

ECEY6009/C

Section 1

A catalyst is defined as “an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action.” A catalytic leader, then, is an agent of change (Attaway,2021). Furthermore, a catalytic leader is described by Connor (2013) as someone who can communicate across organizations and sectors to inspire a new way of working that will achieve the community’s highest aspirations. A catalytic leader does not come from above or from the front, it comes from anywhere and everywhere (Reed and Canning, 2012) which suggests that anyone can become a catalytic leader. As Baker (2021) quotes “give light and people will find a way”. A catalyst leader shows a personal stake in others, in many ways, such as coaching or mentoring. A catalyst leader can transform a person’s vision into reality (international fire chief association,2017). However, there is a slight difference between leaders and catalytic leaders. Leaders inspire and enable while Catalytic leaders build on inspiring and enabling with their attention to earn the right to lead and encouraging without judging (forbes,2015). According to Joiner (2017) managers grow through multiple stages in developing their agility. The first one being expert leaders followed by achiever leaders and then reaching catalytic leaders. Joiner (2017) further adds, although Catalyst leadership is the most effective in today’s turbulent environment, only about 10% of leaders currently can lead at this level. A catalytic leader is believed by PRC (2017) More than anything else, catalyst leaders bring out the best in people. They do that by: Encouraging people to try new things – Look for the potential in others that cannot see themselves and give them the confidence to spread their wings and get out of their comfort zone. Teacher Leaders are catalysts for change in schools. This research delves into exactly how meaningful teacher leaders are to the process of change in schools (Reymond,J. 2016) furthermore, CGPS (2018) explain that the caring and compassion of teacher leaders is crucial to their ability to help colleagues and communities engage in deep discussions about culture, social justice, culturally responsive teaching, and positive discipline in the classroom. Likewise, research gate (2015) adds that Teachers play a key role in realizing successful changes in education. Among them are real ‘change agents’ at both classroom and school level.

To become a successful leader in the early years requires that all adults in a child's life such as staff, parents and carers, understand how children learn, and can act on this in real and meaningful ways. To become a successful leader within the early years it has been described by early years matters (2023) that a leader should certainly be able to inspire others, having a clear vision, thinking creatively, having a problem-solving approach to difficulties and a commitment to partnership working as well as developed interpersonal skills and qualities of leaders. Likewise, an effective leader in ECE is someone who can create a positive, nurturing, and stimulating environment for children to learn and grow (The University of Arizona,2022). Anyone can become a leader. However, NPQs are available for teachers and leaders who want to develop their knowledge and skills in specialist areas of teaching practice. A NPQ Is a training scholarship for Early Years Leadership and is available to those leaders qualified to at least level 3 with a full and relevant qualification (gov.uk,2023). The EYFS (no date) explains that Leadership is about character, behaviour and relationships, being credible, open and honest, trusting, respecting, listening to and empowering their team as well as having a focus on actions, development and improvement, being prepared to take risks and accept challenge. However, many early childhood teachers fear or avoid discussions about leadership due to misconceptions about what leadership entails. These misconceptions challenge teachers' ability to recognise, understand and engage in leadership as part of their everyday practice (Cooper,2014) which suggests that many teachers avoid the topic as they do not fully understand the meaning of leadership therefore, they find it difficult to use in everyday practise.

However, there are sociological factors that impact on children's lives in early years, such as environment, gender, physical and mental well-being, family & social life, education, and play (smartivity,2022). These factors can be affected by poverty, violence, abuse, neglect and much more. Orchids (2022) adds that these factors influence the child's development such as physical, intellectual, spiritual, economic, and social. Therefore, it is the leader's role to be aware of indicators of abuse and neglect, understanding that children can be at risk of harm inside and outside of the school (keeping children safe in education, 2017) moreover, it is important for all staff to receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety) at induction. The training should be regularly updated as well as knowing the children's rights. These rights include; Article 19: where children have the right to be

protected from being hurt or badly treated. Article 24: where children have the right to clean water, healthy food, a clean environment, and good healthcare. Article 26: children have the right to support from the Government if their family has not got enough money to live on. Article 28: children have the right to an education. And many more. It is also important that children know their rights and get taught them which is also the leader's role.

Furthermore, early years careers (2016) notes that some daily activities within the early years settings can challenge leaders such as having too much paperwork and not spending enough time with the children, which comes under the safeguarding guidelines (2014) this could result in the staff not noticing sociological factors that impact on the children's lives. on the other hand, gov.uk (no date) mentioned Reducing unnecessary paperwork is a key aim of the new early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework. This is so teacher can spend more time engaging with children. Another problem leaders face withing the early years setting is difficulty recruiting staff who are qualified however, to work in childcare they will need the relevant childcare qualifications; the minimum requirement is level 2 however most nurseries require practitioners to hold a level 3 qualification. If they are not qualified to the expected level there are many options in obtaining the right qualification either training on the job or through an apprentice route (early years careers, 2016). However, this can cause a problem as approximately one in five learners in Wales have Additional Learning Needs (ALN). All children may experience challenges with their learning at some point and for most children, these difficulties overcome with support from teachers and home (snap Cymru, no date) suggesting that staff and parents need to work together for the best learning outcomes for children. However, To work with children with additional learning needs, qualifications such as Level 2 and 3 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools, Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education Early Years Educator or T Level in Education and Childcare (national careers service, no date) are required to reach the best of the child's ability and for staff to have a clear understanding of the additional learning needs and will be able to create the best plan to work with them.

Another problem that leaders face within the early years is difficulty in communicating with parents. It is important to communicate with parents as explained by Rasing children (2023) that effective communication builds understanding and trust. When

teachers and parents or carers understand and trust each other, they will all be able to work together to support children's wellbeing and development. However, it has been described by parent pay group (2022) that there are barriers to communication between parents and teachers with the most common one being parents' work demands and lack of time. Time can affect parental involvement. Work commitments and busy lifestyles can limit parents' ability to participate in their child's school life. There are many effective ways of communicating with parents such as phone calls, emails, newsletters, parents evenings which allows parents to go into the school and speak to the classroom teacher regarding their child's progress and they are able to see their work and discuss anything that is relevant with one another. Some schools now offer parents to download a communication app which has been described by parent apps (2023) "A school communication app can be downloaded in a matter of seconds onto any smart device and give parents, teachers, admin staff and pupils access to important information". However, Cultural differences can also have a significant impact on engagement with parent communications and has been stated that cultural differences can lead to communication breakdowns (Lindsey Lapaquette,2021). It has been stated by Jacobs, KD. (2007) that School leadership in communicating to parents and students from diverse backgrounds is a problem in education that must be addressed.

Section 2

The children's commissioner was created following a recommendation made by Lord Laming in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry. Victoria Climbié died in the intensive care unit of St Mary's Hospital Paddington on 25 February 2000, aged 8 years and 3 months. Her death was caused by multiple injuries arising from months of ill-treatment and abuse by her great-aunt (House of Commons Health Committee,2002) One of the findings from the inquiry (the Laming Report) were damning, not only about individual practice failings, poor or non-existent inter-agency working and the lack of focus on the child, Victoria, but also, for the first time, about the failure of senior managers in various organizations to account for the shortcoming of their departments and their resistance, in most cases, to accept responsibility for them (University of Huddersfield,2002) which suggested that there was guilt from all suspects of the case and was further suggested by Lord Laming to make recommendations "as to how such an event may, as far as possible, be avoided in the future". Therefore, the

children's commissioner was created, the role was initially established under the children Act 2004 which gave the commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children (Children's commissioner, 2023). Furthermore, children's commissioner Wales states that the principal aim of the Commissioner is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children.

In Wales the children's commissioner is Rocio Cifuentes. Rocio started her role as the children's commissioner in April 2022 and will continue her role for seven years. As the children's commissioner she has also got previous experience in other aspects of early childhood such as being Chief Executive of the charity Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales. She helped to set up this charity in 2005. Her role as the children's commissioner for Wales is to promote and protect children's rights in Wales (Children's commissioner for Wales, 2023). Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) there are 42 rights. All 42 rights have been created to give children and young people what they need to grow up happily, healthily, and safely.

In the article a children's human rights approach to education in Wales (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2023) clearly states that 'Wales should be a country where every child experiences their human rights'. However, In May 1999 the Welsh government established with a plan to make Wales a wonderful place for children and young people to grow up, live and work, where everyone feels valued (gov.wales, 2022). Furthermore, in 2004, the Welsh Government formally adopted the UNCRC as the basis of policy making relating to children and young people and further created a law, the rights of children and young people (Wales) measure in 2011 which was created to ensure that all children's rights are considered in everything Wales does. It has been said by Welsh government (2019) that children and young people aged 18 and under, have the right to be safe, to play, to have an education, to be healthy and be happy. The UNICEF (no date) also works with families, local communities, partners, and governments in more than 190 countries to ensure more of the world's children are fed, vaccinated, educated, and protected more than any other organisation. Moreover, the UNICEF have proven to be a successful charity and have helped millions of children for example; they believe that every child has the right to an education. During the coronavirus pandemic restrictions disrupted learning for millions of children globally, the UNICEF successfully helped and made sure 48.6 million

children could keep learning in 2021. It is important that children and young people understand equality and know their rights, to understand both how they should be treated, and how they should treat others. Teaching these topics creates a safe place for students to explore, discuss, challenge and for their own options and values (equality human rights, 2016). This can be supported by children sharing their feelings within the classroom through a way that they most feel comfortable, this can be speaking to a member of staff, writing their feelings down on a piece of paper and putting it in a box that can be created in the classroom or by using the new system that has been created which is known as 'speaker' which allows children to share how they feel every day on a digital device where they simply have to press a happy or sad face.

Another point that is mentioned in the article is children's human rights approach to education in Wales 'that settings need to make sure all children have equitable experiences across all areas, both inside and outside of the classroom'. However, in early childhood setting equality means providing high quality education and care to diverse learners. Each child has a unique learning and development trajectory that may require individualised or additional support for them to be fully engaged in a quality education and care (Melbourne graduate school of education, 2011) which could result in not enough staff in the setting which more than eight in ten early years providers (84%) are finding it difficult to recruit staff according to a new report from the Alliance (Early years alliance, 2021). Furthermore, Wales online (2022) reports that workload pressures could see half of teachers in England quit within the next five years according to National Education Union survey as they further add that the survey found 52 per cent of teachers said their workload was 'unmanageable' or 'unmanageable' most of the time, up from 35 per cent last year, which could become a major problem within early years settings. One problem being staff Ratios and group size which are two factors that are critical to a child's health, safety, and development (childcare.gov, no date). It is further explained that low child-to-adult ratios and small group sizes that help ensure that children get enough one-on-one attention from an adult who is available to take care of each child's unique needs. Likewise, twinkl (2021) states that in early years settings, the current ratio rules make it safer for children and adults to manage the children in early years settings and help ensure that adults can provide more focused support towards children. This suggests the more staff within

the early years setting the better outcome it will be for the children as they are able to focus on individual needs and tasks that need to be met. Children also build a better relationship with the staff when in smaller groups, which is essential for healthy development in the child and will set them up for a good start in life (mental health foundation, 2016).

The article further adds 'it also needs to involve understanding and removing barriers to participation in learning and in a wider enrichment such as school clubs, groups and trips (Children's Commissioner for Wales,2023). Likewise, the ELMS (2022) states that "Day trips and residential trips enable our pupils to enjoy experiences that cannot be replicated in the classroom environment". Furthermore, Cas trips (2022) reports that school trips give students a new level of responsibility for themselves and their belongings. In addition, travel also taps into the skills needed for public speaking, professional communication, and presentations - all things many students struggle with. This suggests that school trips are beneficial for pupils. On the other hand, the funds for the trip could be an issue. Unfortunately, school trips are rarely free, and for schools and parents, the financial cost of outside the classroom learning can be prohibitive (plan my school trips,2023) meaning that the school or parents/careers will have to cover the cost of the school trips. There is also an endless choice of clubs, classes and creative sessions that provide fun and motivating ways for children to learn, play, develop new skills and gain new and exciting experiences (learning hive.2023) which usually cost a minimum of £2.50 per child, per session. However, there are many services that can help cover the cost of school trips and after school clubs if the school or parents/careers are unable to cover the cost. The school can hold fundraising days such as farmers market – in line with healthy eating. Children could be responsible for growing their own vegetables in the school garden and have a farmers' market when they are ready to eat. (Uk school trips, no date) This is also a fantastic way to encourage children to eat healthy and have a hands-on experience outside the classroom as well as a wonderful way for them to learn about living. Having a non-uniform day is also an extremely popular fund-raising day in school all over Wales where children give money to wear their own clothes to school however it has reported by Bridges (2023) that own clothes day for some, it is an opportunity to show off their best clothes and fashion sense. Sadly, for others it is a day that makes them anxious and nervous about coming to school, due to fears of being judged on their old,

cheap, or unfashionable clothing and further reports children should not be missing their education over concerns about their appearance. In Wales there is also a grant available for anyone qualifying for benefits and their children are in primary or secondary school, they may also be able to get free school meals, school clothing grants or school journey grants for their child. (Royal Greenwich, 2023). Furthermore, In Wales there is a service that is offered, called Cadw, which offers free self-led education visits at Cadw staffed sites where charges are normally applied, to a wide range of learners (cadw,2023) which indicates that the visits are free under their employment therefore the travel expenses will need to be covered.

Section 3

There are many sociological factors within the early years setting that can challenge children's early years experiences for instance living in poverty which will be the aspect focused on for this critical evaluation.

In Wales poverty has become a complex problem with the highest rate of child poverty of any nation in the UK (United Kingdom) (PSE,no date). The Latest figures show that 34% of children in Wales are living in poverty (Children in Wales, 2021) which gives an estimate of Around 200,000 children. Poverty is described as when resources are well below minimum needs (JRF,no date). There are three different levels of poverty the first one being MIS which stands for minimum income standard where people with an income below minimum income standard and are getting by day-to-day but under pressure. Secondly, there is 75 per cent MIS where people do not have enough income and are at a high chance of not meeting their needs. Last of all there is Destitution, where it is very unfortunate that people cannot afford to eat, keep clean and stay warm and dry. There are many causes to why people live in poverty with the main cause being many low-paid jobs offer no opportunities to progress to better work and better wages. However, research have gathered that 75 per cent of children living in poverty have at least one parent in work (CPAG, 2023). As well as low income there are many more causes of poverty. Furthermore, these consequences have a major impact on the children living in poverty such as children's health, social, emotional, and cognitive development, behaviour, and educational outcomes (Public Health Scotland, 2022). Children born into poverty are more likely to experience a wide range of health problems, including poor nutrition, chronic disease, and mental health

problems. Fortunately, in Wales the NHS provide care for everyone, free at the point of use as well as preventing, reducing, and mitigating the effects of poverty (Buck, 2021). Nevertheless, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021) estimated that poverty costs the NHS and social care services a staggering £29 billion per year. However, that could be an issue due to the statistics of poverty in Wales has increased which was reported by Welsh government (2020) that In Wales, 31% of children were living in relative income poverty in 2017 to 2020. This figure has increased from 28% reported last year and is a 2-percentage point increase based on the unrounded data.

However, there are many services available to help children living in poverty such as Flying start which is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age who live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales (Welsh Government, 2017). The aim of flying start is to make a decisive difference to the life chances of children by mitigating the impact of poverty, which is linked to poor life outcomes in early childhood, including health outcomes. However, not everyone is entitled to flying starts as there are requirements to be able to go ahead with the programme which is targeted at children aged 0-3 years 11 months and their families who live in certain areas defined by postcode (Family Information Services Carmarthenshire, 2023) this is an issue to some children that a suffering by living in poverty and it could be something the government could look into, to change some of these requirements such as allowing more children in disadvantaged areas have access to flying starts near to the future to decrease the number of poverty in Wales.

One of the other services that is offered for all children in primary schools is a free breakfast which was introduced by the Welsh government in 2004. The aim of the initiative was to help improve the health and concentration of children and to assist in the raising of standards of learning and attainment (Welsh government, 2014). Likewise, Greggs foundation (2023) stated that hungry children find it harder to concentrate and learn, impacting their academic attainment. Giving children a good start to their day gives them a good start in life so, in 1999, they launched their Breakfast Club programme to provide a free breakfast to children who need it. Again, this service has been successful, but some children still attend school hungry, a new survey has found almost four in 10 teachers say, "children have come to school hungry". The survey, of 750 teachers, found 37% have children in their class who had

not had breakfast in the morning (Wales online, 2023) which suggests that the children who need the breakfast still do not receive it. This is a cause for concern and suggests that again the Welsh government could investigate and make some new changes like fix requirements that qualify children to have free breakfast. Furthermore, During the coronavirus pandemic 2020 the Welsh government made plans to support low-income families whose children were eligible for free school meals and were offered vouchers, food, or meals to make sure they continued receiving support, even if they were no longer attending school due to the coronavirus outbreak (gov.uk,2020). Furthermore, as of September 2022 new plans have been made where all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by 2024. This commitment is in response to the rising cost-of-living pressures on families and our shared ambitions of tackling child poverty and ensuring no child goes hungry in school (Blaenau Gwent council, no date). The big issue (2023) states that just over 100,000 pupils were eligible for free school meals in Wales in the academic year 2021/2022. But with the new plans, approximately 272,000 primary school pupils in Wales are set to get free lunches by 2024.

To conclude, it is obvious that the Welsh government are working closely to provide a suitable environment and to ensure that children are happy and healthy. however, there are things that need to be changed to ensure that more children get the support they require.

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