

Enabling learning

This section has been developed to support senior leaders and practitioners in schools and settings in the planning, designing and implementing of a pedagogically appropriate curriculum for all learners.

Part of

Designing your curriculum

Introduction

This 'Enabling learning' section of Curriculum for Wales guidance has been developed to support senior leaders and practitioners in schools and settings in the planning, designing and implementing of a pedagogically appropriate curriculum for all learners. It may also be used as a tool to support evaluation of the quality and impact of curriculum design on learner progress. It will be of particular interest to those working with learners who are in the period of learning leading to Progression step 1 ('this period of learning').

The value of this period of learning should not be underestimated. It should be thought of as the gateway to the **statements of what matters** in the six areas of learning and experience (Areas) and the **descriptions of learning** at Progression step 1. It provides the firm foundation that all learners need to support development, at their own pace, towards realising the **four purposes** of the curriculum.

The following guidance in this section focuses on the key principles that are essential for holistic and meaningful learning for all learners during this period. Fundamental to this are three 'enablers', identified in this guidance as:

- enabling adults
- engaging experiences
- effective environments

These enablers are interrelated and interdependent and the interplay between them is integral to teaching and learning across Curriculum for Wales. While the **twelve pedagogical principles** apply to all curriculum design, particular attention should be paid to the following key features, which are essential for this period of learning:

- play and play-based learning
- being outdoors
- observation
- authentic and purposeful learning

When designing a curriculum, the practitioner's knowledge and understanding of child development is essential. The focus of teaching and learning should include the traditional areas of child development, expressed here as the following five developmental pathways:

- belonging

- communication
- exploration
- physical development
- well-being

The pathways are child-centred and are interdependent, having equal value in supporting overall development and progress. Development within and across the five pathways will be dependent upon the quality of the interactions between the practitioner and the learner, and the learning experiences and environments that are created.

Realisation of an appropriate curriculum should ensure progression from the pathways through to the **descriptions of learning** at Progression step 1 for all learners.

The role of the enablers

The enablers described in this guidance are there to support all learners in this period of learning. Practitioners working with learners with additional learning needs (ALN) will also benefit from using this guidance to support one or more aspects of development.

Practitioners in schools and settings should use this guidance to explore the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of curriculum design for this period of learning. To inspire and challenge children and young people in their learning, practitioners should focus particularly on the quality and impact of the interplay between the three enablers.

Enabling adults

The role of the adult is integral to all learners’ progress, but is particularly significant in this period of learning. It is the enabling adult who sets the expectation for learning by creating emotionally safe environments that support learners to begin to express and regulate their feelings and behaviours in positive ways. They are consistent in their care, and model compassion and kindness. They support learners to cope with uncertainty and change, preparing them to manage transitions and changes in daily routines.

To deepen their understanding of the developmental needs of learners, it is essential for adults to observe, notice and respond sensitively to those learners. They should make decisions about when and how to intervene to support learners in constructing meaning. They should encourage and support learners to begin to work collaboratively to solve problems.

Enabling adults help and support learners to begin to recognise that others can have thoughts and feelings that are different from their own. They respond to learners’ interests, likes and dislikes, and respect their preferences and choices, supporting them to have a voice and make decisions.

Enabling adults help make strong connections between the learner's home and wider community, strengthening the learner's sense of belonging through embracing past and present experiences. They value and respect inclusivity and learners' identity within their community and the wider, multi-cultural Wales. They promote the unique identity of the Welsh language, culture and heritage of Wales. Enabling adults encourage learners to begin to make connections between languages, including English and Welsh, and alternative methods of communication.

Enabling adults are responsive, tuning into and interpreting learners' communication through actions, words and behaviours, and responding sensitively to support understanding. They develop learners' confidence in communicating with others by valuing their attempts to express thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions. They show understanding that learning to communicate is a different process for every individual and that learners acquire and develop skills at different rates.

Enabling adults create an environment that is [communication rich](#), modelling multiple ways of expression. They support learners' understanding through skilful interactions, expanding on learners' existing knowledge to support and encourage them in making connections with people, places and things. They model appropriate use of context-specific language and concepts.

It is essential for enabling adults to support learners' skills development through varied experiences and opportunities. It is the role of the practitioner to recognise opportunities to make the most of cross-curricular connections that draw on learners' previous knowledge and experiences. They maintain quality of provision, and adapt their plans to meet the needs and interests of all learners.

Enabling adults model a joyful approach to learning, using learners' curiosity to make best use of [teachable moments](#). This can support learners to develop resilience, independence and confidence by encouraging them to take calculated risks and to challenge themselves.

Engaging experiences

Engaging experiences should promote learners' independence, offering challenge and the opportunity to experience success along the learning journey. They should provide opportunities for deep-level involvement and uninterrupted active learning, and be rooted in real-life, authentic situations.

Experiences can include learners' own choices or emerge from local or current interests. They should support holistic child development, helping learners to make connections between the Areas and across the curriculum.

Engaging experiences should respect and value the uniqueness of every learner and their families. They should reflect and celebrate the two official languages of Wales, and its rich culture and heritage.

Engaging experiences should reflect the diversity of culture in local, national and international contexts. Experience of different languages and cultures should be offered in sensitive and meaningful ways that give purpose to learning. These experiences should reinforce learners' own identity, and develop and broaden their understanding of the richness and diversity of Wales, past and present.

Engaging experiences are essential to supporting learners to develop social and communication skills. Learners need experiences that help them build emotional resilience and they should be given time and support to recognise their feelings and the feelings of others. Experiences should be carefully planned to develop learners' attention and listening skills in a variety of contexts, both indoors and outdoors.

Engaging experiences will help learners to notice and develop their understanding of [symbolic representation](#), and support them to recognise that they carry meaning. There should be opportunities for learners to experiment with a range of mark-making instruments and materials across a range of contexts, as they begin to attribute meaning to their marks. Learners need practical experiences that encourage them to use simple mathematical vocabulary when exploring quantity, number, shape and pattern. Engaging experiences should support learners' cognitive development, for example allowing opportunities for comparing, sorting and classifying living and non-living things. Learners need opportunities to explore and experiment with digital technology for a range of purposes.

All learners should have experiences that promote enjoyment in physical activity. They need regular access to a wide range of physical experiences indoors and outdoors, using a range of equipment and resources. They should have experiences that allow them to use a wide range of tools and equipment with increasing control.

These experiences will support learners in developing an awareness of their bodies and of co-ordination, core strength and balance, as well as gross and fine motor control. They will help learners to gauge and manage risk, supporting them to think, plan and make decisions about their movements and actions.

Experiences should provide learners with multi-sensory opportunities to respond to and be inspired by the creativity of others, and support learners to communicate and express themselves creatively. They should provide opportunities to make and choose from a range of materials with different properties, and encourage learners to develop [skills integral to the four purposes](#), particularly their creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Engaging experiences can support learners to find out about their environment, and develop an appreciation of the world around them and the need to take care of it. They can support learners to develop an understanding of how things work, to actively solve problems and develop an awareness of causality. Learners should be able to explore how they and objects move in space and should experience language that describes and directs movement. Engaging experiences should encourage learners to notice, think about and comment on their immediate environment and local surroundings, including natural phenomena.

Effective environments

The environment, indoors and outdoors, should be central to learners' authentic experiences. During this period of learning, exploration of the environment is a key driver for development. Through exploration of their environment, in the local community and beyond, learners begin to develop a sense of belonging and an appreciation of the world around them.

In realising their curriculum, practitioners should consider not only the physical spaces but also the emotional climate that support learners to achieve their potential. These environments should provide for wide and varied experiences that allow learners to express themselves physically, creatively and imaginatively, and allow them to follow their interests, independently or with others.

Effective environments should celebrate and value diversity and demonstrate inclusivity. They should promote a sense of belonging so all learners feel valued and represented. These environments should be [communication rich](#) and focus on promoting emerging communication skills and developing them further, ensuring that learners have access to a broad range of resources to help build vocabulary and facilitate [concept development](#). An effective environment will scaffold the development of learners' understanding of mathematical concepts, visual and practical opportunities for learners to experience number, shape and pattern in authentic contexts, both indoors and outdoors. Effective environments should use digital media and a range of other resources to enhance learning in developmentally appropriate ways.

Effective environments should offer opportunities for learners to experience a sense of awe and wonder; they should ignite curiosity about the living and non-living world, motivating them to explore, solve problems and develop their creativity and critical thinking skills. The environment should also offer time and space for both contemplation and reflection, as well as opportunities for learners to develop gross and fine motor skills, as they challenge themselves physically.

There should be flexibility and variety within the environment, offering risk and challenge, and supporting learners to develop resilience, confidence and independence. An effective environment will also support mastery, by allowing frequent and extended opportunities to practise, rehearse and embed taught skills in a wide range of contexts.

For further guidance on effective pedagogy, see [Pedagogy](#) page.

Child development and curriculum design

Progression is at the heart of curriculum design. All learners in Wales have a right to be valued and well supported to make progress throughout their learning journey through experiences that are important and meaningful to them. This journey should meet individual needs and be at a pace that is appropriate to each individual learner.

In order to include all learners, regardless of their age, background, needs or ability, practitioners should consider progress from a holistic viewpoint by applying the principles of child development when they plan, design and implement a curriculum. It is important to acknowledge that there are incremental steps that learners take as they progress, in all areas of development. Practitioners should understand these steps when planning across a curriculum and give learners time to practise, develop and refine aspects of their learning.

Practitioners should explore learners' motivations, aspirations and interests to develop an understanding of the needs of each individual, incorporating the voice of the learner in planning. Taking a [learner-centred](#) approach, working collaboratively with families and [other partners](#) involved in the learner's progress, can support holistic development.

Development of a responsive curriculum can empower learners to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to learn successfully and realise the [four purposes](#). With skilful and sensitive support from those who know them well, learners become more engaged, capable and independent participants and contributors in the world around them. They become healthier and more confident to interact with a diverse range of people, places and experiences. This prepares them well for the next stage in their learning journey. Over time, at their own level and pace, learners build relationships, develop skills for life and ignite personal interests that enable them to reach their potential.

The rate of acquisition of skills and knowledge will differ for all learners, as well as differing across an individual learner's progress. Practitioners should use observation and knowledge of child development to plan learning experiences that support and challenge all learners to develop towards realising the [four purposes](#). As learners reach developmental [milestones](#), they should become more sophisticated in their ability to [self-reflect](#) and [self-regulate](#), and develop greater competency across a wider range of skills. They should acquire a greater breadth and depth of knowledge and become more able to use and apply what they have learned. Consequently, they should begin to make secure connections across the [statements of what matters](#) within the Areas.

Curriculum design should focus on enabling learners to navigate a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar experiences, to refine and apply skills, and to broaden and deepen knowledge, allowing learners to make connections and transfer learning to new contexts.

The developmental pathways

When designing and implementing a curriculum, practitioners should consider the following five developmental pathways, which are fundamental to the development of all learners within this period of learning. Practitioners can use them to ensure learners are supported to make progress at their own pace and in their preferred learning environment. This is important for all learners, but particularly so for younger learners and learners who may have ALN or uneven developmental profiles.

Holistic use of the five pathways in curriculum design will support authentic and purposeful learning, and the realisation of progression for all learners within and across all Areas.

Belonging

Belonging is essential to a sense of happiness and well-being. It shapes a learner's sense of who they are and who they can become, and should underpin the ethos of all schools and settings. During this period of learning, children and young people begin to develop a sense of how they fit into the many groups and communities to which they belong, and a sense of their importance within them. Schools and settings should develop an ethos that fosters strong and secure relationships, as those are vital to a strong sense of belonging for all learners.

A strong sense of belonging can help to create positive feelings of connection between the learners and their home, as well as their school or setting, and which can also be extended to their community and to Wales and the wider world. Schools and settings that value, celebrate and build upon past and present experiences from the learner's home and their community, can strengthen a sense of belonging. Schools and settings should ensure learners feel safe and secure within their environment, and show genuine care and provide emotional support.

Communication

Communication is fundamental to a learner's development. It is vital to the foundation of relationships and essential for learning, play and social interaction. Communication involves developing attention, listening and understanding skills, alongside vocabulary and expressive skills.

The amount, and type, of language learners experience and interact with can have a marked effect on their communication development. Practitioners should make the most of interactions to support learners to understand and make themselves understood. Learners acquire and develop skills at different rates, and practitioners can support their language development by modelling active listening and speaking for different purposes.

When designing a curriculum, practitioners should provide an environment that supports learners to express and communicate their needs, thoughts and feelings. Developing effective

communication, language and literacy skills is important to self-expression, to the development of strong social relationships and to learning more generally.

Exploration

Learners' curiosity about the world around them is a strong motivator for exploration. Practitioners should build on learners' curiosity during everyday occurrences, to stimulate awe and wonder. Learners should have the opportunity to explore and investigate by themselves, and with others, in order to share their delight in new knowledge or skills, and to learn from each other, and celebrate their achievements and those of their peers. Learners should be encouraged to seek knowledge and skills that are both within and beyond their current capabilities. With appropriate support, they can focus attention for extended periods of time on things that are of interest to them. As their exploration develops, they can rehearse and practise skills and test [emerging theories](#), both alone and with others.

Learning involves the gradual development of skills, knowledge and competencies in increasingly complex ways. Inclusive environments, both indoors and outdoors, that provide time and opportunity to explore, play and investigate, and where adults are attuned to learners' interests, can support positive dispositions towards learning, as well as increasing knowledge and skills.

Physical development

Physical activity and movement are fundamental to the development of all learners and are linked to cognition and learning. Engaging in physical activities enhances a learner's sense of belonging and well-being and can support greater levels of concentration, motivation and memory, as well as support healthy bone and muscle development.

Practitioners should provide plenty of opportunities for movement and understand its important relationship to learning. As part of their development, all learners have a natural need to move, or be moved, and to move or manipulate objects. This involves both gross motor and fine motor manipulation. These motor movements become more refined and smoothly co-ordinated with time and opportunity. Repetition and variety are critical to development as learners begin to explore their increasing physical capabilities and develop increasing independence.

Well-being

Feeling connected, secure and safe is essential for positive well-being. Learners are influenced by the adults, experiences and environments they encounter. These three enablers should work together to provide learners with the opportunities to develop their emotional, social and physical health to create a strong sense of well-being.

Practitioners should create emotionally safe environments that support learners to begin to recognise and manage their feelings and behaviours in positive ways. They can also help

learners to begin to understand that actions have consequences.

Practitioners should provide opportunities for learners to develop secure attachments and relationships, so that they can feel confident in themselves and be better able to make choices, take risks, show greater resilience and independence, and participate positively in everyday activities.

First published 30 January 2023
Last updated 30 January 2023