

Section 1

According to successful futures (2014) the Donaldson report suggests From September 2022 schools across Wales started the implementation process for the new curriculum for wales. According to Education Wales (no date) the curriculum is changing because the world and society is constantly changing. Children need a curriculum that is going to support and prepare them to be capable, confident and compassionate citizens of Wales and the world. In addition to this, according to the most recent results from the PISA test, dated 2018, Wales is the lowest ranking country in the UK (Wightwick, 2019). The new curriculum sets out to ensure all schools across Wales are covering the same core learning and securing a consistent approach for learners aged 3 to 16. As the new curriculum is still being rolled out across schools the Foundation Phase curriculum is still in place until all schools have implemented their own designed curriculum.

The foundation Phase was introduced in 2010, it was designed to provide an experiential, developmental and play based approach to teaching and learning (Welsh Government, 2015). According to Country Report-Wales (2018) the Foundation Phase is a curriculum designed to be delivered as a progressive framework that meets children's diverse needs and they should move on to the next stages of their learning when they are developmentally ready. Waters (2016, p.180) states the central role of a practitioner within the foundation Phase was to be a facilitator of learning where children's learning is seen as a continuum and the curriculum was planned to meet their individual needs and facilitate their progress. What this means is it was stated a practitioner's role within the foundation phase was to encourage children's self-learning and collaboration. To prompt conversations and discussions, get children asking questions to stimulate others thinking and encourage those group discussions with their peers (EU Business School, 2022). The foundation phase requires there to be a balance. A balance between structured learning and teaching directed by practitioners and structured learning through child initiated play (Welsh Government,2015).

According to the Welsh Government (2014) the implementation of the foundation phase differs within and between funded maintained settings and maintained

schools. However despite the difference there appeared to me a general move into the right direction. They also state that 10% of the foundation phase pilot implementations went well at the time. The majority of practitioners and key stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in a survey believed the foundation phase was having a positive impact on children. It was having a positive impact on their learning, their attitudes towards learning, their behaviour and their well-being (Welsh Government, 2015). Welsh Government (2015) also stated that the majority of practitioners believed the foundation phase was having a positive effect and led to improvements in literacy and numeracy both in English and Welsh.

The evaluation of the implementation of the foundation phase led to overall improvements in children's well-being, their involvement and their academic achievement. Therefore for the foundation phase to continue to be successful and to further develop and enhance it recommendations were made.

A common thread in the recommendations is the need to ensure staff are aware and trained in the foundation phase and how to use the pedagogies. By staff having the training it enhances the quality of teaching there is likely to be a higher success rate for children's achievements (Welsh Government, 2014. and Welsh Government, 2015). When asked in a lecture how many people had received foundation phase training very few people raised their hand to say they have. This suggests that this recommendation was not applied in settings.

Recommendation 4 states practitioners need to be given practical advice on how they should be implementing the literacy and numeracy framework alongside the foundation phase. Emphasising how both literacy and numeracy can be taught to children in a variety of different approaches complement one another (Welsh Government, 2015). Recommendation 8 of the Welsh Government's final report states a greater emphasis on the foundation phase should be given in teacher education courses and other professional courses (Welsh Government, 2015). This recommendation was applied as it was a big focus point in the CACHE level 3 Diploma and other related courses (Social Care Wales, 2019).

According to the Welsh Government (2014) the need for more training and greater emphasis on the foundation phase and how to use it is because it was stated the

area where the implementation of the foundation phase was poor was the lack of clear and agreed view on how to implement it. There were misconceptions on how children learn and how they can learn through play and experiential learning. Due to these misconceptions practice was not as effective as it could be for children learning. The lack of understanding meant some maintained schools were going back and forth with the implementation of the foundation phase. This meaning for the school who were unsure and did not understand how to implement the foundation phase correctly and allow the children to have experiential learning and learning through play these sessions turned into 'freeplay' which in turn became chaotic and the environment did not work for effective practice. As a result of this the level of confidence in practitioners and in the foundation phase dropped and they went back to learning approaches they were more familiar with in hopes of maintaining standards.

This links to another recommendation from the Welsh Government (2015).

Recommendation 19 states for practitioners to be encouraged to more frequently use a variety of different learning zones or areas throughout their classroom and in the outdoor environment. From looking at the reports it would show some maintained schools and non-funded maintained settings were able to successfully utilise their areas to offer children experiential learning opportunities better than others. However it is clear this is due to some schools and settings not having a clear understanding on how to do this successfully.

To Conclude the implementation of the foundation phase there is evidence above which suggests that at the time of implementation at the pilot stage it was successful in both maintained schools and other settings. There is evidence that shows practitioners found a positive difference in children's attitude towards learning and their well-being when the foundation phase was implemented. Even with the positive impact the foundation phase had when it was implemented there was also evidence to suggest improvements. These improvements being all practitioners using the foundation phase getting training to ensure they understand the pedagogies and know how utilise their areas indoors and outdoors so children are learning through play which is what the foundation phase is all about it is a play based framework that encourage practitioners to provide children with experiential learning opportunities.

Section 2

The definition of unique is described as being one of a kind, only one existing of its type, being special in a way (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). According to Early Years Matters (2022) every child is a unique child. It is recognised that all children learn and mature in all areas of development at their own pace, at different rates and in different ways. The Foundation Phase (2015, p.6) states children develop and acquire their skills at different rates. These skills must be allowed to develop at their own individual and unique pace. Children must also have the opportunity to practise and learn these new skills in different situations where they can reflect and evaluate their own work. The children's work should be respected and valued, it should be encouraged for its originality.

In schools not all current assessments allow children to develop at their own individual pace. Some learning schemes may have week by week planning which practitioners and learners are expected to be able to keep up with. However, as it has been recognised all children are unique and learn at different paces, learners who are struggling with the concept are then moving on to a new concept before they have grasped an understanding and make it concrete, then further their understanding of the concept by making it abstract.

Bradburry and Roberts-Holmes (2017) state their research shows schools and early years provisions are going through a process called 'datafication'. This means schools and early years provisions are having a focus of collecting and analysing data from children's assessments to fulfil government policy and create a baseline for their learning. The article goes on to mention the views of practitioners and researchers. They argue there is more to assessing children than just reducing it to numbers. Practitioners can get a lot of information from observing children in play. Play shows practitioners what they are interested in, what they are capable of doing and how they interact with others around them.

Children are continuously learning and growing into resilient, confident and capable individuals (Earlyyears matters, 2022. and McMahon, S and Dyer, M. 2018, p.30). This is on par with one of the four principles from the early Years Foundation stage.

Every child is unique, they are constantly learning and they can be self-assured, resilient, confident and capable (Department for Education, 2014). McMahon and Dyer (2018,p.30) state each child has their own individual learning needs. It is important practitioners know and understand their children's learning needs in order to support them and further their learning and development.

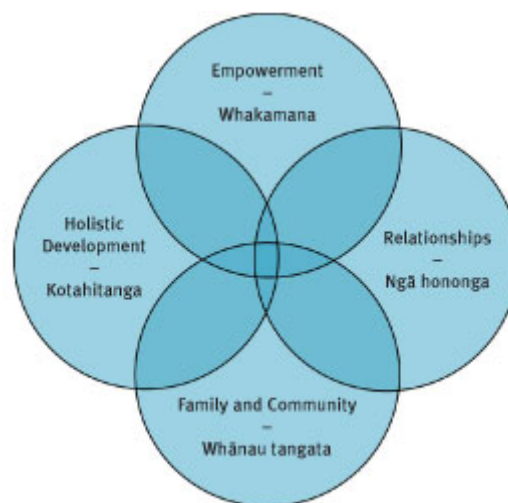
Schools used to follow the same curriculum throughout Wales. From September 2022 the new curriculum for Wales started rolling out. This new curriculum is moving away from a relatively prescribed content based curriculum to a curriculum that is purpose based. Each school around Wales can then design and adapt their own curriculums to suit the needs of their children (Senedd Research, 2023). According to the Welsh Government (no date) assessment has a fundamental role to play in allowing each individual child to make progress at an appropriate pace for them. Play can help ensure they feel supported but also provide them with challenges. Welsh Government (2020) states assessments should contribute in making a holistic picture of the learner for practitioners. These assessments will show their strengths, areas that need support and what steps need to be taken in learning and teaching in order to develop these areas. They also state assessments should not be used as a one off judgement for the overall achievement for learners at a set age or criteria on a best fit basis.

When it comes to assessing children it is important for practitioners to consider the unique child. A form of planning and assessment is 'In the moment' learning journey. In the moment means it is a child centred approach where they are at the centre of their own learning. Through 'In the moment' practitioners are able to respond to children's interests and support them by tailoring activities to suit the children's strengths and weaknesses (Learning Journals, 2023).

The benefits of using this form of assessment is it allows for practitioners to document even the smallest of achievements that can not be documented on a form of assessment. For example these achievements might be a part of a child's IDP. An IDP is an individual development plan which explains a child's learning needs, what can be done to support them and outcomes hoped to achieve (SnapCymru, no date). These outcomes might not necessarily be all academic achievements but they could

be more personal like social skills, greeting others in the morning, being able to play alongside other children, and participating in group activities such as cooking sessions or music time. These all being areas of their development that can not be documented formally but can still show they have achieved these outcomes from photos and adding on to the learning journey wall or into their learning journey stories. Other outcomes could also include the children's own personal achievements. Children may discuss with practitioners what is something they would like to get better at and work on it together over time.

A child centred approach which is similar to this is the Te Whāriki sociocultural approach to learning. This approach is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological-contextual model. This model provides a framework for understanding the context in which humans develop and it is an approach that shows an emphasis on the importance of relationships and whanaungatanga. The Principles for Te Whāriki are Empowerment, Relationships, Family and Community, Holistic Development. In practice these principles should overlap and interconnect (Ministry of Education, 2023).



(Source: Ministry for Education, 2023)

As part of the sociocultural approaches to assessment, the Ministry for Education (2023) states it includes the children's viewpoints when possible, practitioners are to take into account the powerful influence assessments in a child's sense of themselves as learners. This links to 'in the moment' learning journeys and stories as

they both use the child's input into something they would like to be able to achieve. They can set themselves a personal goal. The Ministry for Education (2023) mentions a shift in traditional assessment where they were one-sided. The shift allows children the ability to steer their own learning, set their own goals, they can assess their own achievements and can take on some responsibility for their own learning. Children are being given a voice. This is in line with article 12 of the UNCRC which states parties are to assure children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to do so freely in matters that affect themselves (UNCRC, no date).

Learning stories were developed in New Zealand, they are a narrative account of a task that a child has done. A practitioner's observes the child doing the task and writes it up as a story. Learning stories can also be done for group activities. They can include photographs of the activity to illustrate for readers the learning that has taken place (Nyland and Alfeyez, 2012, p.394). According to My ECE (2023) learning stories are generally made by an adult to highlight what a child is able to do rather than what they are not able to do. They also mention it is common for practitioners to match up strands of the Te Whariki curriculum to the story to explain what a child or a group of children have learnt from that task. Practitioners will also reflect on children's learning stories using learning dispositions to analyse what learning has taken place. The learning dispositions include the child taking an interest and being involved, how persistent they are when faced with a challenge and difficulties, it also includes them expressing an idea or a feeling and taking responsibility (Nyland and Alfeyez, 2012,p.394). Nyland and Alfeyez also state Learning Stories are not compulsory in New Zealand's curriculum however they have been endorsed and it is a comprehensive assessment resource that has been made available online for all services to use in their settings.

The advantages of using this form of assessment are, learning stories can have multiple perspectives, these being the perspectives of the teacher, the children and the children's parents or guardians. Because learning stories are considered to be more comprehensive than other forms of assessments and observation methods they are considered to provide more depth than an anecdotal record (Nyland and

Alfeyez,2012,p.394). This form of assessment allows children to learn through their play, it is child centred and provides them with a voice.

Disadvantages to using learning journeys and stories is staff and time. When practitioners have a class of 30 children, unfortunately they are not able to focus on all the children. Even if they have extra members of staff in the room with how busy school life is, unfortunately not all children will have the chance to have their journeys updated as much as some of the children. There may be children in the class who also have additional needs therefore more time will be put into ensuring those who need the additional support are focused on more. As mentioned by Nyland and Alfayez (2012,p.394) they state the two issues that have been highlighted with learning stories are the role of the adult in early childhood curriculum and time being a problem for practitioners.

Section 3

The Importance of Music in Early Years

Music is an expressive art that allows people to feel a range of different stimuli which allows for listeners to experience an array of emotions. Music is able to engage children in language learning and provides them with opportunities to express and understand their ideas in ways that go beyond words (Winters and Griffin, 2014, p.78). Bautista *et al* (2022, p.8) concludes music is a form of self-regulation, emotional expression and social bonding. They state music has the potential to foster a holistic and balanced development (Bautista *et al*, 2022, p.4).

The New Curriculum

The new curriculum for Wales has 6 different learning areas, one of these areas includes expressive arts. The expressive arts area has five disciplines that together share the creative process, music is one of these disciplines. According to the Welsh Government (2020) the expressive arts area is about having an inclusive approach, where it is accessible to all. Learners who experience the expressive arts could help to engage them socially and emotionally, it can also nurture their well-being, their resilience and self-esteem.

Expressive arts is cross-curricular. By settings having this area of learning as part of their curriculum in schools, they are providing children with the opportunity to develop their skills for other areas. For example, just by looking into music, children are getting the opportunity to use their literacy and mathematical skills.

According to Baurista *et al* (2022, p.183) music is a pathway to literacy. Music and singing can support children's language acquisition, it supports their phonemic and phonological awareness and encourages them to use oral language skills broadening their vocabulary (Heydon, McKee and O'Neill, 2017, p.4).

Music education has the potential to enhance children's mathematical thinking (Raja and Bhalla, 2020, p.2). An article for The Guardian (2016) describes maths as being more than just arithmetic, it is a language of the universe that everyone is able to learn and speak. They also state maths is everywhere and it is logical. Music is made up of recurring patterns and sequences, children are able to develop their mathematical thinking as they notice and respond to these patterns (Boogiemite, 2021). According to making music (no date) songs can bring maths to life for children and they can develop the ability to spot patterns. Music can help children to understand and recognise number quantities with its name by singing songs such as 'five little speckled frogs', '1,2,3,4,5 once i caught a fish' and '5 little ducks'. Each of these songs allow for children to count along on their fingers and be able to count forwards and back to or from 5 using their hands, they can recognise and understand the number place value, the quantity of the number and the number's name.

Some schools may choose to incorporate music sessions into their curriculum in the form of music therapy.

What is music therapy?

Music therapy is a great intervention that is inclusive to everyone of all abilities and ages and stages of life. So how does it work ? Through a range of different music styles, instruments, voices and other resources, music therapy can be used to support babies developing bonds with parents and it can be used to provide sensitive and compassionate end of life support (BAMT, no date). Music therapy can particularly help support children who are autistic or have other learning disabilities (Mewsicmovies, 2016).

Benefits of music therapy.

There are many benefits to the use of music therapy. Some of these benefits include it helps with their communication and social skills. According to Marquez-Garcia *et al* (2019, p.94) studies have shown that children who have participated in music sessions have had a positive impact and improvement upon their joint attention and

social engagement. They also state other studies showed children with ASD had improved with verbal and non-verbal communication and improvements in their ability to self-regulate when the therapy sessions included dance. Music is also a great way to help with children's fine motor skills as they hold and play different instruments and gross motor skills as it encourages their inclination to move their bodies to rhythms and beats (Arete Music Academy, 2018).

Dr Ray Heipp explains in a youtube video the use of the Beamz light system. Beamz is a device that uses light beams that when broken generates musical sounds. The Beamz system includes a software system which allows for music therapists to create their own sounds (School Health, 2018). According to Presley (no date) Beamz enables people of all ages and abilities to have fun creating and playing music. This can be done by the user breaking the laser lights by using their hands, fingers or other objects. This video link shows a demonstration on how Beamz can be used through the motion of eye movement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEmgl7smJpE>

Westminster Technologies (2016) shows different people talking about the positive effects the Beamz system has had on children. One of the positives include an increase of flexibility in a boy's arms and hands. The Beamz system has allowed children to have the opportunity to participate in the joy of making music no matter their mobility they are given the chance to have the ability.

To conclude, music is enjoyable and inclusive. All children are able to participate in music whether it be using their own voices to make sounds, dancing or playing instruments (traditional or electronic). It is a cross-curricular activity where children can develop and learn new skills. They learn listening skills, language and mathematics. They are also learning to develop important life skills such as communication, social skills and holding eye contact with others. Music allows for those participating to develop bonds and relationships with others. Therefore with all this in mind it is important schools and other settings should include music into their curriculum.

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