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Section One

The Foundation Phase is currently the National Curriculum in Wales for 3 to 7 year olds (Taylor *et al.* 2015) which is soon to make a departure as a New Curriculum in Wales will be rolled out in 2022 (Welsh Government, 2021b). The need for this reform is to increase standards, reduce the retainment gap between students, give them the skills needed to go on to live for fulfilling lives and to make an exit from the more formal competency approach to learning (Donaldson, 2019). This assignment examines the current Foundation Phase Framework and highlights any areas that may need improvement before implementation of the New National Curriculum in Wales (Taylor, Rhys, and Waldron, 2016).

The Foundation Phase was first piloted in 2004 and spread out over stages and then fully implemented in 2010 (Welsh Government, 2016a), which offered a more play-based approach to children's learning both in the indoor and outdoor settings (Maynard *et al.* 2010). This was implemented after the success of other play based early years programmes such as Scandinavia, New Zealand (Te Whariki) and Reggio Emilia, where evidence shows that the move to less formal pedagogy methods before a child reaches the age of six or seven can raise the standard of attainment for future success (Taylor *et al.* 2015).

In the Reggio Approach children do not follow any formal learning and a play-based approach to learning is central within the Curriculum Framework, where children's ideas are used as starting points for enhancing their learning experience and pedagogues use these skills and ideas to create further foundations. The Reggio Approach identifies children as constructors of their own knowledge which is then built upon in planning for their next steps in their play and development (Thornton and Brunton, 2014).

Scandinavia supports the same ethos within their own curriculum, where they base activities on the grounds of here and now and then staff build upon the children's interests. Scandinavia acknowledges outdoor play as an important part in a child's life and learning as it allows the children to seek out risk, challenge and adventure which gives the children the freedom to make full use of the environment and resource their own activities built on their own ideas and experiences (Sandseter, 2014). This is supported by Gibson (2014, quoted in Sando and Sandseter, 2020) in his concept of affordances, where children use the resources that

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environment has to offer within their play, which highlights the need for outdoor play with in the curriculum.

Waters (2016) states that the Foundation Phase indicates that settings are required to provide children with access to indoor and outdoor areas, however some establishments are at a disadvantage as they do not have outdoor play areas. Therefore Chapman (2020) expresses, that solutions need to be made for children to participate in outdoor play and experiences. Durant (2018) agrees with the view of Chapman and says not all children attend well equipped establishments therefore settings should be providing outdoor activities regardless of this, to places such as woodland areas or parks.

According to Rosenow and Worth (2021) there are not as many outdoor areas for children to go and explore today as there was in the past, because such areas have been built on by houses or shopping centres, so it can be sometimes difficult to find areas close by for children to run around and play on, particularly for childcare establishments based in city locations. Taylor *et al.* (2015) identifies this under recommendation 18 of the evaluation of the foundation phase and suggests that budgets need to be made available to provide more transport provision, which will allow the children to gain access to a wider variety of outdoor learning environments.

The International Pisa results show that in 2009 the UK slipped below the average in performance, at a time when the foundation phase had not yet been established (OCED, 2010), but in 2018 the Pisa results indicated that there has been a significant improvement (Lewis, 2019; OCED, 2018). However according to Wightwick (2017) although the results indicate improvement, Wales still trails behind other UK countries such as England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, which suggests the need for a change in education. Donaldson (2015) calls for a complete reform in education and expresses that the idea is not to change what is already in place, but to make improvements.

The Teaching, Learning and Research Programme indicates that staff training, qualifications, and ongoing professional development is likely to have an impact on the quality of provision that is provided and successful outcomes of the children, especially for those from a disadvantaged background (Maynard *et al.* 2010; Bonetti and Brown 2018). This is further

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supported by Welsh Government (2014) in the independent stocktake where it considered how well the Foundation Phase was implemented into Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). And concluded that early year's provision was at higher quality when staff were well trained.

Jayne waters (2016) emphasises that the Foundation Phase requires a change in behaviour of practitioners to support a more play based, and child led curriculum and more training is needed by practitioners so that they know what is meant by child initiated, practitioner directed, active learning and structured play, as information can be confusing. Power *et al.* (2018) somewhat supports this view and says that child centred play has been uneven and states that children's outcomes are far better in settings where the Foundation Phase has been closely followed. However, children's outcomes can also be unbalanced, and some children seem to gain more from the Foundation Phase than others, for instance boys living in poverty don't seem to gain as much from a play-based environment than girls which needs to be addressed so it benefits all.

The Foundation Phase is a time when children are learning new skills at a rapid rate and at their own individual unique pace, which allows them to make sense of the world around them. Children need a wide variety of activities and experiences to support their play and holistic development and they should be able to plan their own activities from the resources around them (Welsh Government, 2017). Therefore, staff should be trained to provide such opportunities and be given time to continue their professional development (Filipe *et.* 2014).

An article by Evans (2014) suggests that qualified teachers in some nursery classes are now being replaced by teaching assistants in schools. However, Whitebook (2003, quoted in Bonetti and Brown, 2018) disagrees with this and expresses that a teacher is needed within nursery classes, as a higher qualification such as a bachelor's degree is an essential way in providing the consistency in high quality of teaching in schools. However, Kingston and Siraj (2019) points out there is a diverse workforce in Wales which includes trained teachers with degrees and staff with less qualifications or no formal qualifications at all, also educators often have different qualifications, understandings, and experiences within settings and schools, which results in differences in teaching approaches.

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The Welsh Government (2020a) sets out a national mission in Wales to reduce 'infant's' classroom sizes in order to give teachers more time for training, reduce the workload and raise standards, therefore have put 36 million pounds into grants in order to fund this. Schleicher (2017, quoted in Wightwick, 2017) supports the notion that teachers need more time for training. However also states that class sizes are not as important to ensure the quality of teaching and if it means that class sizes increase to give teachers more time for training then so be it, he states that class sizes in other countries such as Singapore and China have classes of 50 or more students and are higher performing countries.

The Cohort Study Weinert *et al.* (2016) reveals that children learn from birth and early childhood education is important for later development. However, the current Foundation Phase Framework for children between the ages 3-7 years old, does not cover provision for children under the age of 3 years old (Welsh Government, 2014). An article by Macdonald (2017) supports this and suggests that there is a current divide in education and care and that a Formal Play-based Curriculum for children under the age of 3 years of age is generally overlooked. There is lack of guidelines on the kind of curriculum children under the age of three should be following, which can be somewhat confusing to childcare practitioners working in day care settings.

Therefore, childcare practitioners working with children under the age of three generally rely on non- statutory curriculum publications such as development matters (Department of Education, 2020), which could result in the inconsistencies of pre-school settings operating a completely different play-based curriculum to schools. Even though there is no formal curriculum for children under the age of 3 years old (Macdonald, 2018). The Ciw recognises the Foundation Phase of significance and says that it is important that childcare establishments are aware of the ethos of the Foundation Phase and the seven areas of learning, particularly when working with children between the ages of 3-7 years old, but again does not mention what kind of curriculum the under 3's should be following (Welsh Government, 2016b).

Some improvements have been made in Wales to increase the chances of children under the age of 4 in disadvantaged areas gaining access to the Foundation Phase, through flying start programmes where children's development and progress are monitored (Welsh Government,

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2017b). In addition to this the childcare offer in Wales, permits working parents to take advantage of up to 30 hours free hours childcare, childcare establishments such as Nurseries and Childminders who are signed up to the service must be providing the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2019). Joint inspections with CIW and Estyn should provide more consistency in the divide between education and care sectors and the way that the Foundation Phase is implemented into settings (Duggen and Llewyn, 2016).

Welsh Government (2016) suggests that establishing home to school links can be important in supporting children through the Foundation Phase. Nokali, Bachmas and Votruba-Drzal (2011) supports this view and states that although one setting can independently have influence upon a child, if a school setting and the family interact with each other well, this can be of unique influence on the child and if parents are made aware of the classes' goals, they may support such learning goals at home. Evidence suggests that good home to school links can increase the academic success on children, recommendation 24 of the evaluation of the Foundation Phase pinpoints the need to include parents and families within the Curriculum (Taylor *et al.* 2015).

Froebel (1782, quoted in Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014) also places emphasis on the importance on partnerships with parents, he looked at parents as being the main educators in children. Froebel viewed parents of being in prime position to educate their children and provide a positive consistent influence on their child's life.

The Independent Evaluation by Taylor *et al.* (2015) states adult to child ratios have improved in the Foundation Phase. Bonetti and Brown (2018) agree and state that the ratios are generally higher than what's recommended but are important in providing good outcomes in children. This is further supported by the National Minimum Standards who emphasise the importance of ratios within settings (The Welsh Government, 2016). The Independent Evaluation supports the importance of ratios, under recommendation 21 and states that higher ratio support needs to continue (Taylor *et al.* 2015).

Staff need to be well trained to provide enabling environments for children, it is vital that all staff recognise how children learn and what the value of play has on the children's independence, well-being and development (Surestart, no date). The impact of

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children's surroundings is well documented by Froebel (1782, quoted in Tovey, 2013) and he states by designing a play-based outdoor garden area will improve the child's well-being and development.

Welsh Government (2014) highlights that some schools are unsure how to structure the environment to provide a play-based setting within the Foundation Phase, which has previously resulted in classrooms being a free for all and resembling a playground which does not work, this highlights the need for extra staff training before the New Curriculum comes out in 2022. Evans (2022) supports this view and specifies that schools should not be criticised for not understanding the concept of a play-based Curriculum, as there is lack of knowledge on what was expected from a play-based Curriculum and it is alarming that that after six years of undertaking the Foundation Phase there is still so much confusion on what the Foundation Phase means and how to implement it, into settings.

From what has been analysed above, the foundation phase indicates the need for change, In the way that we implement the New Curriculum into settings (Donaldson, 2019), more training is needed for staff to enhance their professional development, to deliver consistency in the way that the foundation phase is taught in our schools and settings. Practitioners need clear guidelines so that they can provide a rich stimulating play-based environment for children to learn and develop, it cannot be expected that practitioners can jump from one Curriculum to the other without careful transition and appropriate training (Welsh Government, 2014: Evans 2022). As learning starts from birth, staff also need to be clear on what Curriculum that children under the age of three should be following. MacDonald (2018) somewhat supports this view and emphasises that there is a current divide in education and care.

Section Two

The current Foundation Phase Framework, Welsh Government (2017) allows practitioners to assess, what the children can do through the profile, however a study by Donaldson (2019) highlights that the current way we assess children is no longer adequate in Wales, therefore calls for a change in the way that this is completed. The New Curriculum in Wales is soon to make an entrance and focuses more on tracking progression rather than what the child can and can't do in terms of attainment, which supports the ethos of the unique child, where every child learns at their own unique pace (Welsh Government, 2021). This section evaluates methods of

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assessment and progress tracking whilst considering the concept of the individual child and explores the barriers associated with poverty, culture and ALN (Four Cymru, 2022).

A unique child can be defined as someone who is allowed to be themselves, use their own voice and develop at their own unique pace. Children need to be listened to, respected, and not told all the time, so that they can use their imagination in play and build up their self-confidence and self-esteem, this will allow the practitioner to build a wider picture on the child and their development (Pascal, 2015). However, Axelsson (2017) states that the word unique child should not be used in the education system, this is because it refers to the child as 'One of a Kind' and learning should be through interaction and collaboration and not by classifying the child. This needs further debate as the New Curriculum places focus on the unique child in terms of tracking their progression over time, however, does not place any influence on children in terms of attainment (Welsh Government, 2021b).

Assessment can be defined as observing, evaluating, and reviewing the progress of children, by looking at children's competencies and seeing how to help them progress in their learning. The early years is the most the most important part of the child's growth therefore it is important that progress is measured accurately to help the child reach their potential, (Pacey, 2017). The National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare agree with the statement of Pacey and state that assessment is about looking at how you can help a child's progress, whereby standard 7.9 states what children do in play should be observed to plan for their next steps in their development (Welsh Government, 2016b).

Assessment is a fundamental part of the Foundation Phase Framework and a requirement in both maintained schools and non-maintained settings who are approved and funded by the local authority to provide education for children between the ages of 3 to 7 years old (Welsh Government, 2016b). However, for children under the age of 3, there is currently limited guidelines on what kind of assessment these children should be following, which leads to confusion and inconsistencies between each service in the way that they observe and assess children (Welsh Government, 2017). MacDonald (2018) supports a similar view and points out that there is visible divide in the education and care sectors and there is no official Curriculum for children under the age of 3 years old, settings attend to rely on publications such as Birth to Three Matters or Milestones.

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All assessments are currently centred towards performance within the current Foundation Phase Curriculum, this only pinpoints what children can do as and now, this is recognised by (Donaldson, 2015) in his successful futures publication. However, this can be unfair to some children as attainment can be lower in children from a Socioeconomic background or with ALN which could lead them to feel inadequate, Assessments need reasonable adjustment which will support the notion of an inclusive environment for all children under the equity act 2010 (Four Cymru, 2022). The New Curriculum will record performance through progression steps, which creates a more equal assessment for the children (Welsh Government, 2021).

Lindon (2012) suggests that enabling an inclusive multi-cultural environment can be important in assessing children through the curriculum because if children feel more included, they are more likely to be themselves which will make observations and assessments more accurate. Lindon also states that by providing a rich environment with cultural posters, name tags and other visual images will give the child a sense of personal identification and belonging. Issa and Hatt (2013) agree that enabling a multi-cultural environment is important and express that such cultural resources like stories, jigsaws and other toys will also help a child feel included. This will make the environment be more inviting to children from different cultures and will help develop better cultural awareness. Celebrating Festivals such as Chinese New Year and Diwali will help the class gain some knowledge about culture and will help a child settle in and develop a sense of inclusion.

As part of the Foundation Phase teachers are required to carry out a baseline assessment on all children within six weeks of starting the Foundation Phase and at the end of the Foundation Phase, which is based on observations and formative assessment (Welsh Government, 2017), yet this is unique within the UK as other countries do not use such formative assessments (Bradbury, 2014). This brings a question, is assessment necessary within the Welsh Curriculum if children's progress is now going to be documented in stages, rather than what they can do in the current moment? (Hornby, Witte and Mitchell, 2011). According to Donaldson 2015: OCED (2014, quoted in Dauncey, 2017) assessment is important and should only mainly be used to evaluate the learner so that practitioners can see what improvements need to be made.

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Brown (2019) implies that assessment can often give a false reading, as it needs to take place in wide open spaces and in multiple eyes to be able to examine any evidence collected is accurate. Estyn (2011) supports that fact that assessment should be done in wide open spaces within their evaluation of outdoor learning and emphasises that children can become more themselves outdoors and expresses that valid information may be missed if assessment is not completed outdoors, Estyn also point out some children with ALN are more able and talented outdoors, which gives different observation and assessment results, therefore there needs to be balance between indoor and outdoor assessment.

Davies and Hamilton (2016) conclude that often such areas are not set up adequately to enhance development and that practitioners are less likely to do assessments outdoor rather than indoors. The new curriculum in wales recognises the outdoors to be of importance in child development, within physical health, well- being, independence and communication, therefore should be used in assessment (Welsh Government, 2021b).

Dweck (2017) suggests that it is important that Practitioners take into consideration children's mindset when observing their development, as this can differ between each child. There are two different mindsets a 'fixed mindset' and a 'growth mindset', a growth mindset encourages children to try, and a fixed mind set, will see a task as too difficult and not worth even trying. Boylan (2021) supports this view and suggests that children's mindset can be changed by praising them for the effort they have made, this will give the child confidence, efforts should also be praised with children who have a growth mindset, to encourage them to continue their learning, research displays those children who have a growth mindset have improved motivation and higher levels of achievement. Brown (2019) and Parekh (2017) believe that effective teaching practice is better associated with higher outcomes in children's learning than of observation or assessment.

There is often tension regarding formative and summative assessments as practitioners are finding they are under increased pressure, to improve attainment scores and schools are often held accountable if they do not meet high standards (OCED, 2021 and Davies and Hamilton 2016). How well a school is performing is shown in the school ranking system, which can often put schools under pressure (Wightwick, 2020). However, the Welsh Government

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(2020b) states that the system is not about labelling a school or about creating any kind of league table and its more about identifying which school needs help.

The OCED (2021) states that teachers can sometimes find assessment time consuming, given the quantity of paperwork and instructions. However, the Welsh Government (2014) point out in the Independent Stock Take, that assessment is of importance and if tests are carried at the end or at the beginning of Key Stage 2, then assessment should not affect the quality or time of teaching.

To support children within the foundation phase, the practitioner needs to be able to observe the individual child in play to assess their development needs and interests to plan their next steps in learning (Welsh Government, 2017). However, Vygotsky also identifies children as constructors of their own knowledge and his socio-constructivist theory suggests that children learn more from interaction with others than from themselves, which is an instrumental act that children master themselves (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014).

Observation is important in finding out about the child's interests, friendships, skills, and competencies, and is a significant way in spotting signs such as early development delay, it also allows the practitioner to analyse what they see and hear within the child's play and work out how they can enhance the children's learning experience and plan for their next steps in play (Welsh Government, 2021c). However, Giardiello, McNulty, and Anderson, (2013) state that for observation to be effective in practice, children need to be observed on a regular basis, so that valid information is not missed.

Perekh (2017) expresses that every part of assessment is based on the ability of the child, and children living in poverty who have not yet had the chance to access pre-school at a young age are usually put in lower academic sets or special educational groups, so are therefore grouping children in terms of ability, and assessing them on merit. Hornby, Witte and Mitchell (2011) disagree with the need for grouping and state that, higher achieving students learn from lower achieving students, therefore there is no need to group children and no statutory requirement to group children, However a article by Davis (2011) suggests that the grouping of some children can have benefits, for instance children who are displaying behavioural issues due to being less intelligence may feel that they don't fit in, therefore

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being within their own group will help them access the support they need, to enhance their development.

Likewise gifted children with the ability to move up a step in the education, don't often get the chance to do so, because teachers are not sure how to move them forward in their education, so therefore they are held back, which can result in missed opportunities and lack of motivation or interest within activities (Olszewski-Kubilius, and Clarenbach, 2021).

Weale (2017) states that primary school children that are sitting or undergoing assessments and national tests are showing signs of anxiety and stress, often suffering panic attacks and specify that four out of five teachers agree that tests are putting significant pressure on the children. Jerrim (2021) supports the same view and states that national tests are having a severe negative effect upon children's emotional well-being.

As part of the New Curriculum, children will be assessed as part of the Digital Competencies Framework (Welsh Government, 2018). However according to Barnes and Kennewell, (2016) how this is implemented into settings will be dependent on Teacher experience, in addition to this approximately only 9% of families do not have a tablet, laptop or desktop at home, and some don't have a internet connection, therefore some children will be at a disadvantage in the New Curriculum, suggests the (Children's Commissioner, 2018). Although some children are at a disadvantage Dong, Cao, and Li (2020) highlight the importance of digital competence, for example when the pandemic saw classroom teaching being replaced by remote learning.

Assessment is fundamental in children's development, it allows pedagogues to observe children and record for the next steps in a child's learning (Welsh Government, 2016b). Observation plays a big part in assessment and helps support children living in poverty, with additional learning needs or from a different culture (Lindon, 2012). However, observation needs accuracy for it to be successful and must be completed in both the indoor and outdoor environment, on a regular basis to get the full picture of the child's world (Estyn 2011; Giardiello, McNulty, and Anderson, 2013) Further support is needed to help children become confident learners by abolishing the grouping or labelling of children, and doing away with any unnecessary testing, in order allow children to feel more adequate which will add their

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well-being (Hornby, Witte and Mitchell, 2011; Weale 2017). There also needs to be an official curriculum that is inclusive of children under the age of 3, so that there is consistency in the way the Curriculum is implemented and assessed. This will produce accuracy and stop any confusion between practitioner on the roll out of the New Curriculum in Wales.

Section Three

Blog – What are the benefits and barriers of outdoor play within the New Curriculum.

An article by Cooper (2019) implies that outdoor play is a forgotten resource in America. However, in Wales outdoor play is considered as being a significant part of the National Curriculum and an important aspect within children's development, (Welsh Assembly Government, 2021) which was first influenced by the success of other play-based programmes in the early years, such as Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, Te Whariki in New Zealand, and Forest Schools in Scandinavia. Where outdoor play is at the centre of the child's learning and development (Wainwright, 2021).

Although the outdoors plays a significant part of the curriculum an article by Larson, Green and Cordell (2011) suggests that children are spending less time outdoors than their predecessors, despite that evidence highlights that the outdoors has many benefits within children's health and development. An article by (Jenkins, 2018) supports the same view and suggests that children spend twice as long looking at their screens than what they spend outdoors. However, there were considerably more fun and exciting opportunities for children to go out and explore the outdoors in the past because most children lived near a large open space with woodland or forestry nearby, sadly some of these areas no longer exist today as they have been built on by large shopping centres or housing developments (Rosenow and Wirth 2021).

Waters (2016) expresses that some childcare settings have small play areas or no play areas at all. Taylor *et al.* (2015) agrees but also emphasises that transport provision needs to be made available for such children to explore the outdoors, so they don't miss out. Hardy (2022) also emphasises that outdoor play areas are not often set up properly because childcare providers are unsure of how to organise the area to provide a play-based environment as part of the curriculum, he also expresses that often-outdoor facilities are not up to an adequate standard

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leaving them in need of repair or reconstruction. Which allows interest in the outdoors to be lost.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2021) specifies that indoor toys should not be taken outside, so that the children can gain a totally different experience as part of the Curriculum. The outdoor environment is already full of items that child can explore, such as loose parts play where children can collect a variety of objects such as shells, stones, twigs, logs, sticks, planks to sort organise, count, build and use the concept of affordances (Flannigan and Dietze, 2018 : Gibson (2014, quoted in Sando and Sandseter, 2020) where one day a structure could be a den the next day it could be a shop. The outdoors provides many learning opportunities and provokes curiosity and wonder where wildlife, bugs and insects, trees and plants are all waiting to be discovered, there are woodlands with open fields, where children can run around on freely, hide away in small places and roll down hills (Broodie, 2018).

The outdoors allows children to discover many things about our environment such as - How to balance sticks? How do Plants Grow? How do Butterfly's grow? What's the Weather like? How does Ice feel? How can I go faster or slower? Why do leaves Change colour? (Johnson, Christie and Wardle, 2010), which allows the children to become Ambitious and capable learners, Enterprising and creative contributors, Ethical and informed citizens, Healthy and confident individuals (Welsh Government, 2017), it also helps enhance their holistic development through their social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills and it allows children to be creative, form relationships with others, problem solve, experiment and discover the world around them (Welsh Government : Bento and Dias, 2017)

Rodgers, (2018) states that allowing children to take part in risk has advantages, as it allows children to problem solve and challenge themselves both mentally and physically, be in control of their actions, judge their own limits to their capabilities, develop strength and practice new skills. Broodie (2018) supports this view and states that the benefits often outweigh the risk, for instance teaching a child to swim can be classed as risky, however this teaches them lifesaving skills and climbing a tree in the woods can be classed as risky, yet the health benefits and knowledge and understanding about the world the children gain from this is far greater.

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Pascal (2015) expresses that, children understand risk if you tell them watch their clothes when painting with gloss paints or to be careful when climbing the tree as they will only go as high as they feel confident but by allowing children to take a step outside the box will allow them to become eager learners. Woods and Hall (2013) emphasize that children understand that minor accidents can be dealt with and become somewhat accepting to injuries caused by risk, such as a prick from a holly bush, a sting from a nettle or a little graze and it is about adults letting go for the outdoors to be child initiated so the child can grow and reach their full potential. If adults risk assess the area before venturing out there is no reason why children cannot go off and play freely if boundaries are established. The HSE (2012) fully supports outside play and understands the outdoor environment carries a degree of risk, nevertheless, they don't expect childcare practitioners to remove the risk but control it through appropriate risk assessments.

Toole (no date) emphasizes that often children are not given enough time to play outdoors. (Scott, 2022) supports the same view and states that children need at least two hours of outdoor play per day even in winter. (Horman, 2019) states that some children with ALN are not getting enough time outdoors, because of need of constant supervision or lack of transport or unsuitable equipment, although outdoor play provision does need to be available for all children as it helps improve their senses, co-ordination, vestibular system and is good for their well-being, where it can relieve stress, and anxiety. Bilton and Waters (2016) suggests that outdoor play is important and associated with better outcomes in children's learning and development.

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