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The Foundation Phase in Wales – a play-based curriculum that supports the development of physical literacy

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ABSTRACT
In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government began the implementation of a new holistic play-based learning continuum for children aged three to seven called the Foundation Phase. Areas of learning replaced subjects and consequently pupils in Wales under the age of seven no longer study Physical Education in its traditional form. With growing recognition of the importance of physical literacy and the role that Physical Education plays in its development, a three-phase complementarity mixed methods study explored the impact of this new curriculum on pupils' physical literacy, finding that the Foundation Phase makes a positive contribution to the development of physical literacy. This paper reports on two phases of that study to examine what the Foundation Phase is and how it is enacted in schools that have been identified as showing good practice. Phase one used documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth analysis of the curriculum. Phase two used mixed methods to ascertain fidelity of curriculum implementation. Findings suggest that the schools in the study were implementing the Foundation Phase with fidelity to the original aims of the policy makers and as such pupils were independent, motivated active learners making good progress in the development of physical literacy.

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Introduction

The Foundation Phase, which is the name for early childhood education in Wales, reflects a worldwide trend within education systems of clustering subject matter into learning areas that extend beyond subjects (Macdonald 2003). At the age of three to seven years the Foundation Phase framework identifies seven areas of learning, which form part of a holistic, integrated and cross-curricular approach with an emphasis on the development of skills with the child 'at the centre of any planned curriculum' (Aasen and Waters 2006; DCELLS 2008a, 6; Maynard 2007). Aasen and Waters (2006, 126) suggest this change in approach in the Foundation Phase underpinned by childhood well-being requires teachers to be 'aware of and understand the shift in learning theories' to a socio-cultural view of learning in order for there to be successful implementation of the Foundation Phase. Over 35 years ago, Stenhouse (1975, 5) identified that a central problem in the process of curriculum reform is the difference between the ideas and the attempts to operationalise them, or as Fullan (2003, xi) highlights, 'reforms rarely unfold as intended'.

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The sociocultural view of learning highlighted by Aasen and Waters (2006) is one that is reflected in a range of international approaches to early years education. With government ministers in Wales drawing on best practice from across the world the result was that 'school subjects' in the traditional sense were no longer part of the Foundation Phase approach and so 'Physical Education' as a separate subject on the curriculum disappeared. For the first time since the recognition of Physical Education in the curriculum, children in Wales under the age of seven are no longer taught this as a subject.

There has been much debate in the literature about the nature and purpose of Physical Education (Brown 2013; Jewett, Bain, and Ennis 1995; Kirk 2010), and contributing to this is the concept of physical literacy (Whitehead 1990, 2001, 2010, 2013; Whitehead and Murdoch 2006). Physical Literacy is a holistic concept that recognises all people on a journey throughout life where people in many contexts may influence the development of physical literacy. When in school opportunities for progress on the physical literacy journey are largely through Physical Education. When considering the importance of movement in child development, and the wider issue of physical literacy, this change in the nature of Physical Education for children under the age of seven in Wales may be deemed a cause for concern. However, the play-based nature of the Foundation Phase advocates children learning through first-hand experiential activities (DCELLS 2008a). Maude (2010, 114) states: 'Play environments, both indoors and outdoors, play resources, both natural and manufactured, playmates, both adults and children, are key to the promotion of physical literacy', which is defined as: 'The motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life' (IPLA 2014).

With this definition in mind and in light of concerns for the disappearance of Physical Education for younger pupils, research was conducted into the interpretation and delivery of the Welsh Foundation Phase and its contribution to physical literacy. The Foundation Phase places great emphasis on play as a vehicle for learning (DCELLS 2008a). However defining what is meant by play is far from straight with numerous definitions and interpretations of the concept across the world. Pellegrini's (1991, 215) definition uses criteria to categorise children's behaviour 'as "more or less play", not dichotomous' so 'should not be categorised as "play" or "not play"' but rather 'related along a continuum from "pure play" to "non play"'.

The notion of a continuum of play works well for the Foundation Phase where children move from adult-led activities to more freely chosen tasks. Even many of the teacher-led tasks are playful in their nature, thus creating an approach that can be described as playful pedagogy.

The study found that this playful pedagogy of the Foundation Phase with its emphasis on the use of the outdoors makes a positive contribution to the development of physical literacy, is an inclusive learning environment for pupils with a range of needs and it found a positive relationship between pupils' physical competence and pupils' intellectual development (Wainwright 2014). In light of these findings, this paper will first of all consider the central concept in this study of physical literacy. Next we draw on findings from phase one of the study to examine the nature and philosophy of the Foundation Phase, identifying key features and the main aim of the curriculum. We then draw on findings from phase two of the study to ascertain whether the key features of the Foundation Phase were being enacted in the schools in the study and as such ascertain fidelity of implementation. Finally the paper considers the implications of the findings for policy-makers and practitioners.

Physical literacy

The concept of physical literacy is not new, indeed Whitehead (2001, 1) points out that, 'it was used in a UK Sports Councils flier in 1991' that stated 'Physical Education creates literacy in movement, which is as vital to every person as literacy in verbal expression itself'. Whitehead has since led the debate on this subject, and it is now recognised in the literature, research and policy across the world as an outcome of Physical Education (Hardman 2011; Talbot 2007). This said, 'physical literacy is much wider than Physical Education and encompasses all participation in physical activity throughout

the lifecourse' (Whitehead 2013, 30). Physical literacy is a disposition that is developed through all embodied experiences, from early pre-school movement, play, physical education, sport, leisure and recreation. Whitehead (2010, 23) in developing the concept of physical literacy highlights the existentialist belief that 'individuals create themselves as they live in the world' and she emphasises the underpinning philosophies of monism and phenomenology as central to physical literacy, advocating the notion of embodied learning and the recognition that 'you have not "got" a body but rather "are" your body'.

Stolz (2013, 950) suggests that the academisation of Physical Education led to a disconnect in Physical Education from its purpose 'to develop each person's whole being' and both Stolz (2013) and Whitehead (2010) draw on the work of Merleau-Ponty who argues humans do not view the world from outside, but are themselves part of it and as such are 'beings-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 58). As such humans 'create themselves as they interact with their surroundings' and are 'forever in an active relationship with the world known as intentionality', which is 'our restless drive to perceive and respond to the world' (Whitehead 2010, 26). Whitehead (2010, 26) further explains that 'the intentionality in which our embodiment plays the leading role is known as operative intentionality'. This is of particular significance for the Foundation Phase as a play-based curriculum, where children's operative intentionality is the means for them to learn about the world and their place as part of it. Indeed, young children at play is perhaps one of the most obvious examples of the innate drive to interact with the world where the 'intimate relationship between perception and movement' function inseparably as children construct their understanding of themselves as 'beings-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 58; Whitehead 2010, 27).

Early childhood curricula are of particular significance in the development of physical competence (one of the elements identified in the definition of physical literacy). High quality early movement experiences develop motor proficiency, with movement quality improving as young children embed elements of their movement vocabulary to movement memory, and integrate movement capacities such as balance and co-ordination precision and fluency (Maude 2010). This process depends on maturation and experience, and if children do not have ample early movement experiences in a range of environments then most recent research suggests development may be delayed (Goddard Blythe 2013).

The implications of this are far-reaching, with motor proficiency linked to physical activity and poor motor proficiency resulting in sedentary behaviours and the avoidance of physical activity (Stodden et al. 2008; Wrotniak et al. 2006). This has also been highlighted by Seedfelt (1980) and Clark and Metcalf (2002) who suggest that a lack of proficiency in motor development acts as a barrier to later participation in physical activity, an important issue in light of the definition of physical literacy that identifies 'to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life' (IPLA 2014).

Methodology

This paper draws on data from two phases of a larger three-phase study that combined methods from quantitative and qualitative paradigms in a pragmatic complementarity mixed-method design. Over three years the study measured overlapping but also different facets of children's learning in the Foundation Phase to yield an enriched, elaborated understanding of the Foundation Phase as a naturalistic intervention (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham 1989; Wainwright 2014). In this paper however we report only on phase one of the study and some aspects of phase two in order to highlight the nature of the Foundation Phase, its key features and how it was enacted in the schools in the study, resulting in the development of pupils' physical literacy.

Phase one used documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. An in-depth documentary analysis of the Government curriculum policy documents, guidance for implementation of the new curriculum and ministerial speeches was undertaken to identify themes. Semi-structured interviews with Foundation Phase staff (T1 to T11), head teacher (HT), deputy head teacher (DHT), advisor (LA)

and education minister (M1) were conducted and analysed into units of meaning and themes to identify key features and outcomes that were confirmed through a process of respondent validation.

Phase two used both quantitative and qualitative methods. A quasi-repeated three-time measures design (T1 – February, T2 – July, T3 – December) generated quantitative data. In between the three-time measures a range of qualitative and quantitative tools were used for further data generation to complement the data from the repeated measures and gain a rich insight into what the children were learning and an understanding of the complexities of the Foundation Phase (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham 1989). This paper draws on a selection of the phase two methods. Semi-structured interviews, ethnographic field notes, video, child led tours, and 15-minute observations. Data were generated using these methods over the period of a year. In phase two semi-structured interviews were conducted at time point T2, which was the end of the academic year. Each interview was approximately 30 minutes, was transcribed and coded for analysis. Ethnographic field notes were kept throughout the study written both *in situ* and also away from the situation to include reflection and reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Spradley 1980). During phase two 228 pages of field notes were recorded, units of meaning were identified throughout and coded for analysis. Video was used to capture the context of the Foundation Phase in particular when many activities were happening. The children were very familiar with the small 'flip' camera that was used. A total of 66 videos were filmed in phase two. Footage was labelled and coded into themes for analysis. Child led tours are an aspect of the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss 2001; Clark 2005). Tours led by the children and filmed using hand held 'Flip' cameras allowed children to talk freely about their experiences in the learning environment. A total of 47 tours were filmed throughout phase two of the study. Tours were labelled and coded into themes for analysis. Fifteen-minute observations of activity were used in the study to ascertain the amount of time pupils were active in their learning. In this study activity was viewed in the sense of play-based learning where pupils are not expected to be sedentary and remain at desks for long periods of time. Observations were carried out over 10 days across the time of phase two and a chi-squared analysis was conducted to see of there were differences in the physical activity data by school.

Findings

The nature of the Foundation Phase

The Establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 has resulted in an education system that is distinct and very different to England (Maynard and Waters 2007). Specific features of the new approach are the requirements to build the curriculum, in part, from the interests of the child (DCELLS 2008a, 6) and to use the outside space as a learning environment (DCELLS 2008a, 4; Waters and Maynard 2010). The Foundation Phase is for children aged from three to seven years so reception class, year one and year two children are protected from the impact of the more prescriptive approaches associated with Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum by affording them more informal learning experiences (Maynard 2007). The Foundation Phase is described as a 'framework for children's learning' (DCELLS 2008a) and the use of this terminology implies from the outset that this curriculum has less prescription. Government guidance reinforces this stating that one of the aims 'is to reduce prescription and give control and responsibility back to schools and to learners themselves' so that there is 'flexibility in planning' (DCELLS 2008b, 7).

The subsequent Foundation Phase framework advocates an experiential, play-based approach to learning in which practitioner-directed activities are balanced with those initiated by children (DCELLS 2008a; Maynard, Waters, and Clement 2011). The Foundation Phase framework identifies seven areas of learning which are not approached in isolation but form part of a holistic, integrated and cross-curricular approach with an emphasis on the development of skills (DCELLS 2008a).

The seven areas of learning are planned and delivered in three different aspects. These are the continuous environment, enhanced provision, and focused tasks (Figure 1).

The continuous provision is the 'continuous' learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, the layout of the classroom, the learning areas and the resources available in these areas. The enhanced provision is the introduction of resources or activities that move learning forward linked to a specific topic or theme. The focused provision is the more traditional adult-led/taught session, that may be with the whole class or a small group of children. All three aspects may influence each other, for example, observations of children playing in the continuous environment may identify aspects of development that need more focused work. The learning environment is a key aspect of the Foundation Phase with children needing spaces arranged and equipped, which promote active learning (Hohmann, Weikart, and Epstein 2002) and are more than just a place to facilitate learning as Papatheodorou (2010, 145) argues 'they (spaces) shape and condition how we feel, think and behave'. The continuous provision is a well-planned space with evidence showing that the organisation of the classroom, the resources and the design of educational spaces, affect children's learning (Papatheodorou and Ramasult 1994; Penrose, Thomas, and Greed 2001) and the management of these spaces is crucial to allowing children autonomy in their learning.

The combination of continuous, enhanced and focused provision, along with the balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning, has resulted in the unique nature of the Foundation Phase. Analysis of the documentation highlights the reduced prescription in the guidance, and identifies the Foundation Phase as a framework around which teachers and schools construct children's learning experiences.

Rationale and aims of the Foundation Phase

Concerns about the early introduction of formal, sedentary activities, putting children 'behind desks far too early … seeing that the poorest children were being left behind more speedily' (M1) and the negative impact that this might have on children's motivation to learn led to proposals for the Foundation Phase for Wales (ACCAC 2001). Poverty and well-being were a particular concern with children in Wales having the worst well-being in the UK and one in four living in poor families (Akhtar 2005; Wyn Siencyn and Thomas 2007). In Wales a new approach to education was seen to be the route out of poverty (Davidson 2010).

During the conceptualisation of the Foundation Phase, ministers observed curriculum models, which have influenced educational practice and approaches internationally (Brock 2009). As the incumbent Minister for Education observed:

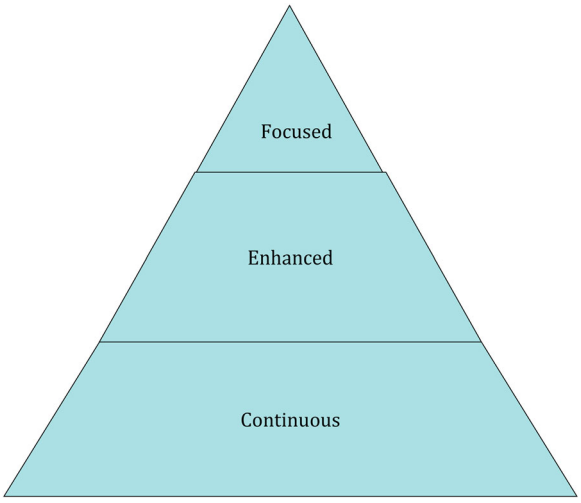

Figure 1. The three aspects of the Foundation Phase.

> children were planning into the delivery of their learning outcomes and able to be very self sufficient … really busy in the most positive way no boredom always thinking and always being sparked off others … I thought well that's what we've got to have here, so in a sense that's what the Foundation Phase was born out of. (M1)

Welsh government documentation also positions the approach firmly in the open curricula traditions of other countries. 'Practice in Denmark, Germany, *Te Whāriki*, in New Zealand and *Reggio Emilia* in Italy shows how children can be encouraged to make decisions about their learning, to be independent and physically active in doing so'. In particular the *High-Scope* approach designed specifically to improve intellectual performance for children in disadvantaged inner city areas in the United States which has shown that good preschool programmes for poor children have lasting effects (Brock 2009; Schweinhart et al. 2012). This resonates strongly with the government's aim to tackle poverty in Wales as identified in the interview with the Minister for Education who stated that, 'there is a strategic direction and it is very clear that the education system in Wales is going to actively address issues around under performance around issues related to socioeconomic issues' (M1).

High-Scope along with *Reggio Emilia*, and *Te Whāriki*, is an open curricular approach and as such emphasises active participatory learning, interaction, reasoning, reflection and responsibility for self-learning (Anning and Edwards 1999; Epstein 2013). These approaches see children as active learners and participants in their own socialisation and knowledge building (Rinaldi 1998), 'rich in potential, strong, powerful and competent' (Malaguzzi 1993, 10). Practitioners are seen as partners in this learning process (Maynard, Waters, and Clement 2011) and their role includes the ability to 'set up situations, and make choices that facilitate the work of children' (Malaguzzi 1993, 91). The Foundation Phase curriculum reflects these approaches having personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity at its core (Maynard 2007). Government documentation advocates an approach where 'children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of "play" providing the vehicle' (DCELLS 2008a, 4), in effect a play-based curriculum. Local authority support highlights this as emphasised in a phase one interview with the Foundation Phase Advisor who stated, 'all learning must have a context that the children understand. Children must be able to access the curriculum at their level so all the resources in the classroom must reflect the range and ability of the children in the classroom' (LA, 1). Teachers also explained how in this approach 'children learn through experience' (T7, 47) needing 'to feel touch explore' (T8, 26). Recognition of children's own responsibility in the learning was emphasised, as pupils were able to 'decide for themselves what they will need in terms of resources' (T1, 207), and the pupil centred nature of the approach allowed teachers the 'freedom to go with the children's interest' (T5, 48). The data from the documentary analysis, interviews with the advisory service and teachers from both schools identified that the Foundation Phase has many of the features of the open curricula that were influential in its conception. As such this research identifies one of the key features of the Foundation Phase as play-based active learning.

The influences from Scandinavia see increased use of the outdoors as an integral part of children's learning. Moser and Martinsen (2010, 459) argue that a 'kindergarten's outdoor space is essential when it comes to children's social development'. Studies in Norway reveal how distinct differences in outdoor environments may influence physical activity and play as well as concentration and physical health (Björklid 2005; Fjørtoft 2001; Grahn et al. 1997). Drawing on such research, the Foundation Phase 'places great importance on practitioners using the outdoors as another classroom where children can work on a daily basis' (M1). Outdoor learning is integral to the curriculum in each of the seven areas of learning with activities organised in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments (Waller 2007). This emphasis on the outdoors has been evident in the Foundation Phase documentation from its conception, with a requirement to view the outdoors as a holistic part of the day-to-day environment where all aspects of the curriculum can be experienced (ACCAC 2001). Consequently the Foundation Phase framework requires the outdoor environment to be viewed as a resource for children's learning and whilst both indoors and outdoors children should be given

opportunities to 'take risks' and 'become confident explorers' (DCELLS 2008a, 16). According to the former Minister for Education, this focus on the learning environment aims to promote discovery and independence, with a 'balance between the cognitive development of the child and its emotional/social development … exploiting the creative potential of play and child-centered activities' (M1). Guidance from the local authority advocates children being outside and more actively involved in their learning with 'a greater emphasis on practical activities rather than worksheets, outdoor learning, involving a range of adults not just teachers (creates) a situation (where we) aim for the children to speak more than the teacher' (LA, 1). What is clear from this analysis is that the use of the outdoors is a second key feature of the Foundation Phase curriculum.

A third key feature of the Foundation Phase is a balance between planned 'practitioner-directed' activities (DCELLS 2008c) and 'child-initiated' activities that are developed from children's interests and play (DCELLS 2008a). However, as highlighted by Maynard, Waters, and Clement (2013, 283), 'activities that are "initiated" by the teacher may be "directed" by the child and vice versa'. The recognition of the child as a co-constructor in their own learning is an important feature of other open curricula. This holistic approach to learning has development of children's self-image and feelings of self-worth and self-esteem at its core where a balance between structured learning through child-initiated activities and those directed by practitioners enables children to be creatively involved in their own learning (DCELLS 2008a). In essence the Foundation Phase is 'a curriculum that involves children in planning and reviewing their work and offers a broad range of experiences (in order to have) a positive long term effect on children's social and intellectual development' (Davidson 2010, 5). The Education Minister highlighted how this new curriculum aimed to nurture lifelong learners, stating that:

> A key strength of the Foundation Phase is that it is a curriculum based on play, active and experiential learning that is child-centered, broad, holistic and relevant. A curriculum phase of education that offers well-planned, practical activities that challenge and motivate, that develop curiosity and independence, and unlock creativity and a thirst for learning. (Davidson 2010, 13)

Therefore, through analysis of playful pedagogies and international best practice, curriculum documentation and practitioner interviews, several key features of the Foundation Phase can be identified. These features are also evident through analysis of interviews and speeches at ministerial, advisory and school level. The recurrence of these features in the primary data suggests they are fundamental to Foundation Phase pedagogy. Indeed, and most pointedly, it could be said that without them any curriculum that is implemented in Wales cannot truly be considered to be a Foundation Phase curriculum. These four key features are identified as: play-based active learning; focused adult-led sessions; child-initiated learning; use of the outdoors for learning. From the underpinning philosophy of the Foundation Phase the aim of the curriculum is identified as: developing independent, motivated, active learners.

In a curriculum where there is no 'subject' of Physical Education, the study aimed to assess whether children were achieving one of the fundamental aims of Physical Education, that of developing physical literacy. Whitehead (2010) identifies the importance of motivation and confidence for learners in realising their embodied capability. The Minister also highlighted the links to physical literacy stating:

> On physical literacy, it just seemed to me as someone who has taught both drama and PE which are both different expressions of physical literacy, that what the Foundation Phase has created is much greater physical confidence and that is an immensely important outcome and needs to be encouraged further up the school system. (M1)

On account of our monist nature, confidence developed in one aspect of life permeates others so learners grow in their independence and motivation as evident in the aim of the Foundation Phase of developing independent, motivated, active learners.

Fidelity of implementation

Existing literature highlights the challenges of implementing curriculum change (Fullan 2003; Stenhouse 1975). With the low levels of prescription associated with the Foundation Phase this study explored the factors that enabled teachers to enact policy in the context of the school. By identifying key features of the curriculum the study was able to critique the extent to which there was congruence between the original vision of the Foundation Phase and practice in schools, in effect assessing the fidelity of the implementation. The key features of the Foundation Phase were evident in the schools throughout the whole of phase two of the research indicating that the schools in the study were implementing the Foundation Phase as intended by policy-makers. This is an important aspect of the study, as it allows us to ascertain whether the Foundation Phase is able to achieve its original aims, in effect answering the question for policy-makers of 'does it work?' Data from a range of sources highlights how the four key features were enacted in the schools.

Play-based active learning and the use of the outdoors

Physicality was highly valued in the culture of the two schools in this study. The key features of play-based active learning and the use of the outdoors for learning were both clearly evident and pupils were highly active in their learning, both physically and in terms of their engagement with learning tasks.

The physical environment of the schools encouraged movement as well as the organisation of the curriculum and the use of the outdoors. In phase one teachers from both schools highlighted how 'there is a huge emphasis to be physical and active in the indoor and outdoor environment, especially the outdoors, they haven't got a choice they have to be physically active' (T2, 120) 'they have daily outdoor time, doing lots of subjects outdoors not just the PE' (T9, 49). Walsh (2004, 106) identifies in Japanese schools that playgrounds were 'elaborately equipped, not only with climbing structures and slides and so on, but also with unicycles, bicycles, tricycles, shovels, stilts, gymnastic equipment, hoses, troughs for diverting water, buckets, tools and so on'. This obvious value placed on movement and physical experiences was similarly seen in the Foundation Phase settings where the developments in the school grounds showed how HTs and governors were investing in opportunities for children to be active. School A invested in outdoor climbing equipment for the Foundation Phase and a trim trail for the whole school (V11A a, b, c). ESTYN (2011, 7) identified the effectiveness of the outdoor areas in the school, which 'provide opportunities for a good range of activities'. School B also had climbing equipment in the Foundation Phase areas, and had built an extensive climbing and adventure structure on the grounds (V11A d–h). ESTYN identified the environment in this school as 'excellent', 'investing in an extensive range of high quality outdoor equipment' (2012, 7). The two schools demonstrated the value placed on physicality in school prospectuses for parents, '… we put great emphasis on giving all children the chance to be active and achieve regardless of their ability … As a school we recognise the importance of physical development' (School A, prospectus 2012, 11), 'We include activities which offer a challenge to the child's initiative, courage and determination' (School B, prospectus 2013, 12).

The structures and developments in the grounds were accompanied by a vast range of smaller equipment, space hoppers, skipping ropes, balance boards, wheelie trays, stilts, bikes and trikes, balls bats, hoops, and a range of games equipment, available to the children during their playtimes, and also during choice sessions in curriculum time (V8A). Playtimes were extremely active with markings, zoning of the playground and the variety of equipment encouraging a range of activities. Staff in both schools valued movement as integral to children's learning, as another teacher explained:

> I see it as a way of developing skills in a really interesting stimulating environment that includes a lot of movement, because it is the natural thing to do from birth. It allows them to understand their space their world, they can't do it 2 dimensionally, they need to feel touch explore, they are natural climbers, it's about being active, not

> abandoning all formalities. It's an active curriculum really … . Before Foundation Phase came in physical development was seen as isolated, I have brought in a lot more movement into my teaching. (T8, 23, 83)

Focused adult-led sessions and child-initiated learning

Teachers had planned learning activities that were in essence taught lessons, as well as opportunities for pupils to plan and direct their own activities. It is widely accepted that children do not learn all the skills they need without guidance and support of adults or peers who can facilitate the next step and ensure appropriate challenges to move learning forward, expressed in the concept of the zone of proximal development (Moore 2012; Stodden et al. 2008; Vygotsky 1978). Although the Foundation Phase is a play-based curriculum, as highlighted by the first key feature, it still retains structure and has adult-led learning. The schools ensured that there was still a system of planning and identified assessment opportunities for pupils' learning. In line with school policies there was a clear planning format. The teachers planning showed how clear activities and assessment for learning were planned to ensure that pupils progressed.

Observations of a planned physical development session highlighted how the teacher focused on aspects from the planning. Comments in field notes highlighted how pupils 'recap ways of moving – building on fundamental movement concepts – spatial aspects, direction and levels' (FNB, 114, 10). The teacher questioned them as identified in the planning and 'reminds them to use different body parts' (FNB, 114, 14) to vary their travelling. The 'children are generally using a variety of movements, Elan (the teacher) stops the music to ask children to show others ideas – she reminds them about using levels' (FNB, 115, 1).

As evident in the planning, the focused sessions took place in all areas of learning, not just physical development, and were highlighted in field notes when pupils were learning to write story maps:

> The class get into a 'cylch' (circle) and sit on the floor to practice a story … The story has actions … The children discuss the task of making a story map of the story. 21 children all in a circle attending to Elan (the teacher) making a rough sketch story map … they joke about Elan's drawings and discuss symbols for 'once upon a time' and 'tomorrow' and 'said'. (FNB, 157–159)

Further scaffolding of learning was demonstrated in focused review sessions where 'children all come to the carpet to review and practice sounds – oo'. Elin goes to write it on the board. Elan (the teacher) scaffolds the spelling … 'there are two sounds that go together to make this sound' (FNB, 162, 14).

Small groups also worked in focused adult-led sessions supported and led by teaching assistants as well as the class teachers such as maths where the teaching assistant worked with one group 'using Numecon and whiteboards. They sit/stand at the table and make numbers on their whiteboards using the Numecon' (FNA 100, 10) and the teacher works with another 'doing tens and units in numbers. They warm up on the board, recap numbers of tens and units in a number' (FNA 100, 11). Even though the activities were focused and adult-led they were playful and featured many of the cues that children associate with play, such as not being at a desk and being physical (Howard 2002).

Of note here is that the key features were evidenced in similar ways in both schools. Guidance for the implementation of the Foundation Phase demonstrated the government's aim 'to reduce prescription and give control and responsibility back to schools and to learners themselves' so that there is 'flexibility in planning' (DCELLS 2008b, 7). It would appear that despite this flexibility for implementation high levels of support in the schools from senior management alongside a structured training programme from the Welsh Government and consistent messages and support at an education authority level resulted in the teachers being clear about the nature of the Foundation Phase. As a result teachers felt competent to implement it with fidelity (Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein 1971) to the original aims of the policy-makers as can be seen by evidence of all the key features of play-based active learning, focused adult-led sessions, child-initiated learning, and use of the

outdoors for learning within both schools in the study. However this is far from the case across Wales with a recent stock take of the implementation of the Foundation Phase reporting as few as 20% of schools implementing the Foundation Phase in line with the original intentions of the policy-makers (Siraj 2015).

Conclusion

This purpose of this paper was to explore the nature and philosophy of the Foundation Phase curriculum in Wales and its enactment in schools, in effect outlining what the Foundation Phase is and how it looks in practice. Research into the implementation of the Foundation Phase found that this play-based curriculum, with an emphasis on the use of the outdoors, contributes to the development of pupils' physical literacy despite the absence of Physical Education in its traditional form (Wainwright 2014). Firstly the paper considered the concept of physical literacy. Then drawing on findings from phase one of the study examined the nature and philosophy of the Foundation Phase, identifying key features and the main aim of the curriculum. Next we drew on findings from phase two of the study to ascertain whether the key features of the Foundation Phase were being enacted in the schools in the study and ascertain the fidelity of implementation. Finally in this conclusion we consider the implications of these findings for policy-makers and schools.

The schools in the study were found to be enacting the Foundation Phase curriculum with fidelity to the original aims of the policy-makers. They were implementing the Foundation Phase through a play-based active learning environment, a balance between focused adult-led sessions and child-initiated learning with an emphasis on the use of the outdoors for learning. In so doing they were developing pupils with a motivated, independent and active approach to learning. Therefore the findings of this research suggests that when the Foundation Phase is implemented with fidelity to the original principles of the policy-makers that it is achieving its aims and should be deemed to be successful. As with all innovations the challenge lies with ensuring that successful implementation occurs in all schools in Wales and this is proving to be difficult in particular since the introduction of reading tests at the end of the Foundation Phase. Welsh Government needs to highlight to schools that pupils who are experiencing the Foundation Phase will make good progress in their cognitive development and teachers should not be returning to sedentary learning behaviours in preparation for tests. Key Stage 2 teachers also face the challenge of maintaining the development of physical literacy through high quality inclusive Physical Education experiences. As pupils leave the Foundation Phase they face applying their embodied confidence to new movement contexts. If they are placed into highly structured competitive situations too early they will be in danger of reduced perceived physical competence and entering a negative spiral of disengagement (Stodden et al. 2008). Physical Education at Key Stage 2 needs to be inclusive and build on the authentic embodied learning they have experienced in the Foundation Phase.

Key of abbreviations for data

M1: interview with Minister for Education
LA: interview with Local Authority Foundation Phase Advisor
H1: interview with HT
DH1: interview with DHT
T1: interview with Foundation Phase teacher number 1 (interviews numbered 1–10 for the 10 teachers)
PI: pilot interview
TA: interview with teacher in School A at time T2
TB: interview with teacher in School B at time T2
FNA: field notes School A (followed by page number and line number)
FNB: field notes School B (followed by page number and line number)
V: video (followed by the number of the video)
CTV: child led tour video
LSA: learning support assistant

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