

Part 1

The Foundation Phase curriculum was introduced in Wales in 2010 by the Welsh Government. This curriculum was for children aged three to seven years old and was split into the seven areas of learning. The aim of the Foundation Phase was to deliver a curriculum that was experiential and promoted creativity, imagination and opportunities to build on prior knowledge, whilst being done through play (Welsh Government, 2015). As part of the 'Building a Brighter Future' plan by Welsh Government (2013) the Foundation Phase is highlighted as a crucial key in children's development. Stating that the level of quality education that a child receives is proven to make a significant impact on a child's future chances in life. Having the benefit of high-quality education early on helps children to build the solid foundations needed for life through being supported by skilled professionals in all areas of learning. This can particularly be an advantage for children who are living in low socio-economic areas and are seen as disadvantaged. This is agreed by Kingston and Siraj (2017) who states that there is evidence that children who receive high quality education and care are more likely to overcome inequalities linked to living in socially deprived areas and coming from generational disadvantage. However, Stoll, Harris and Handscomb (2012) state that high quality provision is not just about the type of curriculum that is delivered but it highly relies on the performance of the educator. The educator should be able to identify what level each individual is at and then the best steps to take to help them further their development. Professional development should be ongoing and allow the educator to have the skills to adapt their provision when needed.

Welsh Government (2014) published Professor Iram Siraj's official independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase listed twenty-three recommendations for improvement. The stocktake aims were laid out and looked at how well the Foundation Phase was being implemented across Wales. Nursery World (2014) discusses the report and the inconsistencies across Wales, they felt these were mainly down to a difference in attitudes towards the Foundation Phase in staff, relating to how well trained the staff were and their understanding of it. This is agreed by Macdonald (2019) research which states that children are accessing the Foundation Phase across a range of different settings such as nurseries, childminders, maintained and non-maintained settings and due to this there is significant differences in the delivery of it due to staff experience and qualifications. Due to the Foundation Phase guidance being more open to interpretation, about the deliverance of the curriculum through

play, there are not clear points on what high quality is specifically. Welsh Parliament (2021) discusses the Donaldson Review, where Professor Donaldson stated recommendations of a New Curriculum for Wales. He agreed that the curriculum should be clearer in its purposes and steps, therefore informing educators of the reasoning behind why they are delivering what they teach. It should be built on the Foundation Phase approach of using the areas of learning but with highlighting the importance of why it is done through an experiential approach. Goldman *et al* (2018) agrees with the importance of experiential learning stating that it promotes learner engagement, however it is dependent on the learning environment and the types of experiences being provided. This is supported by Kolb (2014) who discusses experiential learning and how Piaget's theory identifies that children's levels of intelligence are a product of the experiences they have had and how their hands on approach allowed the observer to see the child conducting problem solving and the different methods they use. Donaldson (2015) states in the Successful Futures summary that the New Curriculum for Wales should provide opportunities for problem solving and through the progression steps the educator will be required to engage children in exciting, inviting and thought-provoking activities to enhance their learning journey. In an evaluation of the Foundation Phase by Welsh Government (2015b) the report stated that the Foundation Phase had made a positive impact on children's academic achievements and that this style of curriculum had the potential to further success as the children progressed throughout the school. This is an integral part of the New Curriculum for Wales in their approach, adapting this for not just children three to seven years but up to sixteen years old.

Nursery World (2019) discusses the New Curriculum for Wales and although there are a lot of the key principles of the Foundation Phase part of it there are also some significant changes. One of the biggest changes is how the children are assessed. As children move through the new progression steps, they will have more flexibility as it recognises how children develop at different speeds, rather than checking if they meet specific outcome in each year. Dubiel (2021) discusses how assessment can be seen as a negative experience, especially in early years as it can result in educators and parents being concerned over children of the Foundation being seen to 'fall behind' if they do not match their peers' abilities. However, Pacey (2017) argues that assessment, in any form, is crucial to measure a child's development and it informs the assessor/educator on how to build on a child's prior knowledge with the

appropriate next steps, in line with the National Minimum Standards. It highlights areas that need further support and can inform the educator of the child's interests which helps plan activities related to this. First Discoverers (2022) highlights how information gained from observations and assessments link with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, indicating the developmental level the child is at and with the correct amount of adult scaffolding in the right areas what the child can potentially achieve. When questioned about assessment in the New Curriculum for Wales, Welsh Government (2022) stated that assessment would be a continual monitoring process which looked at the individual's progress throughout their journey, rather than one off assessments at a specific time of year for all the children. This is different from the Foundation Phase Profile which contained a Baseline assessment in the first six weeks at the start of foundation phase and then a full profile at the end of foundation phase in year two. Alongside this was the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework which was reviewed annually through assessments. The Foundation Phase aligned outcome to expected ages which is something the New Curriculum for Wales is moving away from (Welsh Government 2017).

Wainwright *et al* (2016) discusses the importance of play in children's development, stating that the Foundation Phase approach of experiential learning through play is a driver for promoting learning. Through the educator providing playful tasks the children can choose which activities to access in a more child led approach. Whitebread *et al* (2012) reports some of the barriers that the educators had regarding play in education. Firstly, that the learning through play model was only for children under seven years old, like the Foundation Phase, and secondly that educators were under intense pressure to cover all the areas of the curriculum and complying with the government's standards, therefore limiting children's play opportunities. Howard and Mcinnes (2012) argue that another barrier to play is that although the educator may think that they are providing the children with play opportunities it is not always seen this way from the child's point of view. Children tend to look for where the activity was set up, adult presence and if they were given free choice to participate before it is seen as play to them. They are more likely to see a tabletop activity where there is an adult involved, not as a play opportunity, even if this is what the educator had set it out as. The educator needs to be aware of what the player needs for them to see it as play themselves. Van der Aalsvoort *et al* (2015) agrees stating that children need to see the activities / play opportunities as play themselves, it should be seen as voluntary

and not forced and the children should display enjoyment whilst emerged in it. McInnes *et al* (2013) further supports this stating that when children see an adult at an activity, they are less likely to see it as play. However, if the adult involved in the activity shares the control using shared thinking, open ended questions and playful interactions the child the child is more likely to see it as play. Using this style of play as an approach to teaching is more beneficial to the child.

The OECD (2020) discusses the pre mentioned barrier of the educator feeling pressured to cover the curriculum. It states the New Curriculum for Wales is built around the four purposes and what matters statements across the new six areas of learning. Each school will adapt their curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the children and bespoke to suit the local community. This is a big step away from the national curriculum which was the same for all schools regardless of the local area the setting was in. Welsh Government (2021) discusses the curriculum further and how it should provide challenge and experiences that allow the children to celebrate successes in their learning. It should support holistic development with a curriculum that includes the child's choices and local interests spanning across different areas of learning. This will give the learner a sense of meaning in why they are having these learning opportunities and how it connects to their lives. However, Gatley (2020) raises concerns with the New Curriculum for Wales regarding the Four Purposes being met by the areas of learning. There is a pressure on schools in how they decide to implement it and if they are not clear in their approach it can lead to them tackling these issues without support and guidance. Educators will have had clearer outcomes to work towards as Welsh Government (2018) states the Foundation Phase Framework and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) gave expected outcomes for each year group. This was used to help plan provision and monitor what was expected of the child at that age, therefore guiding the educator appropriately. Despite that the Foundation Phase and LNF had very little child involvement in the planning of it. Holland (2018) discusses the importance of having children involved in the creation of the New Curriculum for Wales gives an insight into what they expect from it. The children discussed with Sally Holland that they wanted more choice in what they learn, incorporate their talents and be flexible to suit their ambitions. They made specific comments on what they didn't want it to be especially when it came to exams and just learning for the sake of a test not for the benefit of their development. Estyn (2018) supports the rights of the child having a voice by

stating that by having the children involved in decision making and their learning it promotes child led learning. Glan Usk Primary School took this initiative and empower pupils to become leaders of their own learning. With collaboration of the educators and children the decide on what themes and topics the children are interested in and they are included in the planning by providing lesson ideas and how they can build on their prior knowledge. This is in line with the New Curriculum for Wales and is a high-quality example of child led learning. Unicef (NO YEAR) supports child led learning as it links to Article 12 of the UNCRC that every child has the right to have their views listened to and taken seriously.

There are comparisons between the Foundation Phase and the New Curriculum for Wales. It is clear how it the Foundation Phase experiential approach is at the forefront of the New Curriculum for Wales with the adaption of a flexible curriculum involving the child's voice and the consideration of the settings local/ socio-economic area. However, there are some potential barriers to overcome with the differences in approaches and staff attitudes towards the clarity of the new guidance.

PART 2

Birth to 5 Matters (2021) state that every child develops at a unique pace and although practitioners have the guidance of the general progress children make during their early years the progress of individual children varies, making the development of each child unique. There are several factors which influence developments, including, emotional wellbeing, culture, experiences, interactions and physical health. As all these factors differ from child to child, it is natural that their developmental progress will also differ. The British Association for Early Childhood Education (2012) Also supports the view that children do not move in a linear direction in terms of their development. Children develop in different areas, at different paces and although all areas are equally important, it is not realistic to expect children to develop at the same time and rate.

PACEY (2016) supports the view of the unique child, and how the use of observations enables practitioners to gain more of an insight on the true needs of children. Through observations practitioners can learn more about children's likes and dislikes, their personalities and exactly where they are in their learning and development. Arnerich (2022) highlights the fact that it is simply not enough to watch and write down what you see. The observation needs to be scrutinized by practitioners, in order for the appropriateness of provision to be evaluated and to identify next steps in children's learning. Louis (2021) agrees and refers to the point that if practitioners are making decisions about their provision without the use of observations, they are simply focusing on what they think is engaging, appropriate and necessary. Therefore, activities can be inappropriate for the needs of the children and fail to address what the children truly need as unique individuals. Smidt (2015) talks about how this links to Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development'(ZPD), the practitioner needs to know what the child already knows so that they can plan what they need to progress onto the next level. This will then help bridge the gap between what they are working at currently and what they have the potential to move on to and achieve. Chilvers (2022) further supports the use of observations as they are beneficial to informing external practitioners such as speech and language therapists, social workers, physio therapists as well as parents and carers. By recording observations practitioners will gather a bank of evidence to support children. Even things that might not seem vital in the moment, might one day be used to support a diagnosis or track certain behaviours in a child.

Welsh Government (2008) discusses how the Foundation Phase uses observation to assess children's progress throughout the Foundation Phase 3 - 7 years. Children are assessed using the Baseline assessment on entry to the Foundation Phase and at the end of year two before they transition to Key stage 2. Throughout the child's time in the Foundation Phase, they will be continuously assessed and monitored through a range of observations linking to the outcomes from the seven areas of learning. Welsh Government (2017b) talks about the different assessment styles within the Foundation Phase, the formative assessments which matches the children's skills against the success criteria of the curriculum in the day-to-day planning and evaluating. This then

informs future planning and highlights the skills that children need to focus on next in their learning journey. The summative assessments which is more data driven as it is the data reported back to Welsh Government and other outside agencies. This is less child focussed and more for the benefit of informing others. Neaum (2016) supports the use of observations and assessments stating that it gives the practitioner the information needed about the individual's development allowing the practitioner to adjust their provision to suit their needs.

Gaille (2020) discusses how although observations have many benefits within the classroom, they do open the door to practitioner speculation. Different adults, with different thoughts and experiences may observe a situation and interpret differently to another practitioners. First Discoverers (NO YEAR) support this issue stating that there can be evidence of bias in observations. Cognitive bias if the practitioner has been given incorrect prior information that could influence their results. Observer induced bias, if the children know they are being observed resulting in them not acting freely and changing their behaviour, otherwise known as the Hawthorne effect. Finally, observer bias, this can often be undetected by the observer as they are not as open minded as they should be resulting in them categorising the child. West Sussex County Council (2021) highlights another concern stating that there is an importance of practitioners being objective in their observations and not to let any preconceived notions influence their observations. For example. If a practitioner has concerns over a children speech and language development, they may look for evidence to prove, or disprove, their prior thoughts. This then takes away the authenticity of the observations and vital elements of the children learning development may be missed. Therefore, not giving the correct view of the child's level of knowledge.

Although Welsh Government (2017b) states that children will have their own unique rate of growth and development throughout their time in the Foundation Phase they also document the outcomes expected at each age. This can then make the child, if they are aware, and their parents feel that they are 'behind' if they are not at the age-appropriate outcome when expected. Alternatively, the New Curriculum for Wales guidance, Welsh Government (2021c) discusses a change in expected outcomes. Children will work through progression steps as a stage not age approach. It aims to

support every learner to make progress and have the learner involved by working together with the practitioner to share their preferred learning style and their attitude to learning, allowing the practitioner to adjust their provision to suit. However, Cornerstones (2020) highlight that there has been feedback of the New Curriculum for Wales that states practitioners were confused about the guidance, they felt it was not clear enough, especially how to assess the progression steps. Another difficulty for schools was the fact that they had to design their own curricula.

Central South Consortium (2022) describes that the New Curriculum for Wales allows schools to design their own bespoke curriculum which will have the best interests of the children at the heart of it. It will consider the type of area the school is set in and what type of curriculum best suits that community. Estyn (2019) reinforces the importance of the new curriculum's approach to creating a personalised curriculum which is best suited for their type of learners. Having the children to help design it has a positive impact on them as learners and helps them feel that they have ownership of it as it incorporates their interests and ideas. Therefore, promoting the child's voice and giving more focus on the individual child. However, having such a varied curriculum across Wales may cause some concern in what the level of quality is being delivered and is it broad enough. Welsh Government (2022b) wants to promote schools to work together in their cluster groups to share good practice and collaborate in designing their curriculum. This will help promote consistency in understanding the style of assessments used or work together in creating the same assessment approaches.

Howes, Wells and Cave (2020) talk about learning stories and how they build the story upon what the child is doing in the moment. This can be done through small notes being taken at the time or a photograph taken that can be written about later on when the practitioner has time to analyse what they observed. Learning stories are informative in a holistic view of the child which promotes further discussion when talked about. Escamilla (2021) supports the use of learning stories as an excellent way of observing and documenting a child's learning experience. Seen as a Reggio Emilia approach where the practitioner takes a step back and does not interject in the child's play. This provides an authentic look at the child's curiosities, how they play

and what stage of development they are at. These types of observation are informative and help the practitioner get a deeper insight into the learner. Brodie (2014) supports learning stories as a positive style of assessment. They describe how the amount of detail in a learning story gives the practitioner a much deeper insight into the child's learning than a convention checklist or tick sheet. This type of assessment is not just easy for practitioners to understand but for the parents and children also as it sets out the leaning that's taken place in an easy-to-read format with the child at the centre of it. However, Kelly (2016) argues that although learning stories are more individual to a child they are often seen as time consuming, which means they are not completed in the moment, and the practitioner has to have good recall of the event. Due to the lengthy time, they take they are done less frequently, therefore not giving a constant update on the child. This does not fall in line with the New Curriculum for Wales as Welsh Government (2019) states that the new curriculum will consist of more formative assessments with an ongoing basis of observations and assessments to help practitioners be able to continuously adapt the provision to meet the unique needs of the child.

Bruce, Louis and McCall (2015) discuss the Froebelian approach to children's learning, stating that the whole child needs to be considered, looking at their physical and mental health as well as their social skills and other areas. The learning provided is not separated into a large quantity of areas as they should all interlink together and focussing on the child's learning successes not what they cannot do. Watson and Fawcett (2016) discuss the importance of training and professional development in observation techniques for the practitioner. The practitioner needs to be aware of how to conduct observations in a range of styles, some more informal such as simple note taking and others more specific in details or using checklists to identify skills. Sharmand, Cross and Vennis (2015) talk about the different styles of observation such as free description, checklists, time samples, movement tracking and graphs and charts. They state that it is important that they understand the needs of the child and what type of play or activity they want to observe prior it to ensure they have chosen the correct observation format. Fleet, Patterson and Robertson (2017) feel that by the practitioners participating in professional development, either specific training or being supplied with pedagogic research they become more aware of how to understand children's learning. They should assess their own practice and see how the use of

theory and research can help take their provision to a new level and potentially reduce any difficulties or barriers they are experiencing.

Mcmahon and Dyer (2018) agrees stating that the reflective practitioner has the child's best interests at the heart of it. Being able to look at their provision and look at the children, individually, is a key element in meeting the needs of the individual child. With the practitioner having set aims and the right assessment tool they are ready to identify where the unique child is at and what they need next.

Part 3

The impact that a school pet can have on a child's development and wellbeing

Gov.Uk (2021) state that having a pet in the education setting can enhance their learning. The University of Edinburgh (2018) conducted research into what effect pets have on children's development. Breaking their findings down they stated that having contact with a pet and building a relationship had a positive impact on their physical health and wellbeing with large improvements on the child's self-esteem. Welsh Government (2021) discuss how Covid-19 effected children's wellbeing stating that more children are having difficulties with their mental health and their relationship skills due being in lockdown and missing school for long periods of time. It highlighted the need to develop new approaches in regard to wellbeing, to help children overcome the 'lockdown effect'. Cardiff University (2021) supports this stating that the number of children with wellbeing and mental health has risen since the Covid –19 pandemic and that there is a need for more investments to support these issues in children and help reverse the impact.

Blue Cross (2020) gives examples of the different pets suited for schools. Some are low maintenance, like fish, that can be set up in any classroom, regardless of size and be seen throughout the day. Others such as rabbits, guinea pigs and chickens require a little more level of care as they need safe enclosures outside in the right type of environment. There is a current trend of school dogs, these would need to be cared for and live with a member of staff. The staff member would need to have an excellent

understanding of the dog and its body language so they can identify if it becomes stressed or needs toileting.

Lewis (2021) talks about a survey conducted to identify if pets, dogs in these cases, can have a positive impact on the child. Everyone involved in the survey felt that the pet interaction had a positive impact on the child, whether it be their reading and relationship skills, confidence or attitudes to learning. The learners themselves reported that they felt it had helped with their confidence and school engagement. Vardy as cited in Gibbons (2021) states that having a dog interact with children has multiple benefits, one in particular being the development of reading. Children who struggle with the confidence to read out loud may feel less pressured when reading to an animal as they know the animal is not judging them, therefore helping to develop their self – esteem also. Research in school settings by Gee, Griffin and McCardle (2017) states that Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) has positive impacts on neurological mechanisms. They found that HAI was known to reduce stress levels and help with the body's physiological stress responses. This can help children who experience academic pressures or failures use an animal as a coping mechanism to regulate their mood or behaviours. They reported that children with ADHD who had physical interactions with dogs had an improved heart rate and blood pressure within five minutes of being with the animal.

The New Curriculum for Wales what Health and Wellbeing mandatory what matters statements assert that learners need to make connections between their mental health and wellbeing and the experiences they are provided. By having these types of experiences, the child can develop awareness of their feelings and emotions resulting in them being able to empathise with others. Building these skills helps prevent poor mental health by giving the child the tools to identify their feelings and create strategies to solve them (Welsh Government 2022c). *Pets in the classroom* (2021) supports the development of these skills as the report on the 'Pets in the classroom study' which involved forty-one classrooms across nineteen schools of the forty-one classes, twenty had pets. The study found that over the school year in the classes with pets, there were reports of 'significantly greater increases' in the children's social skills and decreases in negative behaviours. Parents also reported that their children, in the

classes with pets, had displayed more 'pro-social' behaviours. Overall, the study showed that the pets had big impacts on the children's social and cognitive developments in that year.

Western Governors University (2020) further supports the benefits of having a class pet stating that it enhances the learning environment by linking it to the children's learning. Although the pets help a child's social and cognitive development they can also be used as part of the curriculum teaching. Having a pet, as part of a science or creative lesson for example, provides the practitioner with new and unique ways to excite and motivate the child through more experiential learning.

Nottingham Trent University (2021) identifies that there are quite often barriers to schools having class pets, however this is due to a lack of understanding on how to carry the process out. There may be issues with permissions or risk assessments or staff members not wanting to take full responsibility for a pet. If a school is unable to facilitate looking after a pet there are outside organisations that are trained to do workshops with children and pets, and this could be an improvisation. The research shows that there are multiple benefits to children's learning from having a pet, which is worth the school researching what would suit them best and how to approach it. Fraser (2019) discusses a company called Eggucation which provides schools with ethical egg hatching. They state that children who are learning about the natural world and the life cycles have their provision enhanced through the use of this live hatching experience. One school commented that it made the topic 'more meaningful and purposeful' with children talking about the experience for lengths of time after it and inspiring them to extend on their learning. It also provided children with opportunities that they wouldn't normally experience if they lived in city areas away from rural farms.

Garcia-Bulle (2019) states that approaching learning through the use of animals is fitting with the newly evolving curriculum. It provides practitioners with new ways to stimulate learners whilst supporting a range of developmental skills, with a big impact on well-being. Welsh Government (2021) supports this stating that the new curriculum should be adaptable at any time whilst supporting well-being and give learners new experiential opportunities to help deepen their level of understanding.

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