

Section 1

According to the Welsh Government, (2015). In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government began the implementation of a new holistic play-based learning curriculum for children aged three to seven called the Foundation Phase. The National Assembly for Wales, (no date) stated that the Foundation Phase is one of the changes presented by the Welsh Assembly Government in the One Wales Program. Its point was to change the way to deal with the training of 3 to 7-year-olds by giving a formatively proper educational plan, which is in agreement with the youngster's specific needs and interests. It places an accentuation on kids learning by doing. It gives small kids chances to increase direct encounters through play and dynamic contribution rather than by finishing practices in books.

This was a significant change from previous Key Stage 1 if the National Curriculum that was based on more formal teaching and assessing children to specific competences (Tyler, Rhys and Waldron, 2016). Therefore, this new curriculum was in line with NAFW (2003) who suggested that the introduction of formal learning for some pupils, in particular for the pupils who are not ready could result in children underachieving and attaining lower standards furthermore the pupils would not only lose confidence it could also cause pupils to lose the actual love for learning itself.

However, The Reggio Emilia approach, and Te Whariki, (as cited in Soler and Miller, 2003) does not tend to stick to the National Curriculum framework or any other regimented curriculum policy. It represents a localised, learner-targeted technique as an alternative to national centralised, uniform curricula. This context supports the Reggio Emilia method to espouse progressive and sociocultural perspectives of the child, without robust pressures from instrumental and vocationally oriented perspectives of curriculum, mastering, and pedagogy. When taking this approach it is always considered that the child has knowledge, social being and rights, the teacher in this scenario will always be seen as a collaborator and the teacher is considered as a collaborator and co-learner with the child, whose function is to guide, aide and inspire studies.

Therefore, the Foundation Phase was designed on a developmentally appropriate pedagogy which balanced child-led and adult-led learning, the Foundation Phase was cross curricular built on interlinking areas of learning, delivered through indoor and

outdoor play (Waters, 2016). In doing so the Foundation Phase encouraged learning where children could be creative and imaginative making learning more enjoyable and more affective. (Crynallt Primary School, no date).

This supported the broader aim of the Government which was to ensure that all children had the best possible start in life for their future growth and development (Welsh Government, 2015). The Welsh Government wanted children to have access to a comprehensive range of education, learning, personal and social skills. The Welsh Government policy and legislation is also underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (no date) it is considered that children's rights approach should take in to account the physical, mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from any abuse, unfair treatment victimisation and manipulation.

According to Article 31 as stated in Children's Commissioner of Wales, (2018) play, leisure, sporting, and cultural activities were needed for the children to access. The Government also wanted children to be heard and listened to and to be treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised. However, the Children's Society, (2020) stated that children needed to have a safe home and community that supported their physical and emotional well-being and that they would not be disadvantaged by any type of poverty.

The Donaldson, (2015) report says the execution of the Foundation Phase will be accessible in three main parts. Firstly, the methods used by the teaching workforce had to change, this would be implemented at training level and was designed to specifically improve teaching and to improve learning environments. The second section outlines the changes to the curriculum itself; this section was implemented to guide all involved to implement the new practices. The final section concentrated on the 'learning' impact on pupils and the challenges that they may face.

The Foundation Phase was intended to have a wide range of impacts on pupils and their learning, this also including attainment, attendance, classroom wellbeing and involvement and parents and children themselves (Taylor et al., 2015).

According to Bryn Hafod Primary School, (no date) The Foundation Phase was intended to allow children to be given more opportunities to discover the world around them and understand how things work. This would be discovered by children taking part in practical activities that are relevant to their developmental stage. The Welsh

Government, (2018) states that children would be challenged with open-ended questions and given opportunities to explore and share their ideas for solving problems.

However, according to Welsh Government, (2015) they stated that the implementation of the Foundation Phase may not have been consistent. Welsh Government, (2015a) states the importance on how numeracy and literacy can be taught by using a variety of pedagogical methods and some of these methods can complement each other.

The Foundation Phase places great emphasis on children learning by 'doing'. Young children will be given more opportunities to gain first-hand experiences through play and active involvement rather than just using books. They will be given time to develop their speaking and listening skills and to become confident in their reading and writing abilities.

The independent body, Estyn, (2011) and Donaldson, (2015) acknowledged that many practitioners made better use of the outdoors environment. Children's reading, writing, welsh language, creativity and information technology were not being developed and implemented enough within the outdoor environment.

However, (Humberstone and Stan, 2011) states that some Early Years practitioners may have their own personal opinions concerning play and knowledge within the use of the outdoors. Some practitioners who may have an air of superciliousness in relation to authority may have a negative attitude towards learning as they may be unlikely to embrace an education that can recognise learning from a child's perspective and see any value in the outdoor learning.

The Welsh Government, (2018) says play is one of the main ways in which children learn. They recognise the importance of play in children's lives. 'The Welsh Government places great value on play and its importance in the lives of children in our society. They also believe that play is essential for the growth in children's cognitive; physical; social and emotional development.'

Another challenge for implementing the curriculum according to Knight, (2011) and Glazzard, (2014) that there is a lack of specific training in Wales for practitioners within the Foundation Phase, including Senior Management and this has led to unproductive educational settings.

However, when practitioners were asked what made it difficult to evaluate children in the outdoors, they recognised a few things, such as, staff attitude and experience, use of appropriate resources, the degree of risk involved, weather conditions, staffing ratios, and changes to curriculum policy which emphasise the formal assessment of children. (Davies and Hamilton, 2018).

One of the major concerns was the allocation of the funding with regards to implementation within the Foundation Phase. The Welsh Government, (2015b) stated 46% of practitioners in the funded non maintained settings and 43% of school head teachers said that funding for the Foundation Phase had not been adequate.

The Foundation Phase was developed by The Welsh Government, (2018) based on several early years theoretical contexts including Piaget (as cited in Pentagon, 2018) who viewed play as integral to the development of intelligence in children. Piaget theory of play argues that as the child matures, their environment and play should encourage further cognitive and language development. Therefore, play can help children to develop and extend their language and communication skills. (Early Years Careers, 2017). Piaget, (as cited in Pentagon Play, 2018) stated that play allows them to creative, to investigate and explore different materials, and gives them opportunities to experiment and predict outcomes. Play can also help children to develop their confidence, self-motivation and control of their thoughts and actions.

Vygotsky, (1978, as cited in Pentagon Play, 2018a) states that children's cognitive development happens from social interaction and guided learning from peers and knowledgeable others, a zone of proximal development. Vygotsky also stated that the environment surrounding children will influence how they see things and think about things and adults have an important part to play alongside children's learning and development.

In contrast to Vygotsky, Piaget maintains that cognitive development in children comes from independent exploring in which children construct knowledge of their own and Piaget believed children would only learn when they are ready. (getrevising, 2017).

According to Play Schemes, (2019) Experiential play within education also allows children to test their abilities, use initiative, take risks, and make mistakes without fear or failure. It is through play that children learn the skills of negotiation and the art of forming relationships with their peers.

Froebelle and the Scandinavian approach of outdoor play was given a high status in the Foundation Phase. (Waters, 2016). However, the focus on a play-based curriculum was also a challenge for some settings and practitioners. (Welsh Government, 2015c). For example, Waters, (2015) suggests that training gives practitioners consistent information on what a play-based curriculum is, but training did not always happen. Therefore, how play-based could be interpreted very differently between practitioners.

Also, Taylor et al., (2015) suggests that developing a play-based curriculum for children at the end of year 2 would be a positive change, however, the Government still focuses on standardisation test and this creates confusion for all involved within the foundation phase of the early years.

Welsh Government, (2015d) highlighted this with evidence that play-based learning decreases in year 1 and 2 in some settings.

The Welsh Government are now introducing the Successful Futures Curriculum, based on the new Donaldson Report, (2015). This report says the implementation of the new 2022 curriculum and the Foundation Phase will be offered in three key parts. Firstly there will be changes to the training was necessary to develop teaching and learning settings, the second section will focus on the changes within the curriculum and to influence all involved to adapt to the new curriculum, and thirdly, to concentrate on the learning impact on pupils and to support and guide the challenges the pupils may face.

Due to some of the challenges faced by the current Foundation Phase in terms of consistency and delivering a play based curriculum and the research carried out by the Foundation Phase stocktake, it was the Welsh Government, (2015e) which highlighted the significance of having highly trained staff in order to implement the three new key parts.

As Greenfield's School comments:

The Foundation Phase places great emphasis on children learning by doing. Young children will be given more opportunities to gain first-hand experiences through play

and an active involvement rather than having to use books to discover. (Greenfield Primary School, 2014).

Welsh Assembly Government, (2009) states children will be given time to develop their speaking and listening skills and to become confident in their reading and writing abilities.

The new Curriculum, (2015) has been planned to focus on experiential learning, for active learning and to develop each child's skills and understanding, children's attitude to their learning, promote self confidence and form new friendships and experience the outdoor learning environment.

The Welsh Government, (2018) states that children will learn through play. The Welsh Government recognises the importance of play for children and their development. The Welsh Government also believe that play is essential to children's growth, their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.

The Welsh Government, (2018) states that the Foundation Phase is built on children learning through play, this can be a powerful tool for children learning within education. Unicef, (2018) agrees that one of the most important ways of learning gaining knowledge and new skills is through play. And for this reason, Unicef agrees giving children the opportunities to discover hands on learning through play is the core for an effective pre- primary and primary programme.

Section 2

The Foundation Phase was shaped using evidence from early years programs, Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, and Te Whariki in New Zealand. (Welsh Government, 2014). The Foundation Phase is underpinned by theories of learning that develops with a clear emphasis on the single child and emphasises the socio-cultural beliefs of enablement and play in children's learning (Maynard et al., 2013). As a result, it promotes a play-based approach to teaching and learning. However, the Foundation Phase differs from these international affinities and their correlated theories of erudition (Waters, 2016).

Outdoor provision and outdoor learning are the experiences that children have when being outside during curriculum time, albeit within the school grounds or areas outside of the school environment. These are activities that have been planned by practitioners intended for children's learning. (Bilton and Waters, 2016).

Within the structure there are repeated allusion pertaining to age-appropriate learning and skills and age-appropriate contexts (Welsh Government, 2015). There is a comparable level of ambiguity in respects to the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy assessments for all children aged five to seven in the Foundation phase.

(Dweck, 1991) When children think they can get smarter, they understand that effort makes them stronger. So, they put extra time and effort, and that leads to higher achievement.

Each pupil is given an age-adjusted score, which shows how the child performed against an average child of the same age in terms of months. Not only does this mean that 50% of all pupils will always be below average, but it also reinforces the idea that learners, even as young as five years old, are expected to reach levels specific ability based on their age rather than their stage of development (Taylor, et al, 2016). However, this way of assessing is not fair because every child is unique. Not all children develop in the same way and at the same time. This is true for children with additional learning needs who will find this way of assessment challenging and therefore disadvantaged (Bornman et al., 2010).

Neaum, S. (2016) states that another way of assessing children is by practitioners observing. Observation should be implemented across all areas of learning including in the outdoor area. According (Bento and Dias, 2017) through outdoor play the children can experiment, solve problems, think creatively, and engage with others. On the other hand, as practitioners observe the outdoors, they get a true reflection of the child, which means they can educate around their needs.

Every child deserves an education that suits their needs. The detailed features and the attributes of the outdoor environment provide for different play opportunities that can be repeated indoors. Observation of children provides a clear focus on the individual child and is not tied to chronological age (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009). The Welsh Government, (2014) agrees that through observation and

assessment this will play a vital and valuable role in everyday practice within the Foundation Phase. Not only will this help practitioners to assess the skills developed, by watching and listening to children, this will help the practitioners to understand how, why, and where they learn.

The observational approach is broadly related to Piaget's (1952) construction theory of learning because the purpose supports the child's learning and development. Unfortunately, according to research (Davies and Hamilton, 2016) teaching assistants are the ones most likely to use the outdoors to assess children.

Davis and Hamilton, (2016a) also suggests the need for broader training opportunities for practitioners on planning for learning and assessment in the outdoors. With imaginative planning, there is no reason why collective considerations of all areas of learning within the early years' curriculum, cannot be done as successfully outdoors as indoors.

Teachers tend to do more formal assessments indoors. This is supported by Estyn's findings (2011). It shows that teachers rarely carry out assessments of children's learning outdoors. Therefore, this shows that they do not track the progress children make in developing their outdoor skills well enough. As stated in the Foundation Phase Framework children are supposed to spend more time outdoors (Welsh Government, 2015) as teachers do not go out to observe the children it means that important milestones may be missed.

Some schools in Wales follow the Cornerstones scheme. Cornerstones is a scheme that helps primary schools plan, deliver, and manage their curriculum (Cornerstones, 2020). This scheme is great for saving practitioners time in their planning and this also presents wonderful challenges to use in all areas of learning that fit with the class theme. However, what happens is that the challenges posed in the areas are specific challenges that have been prepared for the children and the children are assessed on the skill within the challenge in the learning area. However, this does not follow the child's interest. It is the adult who decides. This method of assessment has not been created using evidence from the Te Whāriki program. The Te Whāriki programme is more open. The learning takes place in the interaction with the other children and with an adult. (Blaklock, 2010).

The practitioner gains a good understanding through speaking and observations of the child's background, interests and individual skills development. The documentation also shows that practitioners help your child continue to develop and expand in these areas Lee, (2017, as cited in Education Business, 2020). The initial intention of the Foundation Phase in Wales was not to drive the curriculum through assessment but through active learning, play and experiential learning, with a strong emphasis on using the outdoors (DCELLS 2008). However, the attributes of the environment are strongly influenced by the characteristics of the staff. (Bilten and Walters, 2016).

Section 3



(The Conservation, 2020).

Forest School and Outside Learning

July 18th, 2020 by Rhian Smith

During my childhood I was very much outdoors for most of the time. I was happiest when I was outside with my friends, surrounded by nature, playing rough and tumble and feeling free. I remember going on woodland walks with our two dogs and going camping with my family. I remember making potions with flower petals endlessly trying

to come up with something that smelled remotely like perfume from a shop. There were computer games available, but they did not really interest me. Living in a small village where we had fields all around our house whilst growing up, I could just take myself off to whenever I pleased at quite a young age and explore. It did wonders for my soul. I never wandered so far that I could not find my way home. This is quite a different picture to the freedom children experience today things are a little different in today's world. I am sure everyone reading this would remember outside adventures when they were young, even on school trips they were always outside and how much fun were they? How much learning happened during those times?

The introduction of Forest School began in the U.K in the mid-1990's. Forest School is based on a Scandinavian idea that considers a child's interaction with nature to be imperative. Forest Schools focused on educating children about the world around them. (Forest Research, 2020). However, I did not discover Forest School until 2012 whilst I was on a course with work on 'discovering children's play within the outdoors'. I have recently been inspired to find out more about it since doing my Early Years degree and from one of our lecturers Glenda Tinney and her love of the outdoors in early education.

There is an increasing number of Forest Schools in the U.K. Some are privately run, while others are supported by local education authorities (Local Education Authorities). (Forest School Wales, 2020). Wales leads the UK in its development of learning outdoors and the Foundation Phase, the outdoors is the ideal environment for experiential learning. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009a). Forest school introduces a whole new dimension to teaching and learning, with new experiences for both the children and teachers. (Early Years Careers, 2017).

How do Forest Schools and Outdoor Learning work?

Outdoor Learning and Forest Schools are the same teaching system. However, they have some differences that should be understood especially by practitioners and parents of learners because these two groups of individuals make direct actions and choices that affect the children. (Forest School, 2019).

At a Forest School you have a Leader and a group of children who would visit the same woodland area each day over a long period of time, they build a relationship with the area and grow a sense of ownership, they look after it and develop their imaginations through play with each visit. Within the forest school as the seasons change so does the children's perception of nature around them alter. Children begin with some structured activities to learn how things work for example setting up a fire etc. Adults help and support children develop their problem-solving skills which is following a Reggio Emilia approach to education and focussing on interactions between adults and children. (Reggio Emilia Approach, 2020). Then after time children will take the lead and develop their play using skills they have previously learnt.

Outdoor Learning within education inspire, encourage, and develop the curiosity of children to understand something new and learn. Whilst both outdoor learning and Forest Schools do promote that sentiment from learners, forest schools focus on the individual learner. (Forest Research, 2020a).

When children are playing outdoors it can be anything from the local park to walking around the trees, or even going to the beach. However, I think parks and playgrounds not only restrict children to one area but also the way they play and the language that comes with it. (Victoria, 2019).

What are the benefits of Forest School and outdoor Learning?

Research by O'Brian and Murrey, (2006) shows that forest school gives children increased self-esteem and self-confidence through taking ownership of the environment around them and being in control of their movements. However, outdoor play allows development in all areas; physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially (Mainella, Agate and Clark, 2011). Alexandra Louis, (2018) states that physically, children can use all their muscles and develop gross and fine motor skills by building and climbing, cognitively, they solve problems, emotionally they develop resilience and determination, and socially, they work together to overcome obstacles or by playing together alone. It improves social skills and language and communication skills by working as a team to create amazing things while problem solving. Becoming more independent and making decisions and assessing risk for themselves.

Through forest school children can learn about conservation and sustainability from first-hand experiences within the setting and develop the appreciation for nature which inevitably encourage children to help the planet in the long term.

Welsh Assembly Government, (2009b) states the outdoors is the ideal environment for experiential learning, because it offers unique opportunities to be creative, for children plenty of space to move around, to be noisy and to take risks. The outdoors has weather, sounds, smells, and textures which can enrich and enhance a child's learning environment. Henley, (2010) agrees that children need to interact with nature, and many have mentioned the benefits it has on child development. Ben Kastly (TEDx talks, 2014) refers to nature as a solution, because playing outdoors aids mental health and happiness (Moyle, 2012). A child has the right to play as set out in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This is important to remember as we can sometimes forget this and stop children playing because of the business of everyday life.

The world may be different now compared to when I was young but there is still a need for children to be outside, to play freely, embracing risk and connecting with the environment and nature. More and more schools are recognising this with the introduction of forest school. I am so passionate about outdoor learning and I imagine a world where schools are mainly based outdoors. This is my hope for the future.

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