

Section 1

Catalytic leadership is an approach to leading that has the potential to be very effective but does not yet seem to be recognised by all schools and settings. One of the reasons it is impactful is because it focuses on reasonable and sustainable targets that involve all stakeholders (Eckert, 2021). Catalytic leadership in early years settings does not only apply to formally recognised leaders but all members of staff are acknowledged as potential leaders. Moreover, Ankrum (2016) highlights this as a positive strategy for headteachers or managers; supporting and enabling practitioners to lead the learning is a powerful catalyst for change within schools and settings. Practitioners are best placed to influence the learning and teaching, and this enables leaders and managers to focus on other aspects of the leadership role. Empowering all members of the team to feel ownership of the learning environment ensures that high quality provision is secured. However, it is important that the leaders meet regularly with the whole staff team to ensure that the shared vision for the setting is at the heart of everything that the team focus on.

In addition, McDowall (2012) supports catalytic leadership in the context of an early years setting. His research highlighted the difficulties which conventional views of hierarchical leadership presented to practitioners who struggled to see themselves as leaders. The article does recognise that it can be very challenging for practitioners who are not in the leader's role to take it upon themselves to lead others and that they often suffered from 'imposter syndrome'. This study supported early years practitioners to see themselves as able to inspire and influence change without being in a position of power. Through shared dialogue and reflection, teams can have a powerful impact on practice. Nevertheless, this can only be done when leaders in schools and settings view new ideas in a positive way, as opposed to being a threat. Catalytic leadership supports leaders and managers to encourage innovation and recognise everyone's potential. In turn, when people feel valued, they will thrive.

Furthermore, Siraj *et al.* (2013) promote the importance of developing a shared vision in a workplace in order to provide drive and purpose for all members of staff in a setting. Their work also highlights the importance of the leader empowering leadership in others as central to good practice. However, making improvements in a setting always brings about change and this can be daunting for practitioners if it is not managed effectively. They suggest the role of

the leader is to lead by example, implementing and sustaining changes gradually in partnership with staff and encouraging all members of staff to contribute to the team effort.

TEDx (2016) describes great leadership as a very simple concept with just two rules to always bear in mind. Firstly, as a leader it is always important to remember it is not about oneself but others; good leaders enable others to have belief and confidence in themselves. Secondly, it is only about oneself; being the best version of oneself by making personal changes required of others will encourage changes in behaviour through positive role modelling. These two rules may appear to be very contradictory, although actually if both rules are applied in practice, it can secure efficient and purposeful changes in a setting. Leading by example is an important consideration for achieving success, not only from leaders to practitioners, but also from practitioners to children.

In contrast, Cooper (2021) discusses catalytic leadership as a tool specifically for early years teachers to apply in their settings. She does acknowledge and appreciate that leading others can feel daunting and intimidating at times for many teachers. However, catalytic leadership has a strong focus on how teachers approach leading others in an inclusive and social environment. This ensures that everyone is involved, and issues are approached in a professional but supportive manner. For example, if a member of staff found being outdoors challenging, this would need to be resolved within an early years setting. This could require focusing on the member of staff's interests and passions in order to find a solution. This approach enables the leader to resolve a potentially difficult situation whilst ensuring that the member of staff feels valued and appreciated within the setting.

In addition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a useful lens through which to consider the needs of children and staff within a setting (Hopper, 2020). Whatever stage of life people are at, their basic needs continue to need meeting in order for them to be able to make a full contribution to their working or learning environment. In the context of leadership, this requires self-belief and having these needs met will ensure that individuals have confidence in their own abilities and are able to reach their full potential. Hopper (2020) discusses data collected from over 60,000 individuals based around Maslow's basic needs. She found that there was a strong correlation between these needs being met and people's well-being, as well their overall

assessment of the quality of their lives. She also states that the order of the needs does not need to be followed too closely but can be used more as a guideline.

However, Robinson (2016) focuses on the distinctive difference between leadership and management. He states the role of a leader, which could be anyone in a workplace, is to create a vision for all. The role of the manager is to ensure that everything such as policies and procedures are in place to enable the leader to focus on developing the vision for the school or setting and ensuring that everyone is on board with this. The role of the leader is to provide opportunities and enable others, rather than directing others on a day-to-day basis, but the two must be working in partnership to provide these high-quality opportunities - not just for the children but also the staff. In comparison, Flying Start (2014) would argue that the role of the manager is not only developing the policies and procedures in the environment, but to also make time for the children and parents and ensure that they build positive relationships with all families. Acting as a role model in this regard is crucial to the success of the setting. In addition, Cambell-Barr *et al.* (2016) would also support this position, seeing the highlighting of the differences between leadership and management as a distraction from what is actually important, which is working in partnership to ensure a high-quality setting.

The impact of good leadership within an early years setting cannot be underestimated. Securing high quality provision, supporting the well-being and on-going professional development of practitioners and meeting the needs and expectations of families is a complex process. Ofsted (2015) discusses that being open, honest and collaborative within an early years setting is central to striving for improvement. Strong leadership which is inclusive of all staff creates a supportive team who want to work together to create the best possible outcomes for all their learners. A shared vision of what good learning looks like and a focus on support for the sociological issues which might be negatively impacting on children and their families combine to create a successful learning culture. In addition, Flying Start (no date) recognise that children can only thrive when their parents or carers are thriving too. Interventions such as the parent nurturing programme are there to support families who may be struggling. This supports parents to understand their children's behaviour more clearly and gives them skills to interact positively with them.

Whilst catalytic leadership has many positives, many settings can find it challenging to work in this way. Angell and Dehart (2011, as cited in Ankrum, 2016) found that many teachers who would welcome the opportunity to take on leadership roles were prevented from doing so by headteachers who did not recognise the value of teachers as leaders. This conventional view of leadership as something which is done by people in positions of authority is also held by many practitioners and it can be very challenging to break down these barriers.

Care Council for Wales (2016) state that practitioners should continuously increase their knowledge, experiences and lifelong learning. This can be done through additional training, meetings or visiting other settings to get new ideas. However, this is not always realistic for practitioners due to the need for non-contact time and the cost of funding this cover. This could be viewed as at odds with the Welsh Government's vision for early years practitioners to be able to continuously develop their knowledge and skills to provide better outcomes for children. If practitioners are able to develop their practice through opportunities provided within the setting through catalytic leadership, then this reduces the need for one-off training courses and the associated expense of these.

In contrast, Fitzsimmons (2016) states that through shared leadership, teachers should be utilising their own personal talents, knowledge and creativity to influence and inspire their own pupils. The impact of strong leadership on children's achievements and attitudes to learning is very evident and is clearly linked to improved outcomes for learners. It also ensures that a broad range of perspectives and ideas are put into practice, which offers each learner a variety of learning experiences. This additionally encourages teachers to learn with and from one another. This will not only develop their confidence experiment with new ideas but will also enable them to grow as leaders of learning in their own right.

Leading and managing an early years setting has become an increasingly challenging role, with an ever-growing rise in the complex range of sociological issues that negatively impact on children's lives. This includes issues such as mental health problems, homelessness, domestic violence, abuse, poverty and bullying. This is why shared leadership is so important, to ensure that everyone is working in partnership to support all learners and their families, as well as being there for each other in potentially challenging circumstances. According to the Welsh Government (2018) there have been some positive changes for teachers to ensure they are able

to have an improved work-life balance. They also state that teachers should be setting realistic goals, which is a central component of the catalytic approach. According to Early Education (no date), working in partnership will ensure families are supported in a holistic way and the setting can not only offer but also seek advice from families to ensure consistency for the child. Good communication between children, staff and families helps to build trust and positive relationships and leads to successful outcomes for learners. An effective leader puts systems in place to ensure that all staff are able to make positive contributions to the learning environment and that everyone feels valued.

Wilde (2017) believes that the modern-day definition of leadership has been transformed into such high and unrealistic expectations that staff can often feel unclear about what they are working towards. He states that these views have arisen because of leaders giving commands to others instead of sharing leadership roles and responsibilities across teams. In addition, he states that people should think of leadership as pursuing their own direction, embracing shared values, inspiring others and working together in order to create more compassion in the world. This approach also builds confidence in a workforce who are able to come up with new ideas and think outside the box. These skills are essential to be able to secure the best outcomes for young learners in today's complex world and catalytic leadership provides early years staff and settings with the ideal model to be able to achieve success.

Section 2

All children have recognised rights as a result of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as UNCRC. These rights were first envisioned over 100 years ago by a woman named Eglantyne Jebb who had a vision to promote and protect children's rights worldwide. She wanted to ensure every child had the right to a healthy, happy, fulfilling life and so she established the charity Save the Children (Save the Children, no date). Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all was established in 1948, this was almost exclusively focused on the rights of adults (United Nations no date). There was a small number of articles which centred around the rights of children, but it was not until 1989 that the rights of the child became a focus in their own right.

The UNCRC was established in 1989 and came into force in the UK in 1992 (Welsh Government, 2014). This convention recognised that children's rights were different to those of adults and that they had an even stronger need for their rights to be protected and prioritised. The statements of children's rights not only apply to the United Kingdom but internationally and currently up to 196 countries have signed up to the convention. The UNCRC is made up of 54 articles which covers areas in children's lives including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The UNCRC makes these rights a priority for children up to the age of 18 (UNCRC, no date) and there are systems in place to try and hold countries to account for adhering to the convention. However, in Wales, there has been a strong commitment to give much greater protection to children's rights in law and The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure was established in 2011. The measure meant that ministers had a duty to make sure the UNCRC was always at the forefront of discussions when developing legislation and policies (Welsh Government, 2022). The Children's Rights Impact Assessment (Welsh Government, 2014) is also an important development as it sets out the measures by which progress towards securing children's rights will be evidenced and analysed.

In order to support schools and settings to secure and promote children's rights, Unicef established the Rights Respecting Schools Programme in 2006. Unicef (no date) made a commitment to support schools and settings to become Rights Respecting Schools, where children's rights underpin the whole school curriculum in the UK. This helps to ensure that children feel safe, belong, are aware of their rights, receive a good education, they can express opinions and are cared for within a supportive school ethos. Over 5000 schools have registered

for this scheme since it was established, however, this is still only about 16% of the total number of schools in the UK.

In 2001, Wales took the sector leading step of appointing a Children's Commissioner for Wales in order to further promote and secure the rights of children across the country. Wales' first ever commissioner was Peter Clarke who had a huge impact not only in Wales but on the appointment of other Children's Commissioners in the UK as well. His work focused on safeguarding all children as well as promoting their welfare. He prioritised always listening to the voices of children first and he responded to these demands wherever possible. He felt that children had not previously been given opportunities to speak up and were often criticised when they did. He highlighted the lack of access to counselling services for children and made commitments to ensure development in this area. The legacy he left behind was a deeper understanding of the importance of listening to the voice of the child when developing policies and services for children and young people (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2006). In 2008, Keith Towler took over the role as Children's Commissioner. He had a strong commitment to the promotion of children's rights in Wales. He really raised the profile of the UNCRC in Wales and, building on the work of his predecessor, frequently highlighted article 12, that children must have a say in whatever happens to them. If all adults fulfil their duty to listen to what children say then article 12 can become a reality (Children's Commissioner for Wales, no date). In 2015 Sally Holland took over the role. She has supported and promoted children's mental-health and anti-bullying strategies, lessened inequality as well as improving the transitions into adulthood of young people with additional learning needs. Her work has really made a difference to children's lives with a particular focus on banning physical punishment in Wales. From March 2022 the ending of physical chastisement of children in Wales will be enshrined in law. This means that any form of physical punishment in Wales is now against the law. This is a big step for Wales as it is ensuring that children are receiving the same treatment as adults (Welsh Government, 2022).

The work of all 3 Children's Commissioners in Wales has been strongly guided by the 54 articles within the UNCRC. They have all used their platform as Children's Commissioner to raise the profile of children's rights in all aspects of their work. This has included the promotion of the Rights Respecting Schools agenda, engaging with children and young people

at every opportunity and ensuring that children's rights are protected in law in Wales, a step yet to be taken by most other countries. (Children's Commissioner for Wales, no date).

In comparison, Scotland did not appoint a children's commissioner until 2004, after a lot of pressure from organisations who felt that children's voices in Scotland were not really being heard. Furthermore, Peter Clarke played a big part in supporting the establishment of Children's Commissioner roles in Scotland and Northern Ireland when he was Children's Commissioner in Wales. He was extensively consulted and gave evidence to a range of politicians in the process of these roles being set up (House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee, 2004). Since 2017 Bruce Adamson, who is the current children's commissioner for Scotland, has made a big impact on the promotion of children's rights throughout Scotland. His work focuses on trying to ensure children are being surrounded by happiness, love and understanding. He has helped to make children in Scotland more aware of their rights, but he has also focused on educating adults as well. He recognised that if adults were not on board then this could limit any real progress being made (Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, no date). The use of the UNCRC is also very prevalent in Scotland and the convention is given a very high profile. The Scottish Government believes that the convention helps to ensure that children are respected and protected, with every political decision made in Scotland having to have due regard for the best interests of children. The UNCRC in Scotland impacts all families, but especially those whose rights are being compromised the most. For example, children with disabilities, children in care and children experiencing poverty. Children's rights not only lie in the commissioner's portfolio but are also the responsibility of the government. Politicians are encouraged to focus on issues such as mental health, housing or adequate standards of living when policies are being developed. This focus will help to ensure that children can access a good education and then be able to reach their full potential (Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, 2021).

In addition, the NSPCC is a children's charity that focuses on child protection and are committed to protecting all children and preventing them from harm. According to NSPCC (no date) this charity is the only one that has statutory powers which gives them the right to act on protecting children who are in danger. Their vision is to end child abuse and neglect with the help and support from staff and volunteers. The charity has set three impact goals to be achieved by 2031. These focus on getting everyone involved. This includes people like

teachers, coaches or even members of the public working together to create a safer and happier environment for all children, with the NSPCC helpline available for anyone who may need it at any time. Online safety is also an area currently being worked on; programmes such as 'Report Remove' mean that anything that individuals want taken down can be removed instantly. This will support all children and young people right to feel safe whenever they are online and could also help to eliminate other issues such as cyber bullying or black mail. Children feeling safe, listened to and supported are important issues for many organisations and what the UNCRC is promoting.

A focus on securing children's right to feel safe led to some changes to safeguarding procedures in Wales. ADSS Cymru (2019) highlighted the publication of a single set of safeguarding guidelines to protect anyone at risk of harm in Wales. This includes practitioners always having a child-centred approach, with children's views, wishes and feelings being at the forefront of any decisions that are made for them. However, if the child is at risk of harm, then the child's safety comes first, and this must always be made clear to them. There has been a strong focus on ensuring practitioners knowledge and awareness of the importance of listening to the child's voice in safeguarding situations is up to date, and Welsh Government have provided funding for additional training and learning resources. These systems and guidelines have been developed as part of the Welsh Government's commitment to promoting the rights of children and adults at risk to feel safe in Wales.

The fact that consideration of children's rights is now enshrined in law in Wales has led to a focus on the UNCRC being at the heart of all new policy developments. This is clearly reflected in the new curriculum for Wales where the teaching of children's rights is now a central strand of the requirements. This is being approached with the use of the UNCRC at the core of children's educational experiences, listening to learners, school planning, teaching, decision-making, policies and practice. This ensures that children from a young age are being made aware of their rights, in an age-appropriate manner. For example, in high schools the children are able to discuss and debate issues in depth, whereas early years children might be visiting these rights through play-based activities, stories and role-play scenarios. Empowering and enabling children to feel they can make their own decisions to become ambitious, capable learners will create an educational environment that is accountable to all learners and ensure that all their voices are heard. Furthermore, the Children's Commissioner for Wales has

highlighted that a children's rights approach enables agencies to tackle discrimination and ensure that all children are able to thrive and reach their full potential (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2017). Scotland are also in line with Wales in embedding the UNCRC into their curriculum. The Scottish Government have established an annual meeting between cabinet members and young people in order to be able to keep in touch with what matters to the younger generation (Scottish Government, 2021). It is clear that the appointment of Children's Commissioners has led to a much greater emphasis on securing a focus on the rights of children and young people remaining at the heart of government policy in Wales and Scotland.

Section 3

There are numerous sociological issues that can affect children's life experiences, many of which are referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. According to Harvard University (no date) Adverse Childhood Experiences are when children experience emotional, physical or sexual abuse, poverty, neglect, parental addiction and mental health issues. The more exposure children have to ACEs, the more damage this will have on their on-going development and future lives. According to National Health Service (2017), adults who have been exposed to 4 or more ACEs are more likely to suffer from health conditions such as heart disease or cancer as well as addiction and incarceration which can all lead to severe and complex mental health issues.

Unfortunately, if Adverse Childhood Experiences are not recognised and supported, there is a real danger that the cycle of deprivation will continue into the next generation. According to Fiona *et al.* (2010) the negative effects on a child's general development when living with multiple ACEs is extremely negative. They discuss the common factors which influence parents' mental health issues such as unemployment, socioeconomic deprivation, isolation and financial difficulties. They highlight the definite link between the mental health issues of parents and those of their children; the effect it has on children's cognitive and social development and emotional well-being can be very apparent. The need for more interventions to improve and support the mental health and well-being of families is something which many agencies are calling for, due to the ongoing pressure on GPs according to Young Minds (2019). Furthermore, the NSPCC (no date) appreciate that parents who are struggling with their own mental health can find prioritising their parental duties challenging, although they do stress that this is not always the case. Parents may have mood swings or may no longer be able to recognise their children's basic needs, finding routine activities such as mealtimes or school runs overwhelming. The organisation offers additional support programmes for children and families struggling with their mental health such as Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, Samaritans and SANE. Most of these services are focusing on the mental health of the parents, which will clearly have a positive knock-on effect for the children. However, it is still important that young children receive appropriate support for their mental health and well-being in order for them to be able to thrive and succeed. Early years settings have a very important role to play in this.

The Welsh Government has placed a strong emphasis on prioritising children's health and well-being both in the New Curriculum for Wales 2022 and as part of the COVID recovery programme. The focus on health and well-being as one of the 6 areas of learning and experience within the new curriculum will enable schools and settings to prioritise this as part of a holistic curriculum Public Health Wales (2022). Furthermore, according to HWB (2020), children who do not have good health and well-being will not be able to become successful learners. The aim of this area within the curriculum is to provide all children with the knowledge and understanding of why looking after themselves is so important and the appropriate tools and strategies to continuously work on this throughout their lives. Whole school approaches such as Forest School and Mindfulness will support learners and practitioners to develop positive approaches to their mental health and well-being. Nevertheless, there are still significant gaps for supporting the mental health and well-being of the youngest learners in Wales (Richardson, 2022). She states that this area lacks ambition and needs to be much more highly developed. Richardson does acknowledge that many plans have been mapped out, such as the employment of four hundred additional mental health staff by 2023. Yet, with the big decline in children's mental health in the context of a global pandemic (Liu *et al.*, 2020) this may not be urgent enough.

Schools and settings have a duty of care for all children for both their physical and mental health. To support this important work, staff can carry out a range of methods of assessments, such as observations, to see how individuals are doing. One popular method is the Leuven Scale, which is mainly used by early years settings as it is play-based. The scale is rated from 1-5 based on children's emotional well-being and involvement levels. The results are then looked at closely, levels of involvement and emotional well-being are linked, because if children are not involved it is likely they are in a state of low well-being as well. Practitioners are then able to target children with low scores with additional interventions to support their well-being (MacRae *et al.*, 2020). It is always important that this work is undertaken in close partnership with the family so that children are getting consistent messages and support.

Based on the outcomes of the observations, individual plans can be put in place for identified children to support their well-being and learning. This could involve simple strategies such as working closely with the families, to ensure consistency for the child as well as seeking and providing advice. Additional interventions such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistance,

also known as ELSA, have proven very effective in helping young children to recognise and regulate their emotions. According to ELSA Support (no date), the programme was developed due to the lack of specialist well-being support for young children. The intervention is commonly run by teaching assistants to help develop children's social skills, emotions, anger management and self-esteem. However, this may not always be practical, removing teaching assistants from a classroom can lead to other complications. Careers Wales (no date) state that specialist teachers are required for children with additional learning needs but also complex behavioural issues as well.

There is a broad range of services to support families in Wales such as Flying Start, a programme for children aged 0-3 for families who live in particular areas of Cardiff. The service aims to provide children with the right start in life through enhanced health visiting, parenting services and free childcare from two and a half years. Flying Start (no date) publications highlight the importance of positive parenting for higher academic achievement, building stronger relationships, raised self-esteem, fewer behavioural issues and being able to regulate their emotions. However, the Flying Start offer does not apply to all families in Wales and many of those who would benefit from this support are missing out because of their postcode. Nevertheless, Mosalski (2022) states that the programme will be extended from September 2022 to all families who need it. This sort of wrap-around support not only benefits the child's well-being and development but also ensures that parents are able to actively care for their children with love and enjoyment.

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