of teacher leadership to be reconceptualized, for the context and community-based ethos of early childhood education (ECE). Cooper recognized concerns that teacher leadership faces within the early childhood sector that have potentially inhibited teachers' ability to recognize and engage in leadership as part of their everyday practice today. Moreover, teachers leadership practice is viewed as a delegated responsibility undertaken by experienced teachers and learning practitioners, that ensure educational pedagogy employed enhances children's development and supports children's interests, abilities and needs (Cooper, 2014).

However, Nicholson *et al* (2018) discuss the traditional hierarchical conceptions and understandings of leadership as a socially constructed and culturally informed process. Research tells us there is emphasis on postmodern thinking as appose to modernist conceptions, which suggests the importance of examination of assumptions that is

represented in leadership discourse and intentional links between leadership and injustices for children and families and the early childhood workforce. Nicholson et al (2018) states explicit barriers that early childhood professionals face today. These include a lack of agreed definition of leadership that limit opportunities for informing policy or professional collaboration, generally low care provider skills in society or leadership training within institutions of education. Furthermore, giving the increasing diversity of background of children and professionals within the early years sector, it is especially critical that there is an understanding of cultural knowledge that respect perspectives and value of the complex human experiences (Nicholson et al, 2018).

Similarly, Dyer (2018) claims that whilst the recent changes to the curriculum framework for practitioners have been implemented in regards to improving desired children's learning outcomes, these changes have been initiated by the politicians fund the early years workforce as appose to the early years practitioners themselves. This agenda reflects the control government over early years provision which is seen in the compulsory curriculum guidance, which emphasizes a pedagogy rather than a nurturing role (Dyer, 2018).

Leaders in the early years are also confronted with sociological issues that impact children's life that affect a practitioner's quality of standards as a catalytic leader and what is more affect the children's well-being. Some of these may include mental health, poverty and the environment in which they are brought up, family financial issues and adverse childhood experiences and inequality (Darlington, no date).

Smith (2014) draws on the importance of support each individual child, pinpointing ideas around individual fulfilment and self-actualization. This aligns Maslow's theory and the hierarchy of needs in children being met, in order for children' to reach their maximal potential. However, the sociological issues hinder the opportunity for children's progression and so the role of the leadership and management is to support children's well-being and resilience in order to give them most opportunity (Yahaya, 2014). In order for leaders to provide effective education Welsh Government (2015) assert the understanding that children develop at various rates and have unique living

circumstances and backgrounds which impact their well-being, and so the provisioning in the early years policy must encourage children to engage and overcome barriers that may occur, thus promoting children's resilience.

For example, Waters and Payler (2015) discusses techniques in which practitioners can enhance resilience in children including structured play, active learning and child initiated, self-directed learning. The Welsh Government (2021) curricula guidance reflects commitment to developmental approaches and constructivist sociocultural pedagogies that require a play-based approach which is intentional and significant for positive learning for children in the early years sector.

Section 2 - Children's Acts in Wales

The Children's act was created in 1999 as a requirement list for practitioners to consider when provisioning with the purposes of regulations that enable protection to children suffering from mental impairments (Welsh Government, 1999). Asmussen *et al* (2016) states the quality of child's environment include healthy diet, safe and stable home and unconditional love and affection.

Out of the four nations in the UK, Wales was the only nation to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) part of the domestic law, appointing Peter Clark, Keith Towler and Sally Holland as the commissioners. Northern Ireland and Scotland and lastly England, appointing Al Ansley Green.

“The British Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS) study found that successful ECEC leaders of institutions with excellent educational result for the children developed visions for their organization and focused on ‘leading learning’”.

(Strehmel, 2016)

Williams (2013) states the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 is in imperative enactment that goes beyond its purpose. It is the first general legislative measure of the implementation of the UNCRC within the UK, thereby promoting in Wales a well-defined, positive response to the recommendations of the UN committee in successive concluding observations reports. This process of the measure gives legal force of the promotion and respect for the human rights of children as fundamental principled governed in Wales, embedding the view of children's rights in Wales, this was portrayed by key politicians within the Welsh assembly and stakeholders (Williams, 2013).

Section 3 – Adverse childhood experiences and mental health

According to Mental Health Foundation (2022) '75% of children and young people who experience a mental health problem aren't getting the help they need'. All children have their own personal experiences in life, and practitioners in the early years must recognize that when creating provisions in policy. Welsh Government in 2022 launched resources that are designed to assist practitioners support professional, holistic learning when creating their policy in aligning with Welsh curriculum (2021).

The importance of early intervention is suggested to have a significant positive impact on young children's learning and development. However, it is suggested that children with mental health issues such as autism and ADHD are considered challenging within the early years (Volkmar, 2014 and Kourjoutas, Stavrou and Plecousakis, 2018). It is difficult for practitioners to deal with situations that involve children that display traits of ADHD or autism, as children are having to wait up to six months for their diagnosis (The Guardian, 2022). Without diagnosis, the responsibility of supporting the child is left up to the professional practitioners and leaders within settings, with that being said this causes strain on our working practitioners and in turn the children are not always receiving the best provision for their needs. This goes against the work of Volkmar (2014) that stresses the importance of early intervention and the substantial result of the child's symptomatology lowering and gaining developmentally.

However, in Wales today there are supporting programmes for children in the early years that suffer from adverse childhood experiences and mental health issues. Such as, flying start and additional needs units (Welsh Government, 2017). The flying start offers a range of preventive early interventions with a delivery of a progressive, universal service, with a core aim to identify additional needs alongside safeguarding children and their families through encompassing interventions such as parental mental health, bonding and attachment child development and family relationships (Welsh Government, 2017).

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