

Early Years Curricula

According to HWB (2015a) and UNICEF (2018), within the Foundation Phase Curriculum, play-based approaches enable children to practise and integrate their learning. Play-based learning can be demonstrated in unique ways, depending on the age of the child and their individual needs, for example, child-led play, guided play and staff-led play. Play-based approaches and activities are essential for early years settings as the children develop cognitive, emotional and social skills. Children can learn, explore and experiment within their own education, enabling them to combine learning, experimenting with ideas, and developing essential life skills. Play within the Foundation Phase Curriculum is a structured and purposeful method of learning that accompanies the seven Areas of Learning to ensure the children are always meeting their individual abilities (Cambridge, 2025), (Estyn, 2019) and (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025a).

Whereas HWB (2025) and Welsh Government (2024) suggests that within the Curriculum for Wales, play-based approaches in an early year setting encourages vital techniques for a child's holistic development as they begin to promote creativity skills, problem-solving and social competence. During the progression of children, practitioners should encourage an inclusive practice that demonstrates high-quality, fun play experiences for every individual child. The Curriculum for Wales's developmental pathways produced by the Welsh Government, initiated by individual children, represents a child's right to experience and explore an environment where play is valued, both in itself and as part as learning techniques. Within each developmental pathway contents of a clear rationale capture the essence of what is vital to children's holistic development at each stage of life. This is to ensure all children thrive as practitioners recognise and understand the drive of purposeful play opportunities for all children to fulfil their individual needs. Children tend to thrive in inclusive environments, indoors and outdoors, and where there are open-ended, child-initiated opportunities to play, explore and investigate their surroundings. Within these inclusive environments, practitioners who are attuned to children's responses, interests and nonverbal cues can support positive interactions to learning as the children begin to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. as they aim to become ambitious, capable learners, creative contributors and confident individuals.

As stated above, both curricula's state that play-based approaches to learning enable children to succeed in social skills, creativity aspects, cognitive and emotional development as well as problem-solving understanding. However, it is also stated within the Foundation Phase Curriculum that play-based approaches to learning were its primary method of teaching as practitioners ensure hands-on exploration was guaranteed. Whereas the Curriculum for Wales continues to segment play-based learning into their scaffolding but includes a wider learning framework that involves six different Areas of Learning and Experience. This may suggest that due to the increase of areas of learning and development that practitioners need to ensure that play-based learning is still being promoted, otherwise, play-based learning will be less-likely for children when undertaking the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2023) and (Welsh Government, 2024a).

Nevertheless, they continue by suggesting that there are a variety of differences between the two curriculums. For example, within the Foundation Phase Curriculum the approach to play was at the centre of pedagogy, and became a facilitator to play-based exploration, whereas the Curriculum for Wales introduced broader learning experiences and staff-led learning, as well as structured learning which is also a priority within the teaching techniques of early year practices. These circumstances matter as play-based learning is shown as enhancing a child's social and cognitive development, encouraging children to be engaged individuals. However, Curriculum for Wales provides play as a meaningful part of structured learning as they engross within curiosity, indoors and outdoors (Welsh Government, 2024b) and HWB (no date).

HWB (2015b) says play can prompt children with ideas that enables them to experience, experiment, take risks, and make resolutions independently, in small and large groups. Learning through a play-based approach allows the children to develop an understanding of themselves as individuals and the world that they live in, all through first-hand experiences. Play within the Foundation Phase Curriculum encourages children to build upon or develop confidence with their self-image, self-worth and self-esteem throughout their explorations, as well as expanding their fundamental development to their intellectual thinking. However, to ensure the children can do this successfully, practitioners within the early years setting must understand how individual children develop, as they plan suitable activities through the Foundation Phase curriculum, considering every child's developmental needs and the skills that the children need to extend as they become confident, capable learners.

In comparison, the Curriculum for Wales states that play-based learning promotes holistic development, as well as enhancing creativity and problem solving. As a result of this, children can experiment and develop decision-making. Similarly, play-based approaches within the Curriculum for Wales allows children to investigate their interests and learn at their pace. The Curriculum for Wales also encourages creativity, curiosity and a “free flow” between indoor and outdoor environments while having a variety of opportunities to challenge themselves throughout their sustained thinking (Estyn, 2019) and (Welsh Government, 2024). According to Welsh Government (2023), play-based learning within an early years practice is vital as children foster holistic development, explore the outdoors, develop creativity and build upon problem solving. During this time, practitioners should assess and adapt their approaches to meet every child’s individual needs.

According to HWB (2015c) the Foundation Phase Curriculum aims to create an inclusive environment where children can learn creatively, fostering their development of communication, and self-esteem, as well as promoting and understanding different religions and cultures of all individuals. The Foundation Phase promotes play and hands-on learning as they aim to achieve positive attitudes towards learning and wellbeing, that contributes to a child’s overall development. The Foundation Phase helps all children flourish, no matter their stage of development or learning ability. It promotes discovery and independence as play is interwind within the learning experiences of all (The Mountain Cambridge School, 2025).

Hwb (2023) and Welsh Government (2024) says, similarly, within the Curriculum for Wales, inclusive environments are essential while supporting play-based learning as it ensures all individual children, no matter of their backgrounds, abilities or life experiences, will still be encouraged within participation, as practitioners support the children’s holistic development. The Curriculum for Wales emphasises belonging, communication, physical development and positive well-being, an inclusive environment will ensure all children thrive, as well as feeling safe and valued during play-based experiences.

However, according to Welsh Government (no date) and Ang (2013), there can be a variety of challenges while implanting the Foundation Phase Curriculum, for example, creating an inclusive, engaging environment requires a large space, materials and skilled staff, however, due to budget limitations this may not be possible for all settings which causes staff absences, lack of toys and the uneasy feeling towards children within the atmosphere of the

environment. Supporting individual learning needs while implementing the Foundation Phase Curriculum may also become a barrier as every individual child develops at their own pace, but within the Curricula there are developmental areas that the children ‘must’ meet by the year group shown. This can become a challenge for children with additional learning needs as providing personalised support within a group setting can be pressurising for the practitioners, as well as having the lack of funding to ensure all resources and equipment needed are considered for each individual child. Within the Curricula it is also apparent that all aspects of learning descriptions are age and school year based, however this may become a barrier for young children as there may be an eleven-month difference between two children within the same year group. Development Matters (2023) agrees with this statement as they suggest that “this guidance sets out the pathways of children’s development in broad ages and stages”. However, also suggests that assessment and accurate planning helps practitioners make informed, professional decisions about what an individual child needs to learn, and their next steps for their individual abilities.

According to HWB (no date) and ifs (2025) similarly to the Foundation Phase Curriculum, the Curriculum for Wales also has a variety of challenges during the process of implementing the curricula. Due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, education was hugely disrupted. This pandemic affected practitioners’ ability of implementing the Curricula to the best of their ability with only online sessions with children. Due to this, children tend to struggle with catching up with the information and lessons missed as resources and presentation could not be shown effectively. Within the Curriculum for Wales, progression is prioritised rather than the standardised testing of young children, this can become a concern for practitioners and leadership as the unknown achievement of children will be measured and compared in different ways. Like the Foundation Phase Curriculum, early year settings and schools are experiencing a lack of funding, materials and skilled staff who can develop upon their professional development. As a result of this, some settings may struggle without the funding aspect while trying to implement the Curriculum for Wales, this then results in children not being able to meet their individual needs and abilities successfully (Bera, 2020).

Veraksa, Colliver and Sukhikh (2022) suggests that evidence gathered suggests that the “efficacy of play to lead to academic learning outcomes but higher quality evidence mounting that “soft skills”, such as social, emotional, and interpersonal abilities, are associated with free play in homes and ECEC settings”. However, within this analysis suggests that

Vygotsky's view is learning through play shows positive aspects, but adult-led play can achieve "hard" skills, these include reading skills and mathematical understanding. Whereas Piaget's proposal was that children learn better through an active play-based structure as they progress throughout their developmental ages and begin to shape their knowledge and understanding of the world that they live in.

To conclude section one, as demonstrated above, the transition from the Foundation Phase Curriculum to the Curriculum for Wales reflects a broader perspective on play as the Curriculum for Wales moves away from play-based learning being the core pedagogy within the Foundation Phase, to play becoming a structured and meaningful area of learning. Within the Curriculum for Wales, play still ensures engagement, development and curiosity builds and naturally comes a process with clear goals and outcomes (Encyclopedia, 2018).

However, within all research gathered and gained, learning journeys are also a positive way to structure, personalise and incorporate learning within an early years setting. According to, Early Years Careers (2018) and Lancashire Personal Development Services (no date), learning journeys allow children to develop at their own pace, developing on their individual strengths as they track their learning journeys. Learning journeys helps children recognise their progress, as well as supporting practitioners to plan effectively, integrating social, cognitive and emotional development.

Assessing the Unique Child (1500 words)

Start off with a paragraph of ‘the unique child’ each child is unique, develop at different times, individual etc... home environments, cultures, background

Every child is unique and different in their own ways.

- **What do different curricula say about unique child - The Foundation Phase (WALES)**
- **New curriculum (WALES)**
- **Early Years Foundation Stage (ENGLAND)**

Te Whāriki (NEW ZEALAND)

Culture

Ability – slide 27 on unique child - Parekh, G. (2017) ‘The tyranny of “ability”’, *Curriculum Inquiry*. 47, pp. 337-343. [On-line]. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03626784.2017.1383755> [Accessed: February 17 2020].

1. Considering the concept of the 'Unique Child', critically evaluate methods of assessment, progress tracing and age or staged related development models within play-based curricula (1500 words). **30 marks**
- Can look at two different approaches of assessment and compare and contrast them (i.e age and stage assessments or learning stories against the new progression steps against the new curriculum for Wales – consider how this assessment process supports the unique child and why it is important that assessments reflect the individual development. You can consider culture and the fairness of assessment of each individual child. **Important point to remember is that this is a critical evaluation – look at what is good and what is bad about the chosen assessments.** What supports the unique child and what does not? What works well, and what doesn't work well? Does the assessment show a true reflection of the child's learning and development? If not, why not? What do we need to do instead to provide a true reflection of a child's development? Consider, could the chosen methods work in Wales? What could be needed to make them work in a setting in Wales? Consider barriers when using these types of assessments (ratio, class sizes, funding, access to professional learning).
Remember to support all points with research evidence! Critique and in-depth analysis!!!!

Assessment focus – evaluate the methods (2). What are their strengths, weaknesses, barriers etc...

Any method of assessment that you are interested in – age or stage related, development tracking – critically evaluate them – strengths and weaknesses and barriers

The assessments we tend to use – foundation phase assessment – don't consider backgrounds, culture or family life – does it take account of learning additional need? Etc... or is it just a benchmark – can this be a benefit?

What is the assessment process for foundation phase and curriculum for Wales and then say learning journals are best

2 assessment areas

Role of culture, growth and fixed mindsets

In Wales, we have moved from foundation phase to the progression steps of curriculum for Wales – these differ as progression steps aren't a certain age. Pick foundation phase – age and stage tracker and then compare to learning journals – are learning journals a better way of assessing a unique child- detailed, individual, positive aspects however, time, number of children and staffing ratios – can link to curricula by their guidance

assessment and unique child

Foundation phase profile

Curriculum for Wales – page full on assessment

How does all information talk about link to assessment

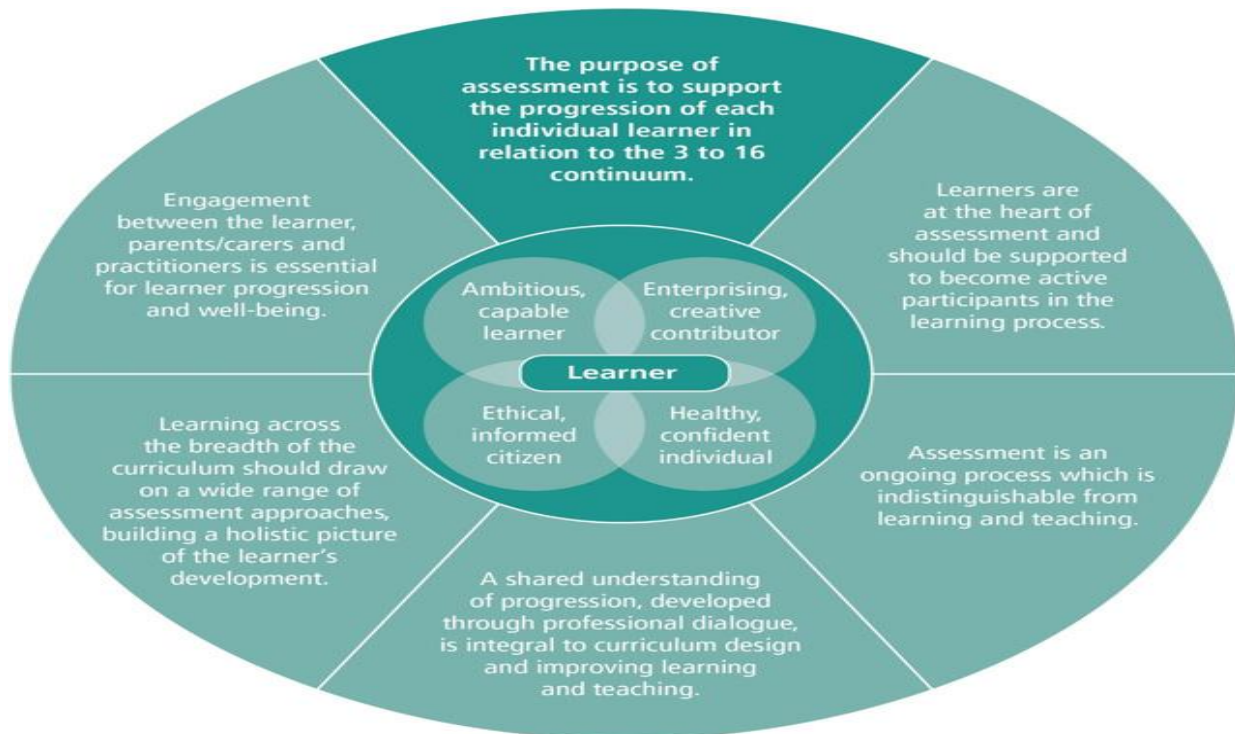
How does all information talk about link to unique child

What's good about the assessment, what is bad

What is assessment? - Assessment plays a fundamental role in ensuring each individual learner is supported and challenged accordingly. It should contribute to developing a holistic picture of the learner – their strengths, the ways in which they learn, and their areas for development – in order to inform next steps in learning and teaching. Assessment should not be used to make a one-off judgement on the overall achievement of a learner at a set age or point in time against descriptors or criteria on a 'best-fit' basis.

- Doesn't tell you about children's background or the whole holistic child

What should assessment be?



Curriculum for wales

- 4 purposes

Principles of progression

Progression steps – how do they differ to the foundation phase? Strengths and weaknesses

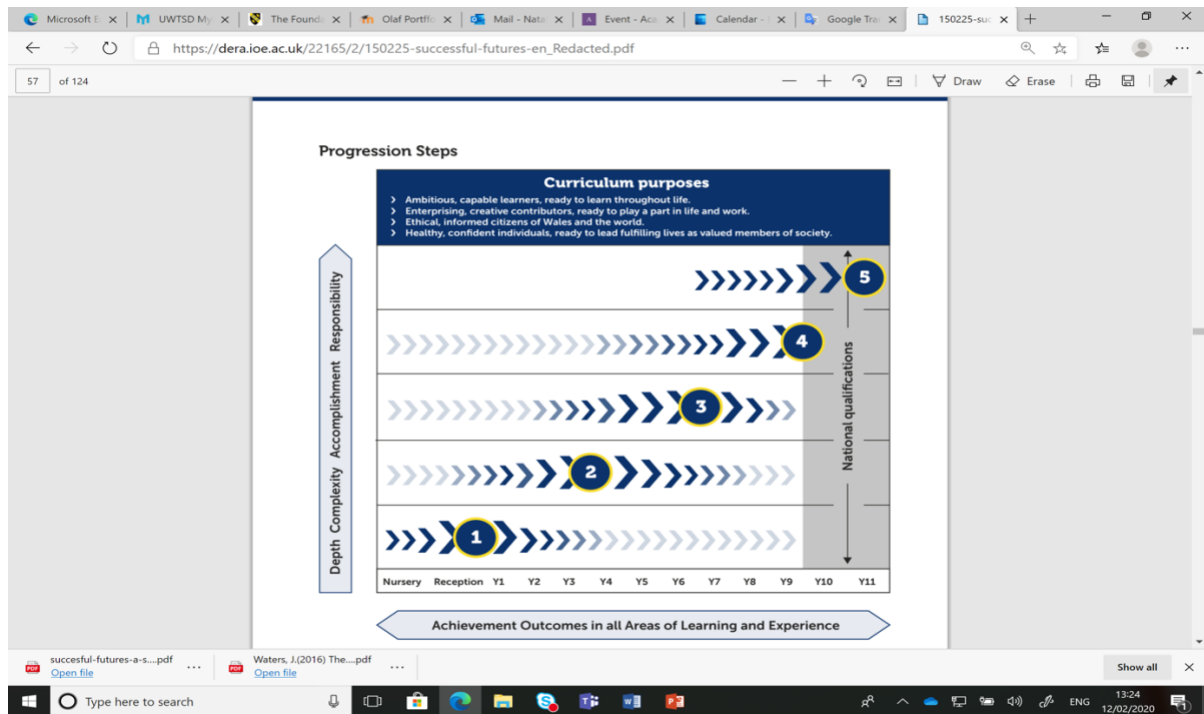
Progression steps – puts the individual child at the centre as it states “I can” – directly from the child, not linked to ages or school year, broad statements, fluid throughout progress – we aren’t looking for them to complete a stage and move on quickly, were looking to see if they have made progress.

How would you know if a child needs. Support? Foundation phase would show this clearly, however progression steps shows them not moving throughout progress

Katie Cornelius-Davies (2315284)

4,000 words

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How does the progress steps compare to foundation phase assessment – how do I measure that? Learning stories?

Recording Assessment

- learning stories
- short narratives
- one-page profiles
- learning journals
- short annotations
- digital apps, platforms or software

Learning stories - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpor4bXCf44>

Compare and contrast curriculum for wales and foundation phase. but the ideal assessment is... but in order for this to work...

Play-Based Curriculum Change Blog (1000 words)

1. Write a blog suitable for a professional publication (for example, Nursery World, Small Talk) linked to considerations needed when implementing a play-based curriculum/curriculum change (1000 words). **20 marks**
- Write a piece that you are passionate about related to early years curricula! Evidence and justify points! Research, evidence and theory! Write in an academic style. You need to convince the public and agree with what you are saying – choose one side of your opinion and convince others why you are right!

Blog- choose a topic that links to early years curricula- passionate about it – be more sided about your view – by the end of the blog you want the audience to support your view and see where you are coming from – don't do a however

Nursery world, small talk etc...

Vera Blog – examples

Still reference

critically evaluate, strengths, weaknesses, benefits, etc... all aspects of the child into account

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Katie Cornelius-Davies (2315284)
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