

Section 1

This paper assesses the significance of the implementation of the play based early years curricula which is called the foundation phase, mainly focusing on the need for change.

The foundation phase is a curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales, the seven areas include Welsh development, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, personal and social, Welsh, physical, creative and Language development. The curriculum was designed to encourage children to learn whilst having fun, it was built on the foundations of learning through play, there is significant evidence showing that learning through play is a powerful way to develop, play encourages children to explore, investigate and create, giving children the opportunity to grow on their self-esteem and emotions. (Welsh government, 2018)

All children have the right to Play and relax (UNICEF, 2019). In regard to the play-based curriculum, Welsh government (2014) and Siraj and Kingston (2017) mentions that the idea of learning through play has been misunderstood due to many mixed messages about what the true meaning of play is, this resulted in practitioners paying less attention to adult pedagogy meaning that they were not always done in the correct and beneficial way. Siraj and Kingston (2014) add to this and state that there has been a lack of understanding in terms of play-based learning, where practitioners do not understand how children learn through things like play and experiential learning resulting in settings providing a less effective practice. They mention that in maintained settings this resulted in a more chaotic environment because practitioners did not understand how to structure the environment to ensure play-based learning opportunities were offered, Because of this it was known that they then went back to the old way of how they did things resulting in a more formal way of teaching to maintain standards. In regards to this, Welsh government (2017) loizou (2017) and waters (2016) analyses the implementation of the foundation phase and the teacher's involvement in play and mention that play-based learning requires a mixture of children learning through adult led activities and child-initiated activities. They believe that the practitioner's involvement in Children's play can be a key element of a Childs learning journey. In relation to this, however, Howard and McInnes (2013) look at the involvement of the adult and believe that the role of the

adult in a child's play can be linked to whether a child perceives an activity as play or not, for example, in a research study where they observed children in a setting, they noticed that children's ideas of play changed depending on the presence of an adult and the location the activity took place, they evaluated that this study highlighted the importance of practitioners having training about children's views on play and for them to offer the children opportunities and the correct environment to develop their understanding of play. When looking at this study, there's a need to consider that the children that took part of this study were aged 3-5, missing a 2-year age gap that the foundation phase covers as that framework is designed for children aged 3-7 years old (Welsh government, 2017). Another thing to consider is that there was a number of 129 participants from three educational settings, this is a smaller scaled study so questions reliability and accuracy,

Johnson and watts (2018) state that through play, children are able to show their emotions and personal needs, it is known that through play children can develop on their resilience and confidence and mention that specifically undirected and child-initiated play allows children to problem solve, discover, focus on their interests and promotes sharing. They state that when play is adult led this can sometimes focus more on rules and begins to prevent the benefits of play on their creativity, leadership and group skills. Howard and McInnes () add to this and talk about a play study they created and concluded that children who liked play showed significant levels of positive well-being.

When looking at the implementation of training in the foundation phase, Welsh government (2015) talks about the evaluation of the foundation phase report and states that under Recommendation 9, it should be made compulsory for foundation phase training and under Recommendation 11, there is a need for follow up training to support that implementation. They believe that in order to achieve this, there is a need for considerable support for all practitioners that work in the foundation phase so that they are able to implement and use the new framework effectively. However, Siraj and Kingston (2014) talks about the independent stocktake report that only mentions the need for leaders and seniors to undertake training on the foundation phase and adds that there was a lack of clear guidelines when implementing the foundation phase resulting in headteachers, senior leaders and teachers having to guide the foundation phase practice themselves because additional staff lacked the

training and theoretical knowledge to understand the principles of the foundation phase. Waters (2016) talks about the independent stock take and mentions that the findings from the document mention that only a fifth of the foundation phase settings were classed as doing well.

Welsh government (2015) Evaluating the foundation phase report and Siraj and Kingston (2014) state that under recommendation 5 and 6, practitioners need to be provided with training and guidance on how to use the foundation phase pedagogies, for example the 12 essential foundation phase pedagogical elements. However, Waters (2016) discusses the issue with this training and mentions that the word play is not included in any of these twelve elements, she mentions that the evaluation of the foundation phase report makes recommendations about changes in pedagogical practice by being shown how to change rather than knowing and understanding exactly why there is a need for change. She then goes on to discuss that pedagogical change is more likely to happen when educators understand why their actions have an impact on the child's learning. This shows confusion with the pedagogy vs outcomes and believes that in order for teachers to fully understand and embrace pedagogic change, they need support and time. There is no clear guidance or explanation on the approach and pedagogy that practitioners can use (Maynard et al, 2013 cited in waters 2016). There is a lack of coherence in regards to the foundation phase pedagogy when it came out originally, so practitioners were using sociocultural, and constructivist approaches rather than one clear approach (Siraj and Kingston 2017).

Welsh government (2017) talks about the literacy and numeracy framework (LNF) and mention that it became a statutory requirement within the curriculum for all schools and settings by 2015, the framework was created in order to help practitioners raise children's literacy and numeracy skills, which falls under the language and mathematical areas of learning. The framework was designed to encourage practitioners to provide opportunities for literacy and numeracy learning into children's continuous, enhanced and focussed provision and to help children self-assess, it was also in place to help practitioners observe and identify children's performances and notice any children who seem to require additional support in their learning however, when looking at a need for change in the curriculum, White wick

(2019) looks at the PISA scoring and mentions that Wales was the only country to score below the average OECD in reading, maths and science.

Donaldson (2015) states that even though the foundation phase curriculum was outdated and needed to be changed, he believed that this early year's curriculum was still a highlight of Welsh education and had a good foundation that the new curriculum could build upon. Welsh government (2015) agrees with this and states that the successful futures document is the start to an engaging 21st century curriculum which is shaped through international thinking allowing the next steps of the journey to begin. Waters (2016) states that in order for the new curriculum to work affectively, there is a need for a firm leadership to ensure there is a strong focus on the pedagogical development which lacked in the foundation phase curriculum.

Throughout this paper, there is evidence suggesting that there are positive points to take from this curriculum. However, there are also key issues that suggest change is needed in order for the curriculum in the early years to improve, key areas include the need for training to be provided to all practitioners that work in the early years and the need for practitioners to understand play as there has been a repetition throughout about practitioners lacking the understanding of what play is and what play based learning involves.

Section 2-

All children are unique and continuously learn whilst being resilient, confident and capable (department for education, 2022). Early education (2021) it is a Practitioners job to observe and gain an understanding of each and every child's development and progress, there is a need to plan, identify any additional support needed and nurture the next steps of children's learning in order for children to feel safe and valued.

Tierney, R. D. (2013) Talks about concerns regarding the fairness of educational assessment. It is known that in the early 20th century, tests were known as an injustice created by teachers as the judgements from teachers have a negative impact on children's self-image and approach to learning. She believes that the use

of assessment changes the dynamics of the classroom and can be difficult on diverse learners. Gaztambide-Fernandez & Parekh, 2017) believe that Assumptions of children's ability has been a recurrent issue of education inequity since education started, Historically, ability has been a known factor of who should attend public education and who should not, in this century it is still known as the decider of who should and should not access educational opportunities.

The aim of baseline assessment is to measure progress within the school and not look at the children's background. Alternatively, there are worries that the baseline is known to be at a disadvantage for children that have English as an additional language as well as children with additional learning needs (early education, no date). In addition to this, Parekh (2017) Talks about a study where they looked at the teachers perception of children's abilities through assessing them, they discovered that children with lower income backgrounds were given less complicated curriculum work by teachers because they assumed the children would need easier work, this showed that teachers formed an idea that children's culture relate back to their ability to learn. They add to this and mention that educators spoke in a fixed state when talking about children with lower ability, however they spoke in a more positive tone about children with higher ability's potential and intellectual levels. Welsh government (2022a) add to this and mention that schools believed that there was more of a focus on assessing children's skills very narrowly within the baseline assessment, focusing more on their ability rather than their enthusiasm to learn.

Teachwire (2023) mentions that the baseline assessment is in place to get to know children's prior abilities, this helps provide effective learning opportunities for them. They add to this and state that children like to have one to one time with their teacher. However, Parekh (2017) and Welsh government (2022) believe that assessments lead to children feeling stressed and unwell, affecting their ability to have a true reflection of their learning because they don't want to get it wrong and assessments seem like there is a lack of trust from educators. They also believe that actual ability of children may not be accurately shown through assessments such as the baseline assessment.

Department for education (2021) mention children learn to grow and become development through forming positive bonds because they can learn through being in enabling environments with adults who support them. However, Early education (no date) talks about the negative effects of baseline assessment and mentions that teachers miss out on key interactions and bonding Time with children as they are rushing to complete the 6 week time frame the baseline assessment requires, this results in children being labelled early on in their learning which can lead to problems as they get older. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2005) agrees with this and mentions that Baseline Assessments tend to be carried out by adults that have little knowledge of the child as they have not formed a bond with them yet.

In addition to this, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) talk about their findings from a study they conducted, the results showed that Baseline Assessment has had a big impact on the start of school in regard to teaching and curriculum. The study showed that the Baseline Assessment was more of a focus to the teachers rather than the children meaning they were more concerned to carry out evidence than focus on the children's wellbeing and care, statistics show that 59% of respondents believed that the assessment had a negative effect on the settling in stage for the first few weeks of joining school.

Early education (no date) mention that when considering the baseline assessments practicality, there's a need to remember that this form of assessment rules out the consideration that children joining reception can vary from 4 years to 4 years and 11 months, meaning that they can be at different stages of their development. Additionally, Siraj-Blatchford et al (2005) adds to this and mentions that children join schools at different ages meaning that the younger children are at risk of being early labelled.

Welsh government (2018) explain the main aims of the baseline assessment it to observe children to match up with the end of phase outcomes, this assessment allows practitioners to help identify potential delays in children from an early age ensuring support is always given to children who need it the most, this assessment provides information for all practitioners to guide children's learning. However, Roberts-Holmes, G. and Bradbury, A. (2016) mention that during a study on the effectiveness of the baseline assessment, 70% of practitioners mention that they believed the baseline assessment did not help them identify children with additional learning needs. Research from Chilvers (2002, cited in Siraj- Blatchford et al 2005) relates to this and suggests that assessment of a child's personal, emotional and social development should be included in the baseline assessment because well-being can have a large impact on the children's ability to learn.

Welsh government (2022a) mention that baseline can be used through observations, however they noticed that many schools stated that they needed to also set up

activities to ensure specific skills were observed that are less likely to be possible to be achieved through play. Practitioners mentioned that the focussed tasks were being used to save time as natural observation was known as a time pressure to complete.

Welsh government (2022a) explains that an issue with baseline assessment can be that children from other language households are known to struggle with baseline because the outcomes can be lower for children that have to communicate a language that is not from their mother tongue. An example of this was that a practitioner mentioned low scores were a worry for parents with the worry their child had regressed in their development, making the families feel left out because of their backgrounds. Roberts-Holmes, G. and Bradbury, A. (2016) also mention that children with low scores, even if they make good progress will be seen as acceptable to remain in the lower ability category, This is known as an issue because the baseline is known to affect children with English as an additional language and children who receive free school meals because schools are still known to set targets and predict the children's capability because of the structure of the baseline assessment, this risks the worry of lower expectations of children as they continue to go up in the school because of what they knew from a very young age, resulting in long term difficulties and presumptions.

The short and long term benefits of outdoor play and the importance of practitioners providing opportunities of outdoor play

When working in the early years sector there is a need for practitioners to give children the opportunity to learn and play in multiple stimulating environments. When children experience this, they can thrive, their bodies and minds develop at a constant rate because they are learning through real life experiences and play. The outdoors is an ideal environment as it provides children with meaningful experiences because there is evidence to suggest that children prefer to play and learn in natural environments and tend to interact with other children in a more effective and efficient way, they will go on to use these key skills they continue to develop throughout their lives (Johnson, J. and Watts, A. (2018) and (Welsh government, 2022).

Johnson, J. and Watts, A. (2018) states that the outdoor environment can encourage social learning and it is a practitioner's job to encourage children to problem solve, communicate and experiment, this allows them to grow because they are able to correct their mistakes independently, Vygotsky (1986) also commented on the importance of social interaction for children to grow, he believed that children could develop on their learning and thinking through discussing their ideas and views with practitioners.

Welsh government (2022b) state that the outdoors is excellent for experiential learning as it provides endless opportunities for children to participate in risky and spacious play, this is said to encourage wonder and confidence, They believe that practitioners understanding the importance of the outdoor environment ensures they can support Childrens capability to develop on their holistic development, practitioners also need to ensure that they provide focused, continuous provision in the outdoor environment. . National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, n.d) agrees with this and states that children should be provided with opportunities to encourage them to learn the key principles of their holistic development.

Froebel trust (no date) talks about the Froebelian trust and states that the special moments children have can shape their futures. The importance of play is key to a child's well-being, each child is different and focussing on what a child enjoys and likes is the best foundation to start with, children are known to develop significantly through doing things by themselves. This goes in line with Waters (2016) comment about self-worth and self-esteem being at the core of the foundation phase.

Babies should be given the experience to access the outdoors in early years settings. (Johnson, J. and Watts, A. (2018) states that the Outdoors offers a more exciting and stimulating environment, by taking babies outside practitioners are able to support their growth by encouraging them to develop on their senses, when babies begin to crawl, they are able to move to what they want to look at allowing them to experiment by themselves with textures and discover new objects and things around them, as babies and children explore with elements such as sand, water and snow it allows them to develop confidence to continue experimenting and

discovering for themselves. They believe it is vital that practitioners to encourage outdoor play as this provides children with endless chances for exploration.

Through outdoor play, children can explore ideas, risk take, Problem solve and make decisions by themselves allowing them to understand themselves and the world around them (waters, 2016). Welsh government (2022b) adds to this and talks about the curriculum for non-maintained settings and mention that the chances and experiences we offer children in the early years should be meaningful and special to each child, they should focus on the child's interests and encourage independence, wonder, risk and challenges. Practitioners should support this by supporting each individual child's progression journey. Practitioners need to ensure children can go to areas that allow them to gain a sense of curiosity in their surroundings making it easier for practitioners to observe and engage in children's play and learning. Welsh government (2017) states that practitioner's role consists of supporting, engaging and observing, they should then provide the children with opportunities to encourage children to engage with the world they live in, this can be done by taking children into the outdoors as children are known to behave and learn in a different way outdoors. Froebelian trust (no date) mention that when children experience the nature around them and their personal involvement in it, it allows them to learn about living things and begin to look at the bigger things in life such as sustainability and the climate around them. Welsh government (2022) mention that throughout education, children have the chance to learn about the world and nature and understand how they can prevent harming and damaging it, through learned experiences in the early years, children will learn a broad understanding about the importance of the climate and sustainability resulting in them having more positive actions in the decisions they make later on in life.

Welsh government (2015) States that within the foundation phase framework it is essential for children to have the chance to explore and investigate their surroundings, both indoors and outdoors. Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish (2015) and waters (2016) agree with this and talks about children's capability of sustained shared thinking and how it links back by having key interactions with adults and space to explore and investigate. The key issue surrounding this is mentioned by buenos and Dios (2017) where they state that practitioners be unsupportive and

affect children's development because they are worried about the hazards and risks that come with being outdoors, this can leave children stuck inside and feeling disconnected from the outside world. Are you ensuring the children in your care are able to have the opportunity to go outdoors and enhance their involvement in sustained shared thinking?

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