

Early years curricula module.

Section 1

According to Welsh Government (2015 'a'), The Foundation Phase Framework is the Curriculum in Wales which is set out by the Welsh Government. It is aimed at children aged 3 to 7 years old and has seven areas of learning which include – Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity, language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical development, welsh language development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. The foundation phase framework was introduced in 2008 by the Welsh Government. The foundation phase framework started in 2010 and was designed for children to learn through a play-based approach to encourage learning and development. It is also to encourage children's imagination and creativity through play and through hands-on experiences (Welsh Government, (2018). The main goal for the foundation phase curriculum was learning through play and for teachers to participate, encourage and support children whilst they learn through play-based activities in a relaxed environment.

A research report was taken by (Power, S Et al 2018) and shows that only a few children benefited from the foundation phase curriculum. The ones who didn't benefit seemed to be boys and children that live in poverty. This is in line with Bernstein's (1975) beliefs of poverty being an issue, he supports poverty can be an issue when it comes to child-led approaches in a poorer environment as he believes that there are fewer experiences for the children and that the expectations are not as high in a disadvantaged area (Pavett, 2014). The National Educational Union (2019) supports Bernstein's belief that poverty affects children's learning, education and development as they state that poverty has a negative impact on children's overall health - including their mental well-being and physical health. This can then affect children's ability to learn. The national educational union also state that poverty is creating barriers for children's education and is having a negative effect on their chances in life.

The research report by Power, also clearly shows that the girls in the setting also had achieved better learning outcomes compared to the boys, this was believed to be because the girls appeared to engage better in the child-led activities and opportunities. This is also supported by the report on understanding the gender gap in literacy and language development (Moss and Washbrook, 2016) as it states that more boys than girls are below the expected standard when it comes to language and development when they reach the age of 5 and 7 years old. Girls are more engaged when it comes to education, The paper also states that boys who have poor communication and language could then later go on and not enjoy their education or school experience as much. It also states that it can also affect their confidence in the classroom and boys could lose motivation for learning.

However according to (BBC, 2015) researchers suggest that teachers can be biased towards girls as they believe that girls appear to be less disruptive than boys in class, teachers also believe that girls are more positive towards their learning. Teachers could be engaging more with the girls in the class over the boys, when it should be equal, which then gives the girls an advantage in their learning and development as there is a possibility the girls are having more time spent with them whilst learning. Furthermore, the Welsh Government (No Date 'a') commissioned an independent evaluation by WISERED and the outcome from this evaluation was that boys, where English was an additional language, were benefiting the most from the foundation phase.

There was also a stock take carried out from September 2013 to March 2014 by professor Iram Siraj. Welsh Governments (2014) independent stocktake of the foundation phase in wales report carried out the stocktake to review the implementation of the foundation phase and to assess and see how well the foundation phase is working in nurseries and schools. Siraj evaluated the progress of the foundation phase curriculum over a period of 1 year and found that only around 20% of settings have achieved the correct implementation of the foundation phase curriculum. The Pupil progression was positive for the settings that closely followed

the principles of the foundation phase, these settings achieved the best learning outcomes and well-being for the children.

However, Siraj's research and evaluation also show that there was room for improvement in some areas. Recommendations were made for positive changes that should be put in place. Such as, Staff understanding the importance of play and how it can be implemented in the setting. He also suggests that all staff should be up to date with training and understand the Foundation Phase and how it should be implemented in the setting. There is guidance to support staff and teachers from the Welsh Government (No Date 'b') such as the Foundation Phase Profile handbook. This handbook provides all the information on how to implement the Foundation Phase into a setting, it has guidance on how to support the assessment of children's development and learning. It has the information and forms for the staff to use to complete the children's developmental progress and ladder skills. The children are assessed by observations and formative assessments within the Foundation Phase Framework. They are then given a score, this score will be matched up against the expected age of development.

Pacey (2022) agree with Siraj views on the importance of staff being up to date on training as they believe it gives opportunities to provide children the best possible start. Staff should understand the importance and key points of play and why play matters and how to implement it in the setting (Family lives, 2021). Children who learn through play are generally ready for school and this can have a positive impact on their imagination, literacy and numeracy skills. Staff should understand the importance of play and what benefits it has on a child's learning development, for example the playing outdoor area is within nature and will help a child understand the world around them and help them make sense of the world, this is in line with the (Welsh Government, 2015a).

The independent evaluation which was commissioned by the Welsh Government (no date 'a') provide a report on the key findings of the Foundation Phase. The report states that overall, it has had a positive impact on the children that were evaluated by

schools, childcare settings and parent and guardian surveys. It also included several interviews from the local authority, organisations and practitioners. The findings of the report were that the majority that were interviewed believed that the Foundation Phase had a positive impact, focusing especially on the children's wellbeing and confidence.

Overall, the key findings of the reports and other research that have taken place are that the Foundation Phase Curriculum has had a positive effect on the way children learn however, changes need to be made for better outcomes. Some of the changes that were put in place by Siraj can be seen in the document 'a guide to Curriculum for wales 2022' that has been set out by the welsh government (2019 'a'). For example, Siraj highlights the importance of staff being up to date with all training and understanding the importance of the curriculums. This recommendation can be seen with the new Curriculum for Wales, which states that there will be new ways of training staff to help improve the school and education systems (Welsh Government, no date).

The New curriculum for wales 2022 will be a whole new system change. It has been developed on the benefits from the Foundation Phase. The Foundation Phase Curriculum pedagogy and principles will still be delivered to the early year's education; however, the ethos of the Foundation Phase Curricula has been incorporated within the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government 2019 'b'). The new Curriculum has been designed for wales to transform the way children learn in education, it is to help children thrive in schools. Since 2014, Wales has been reforming and shaping ways on how they can improve the way children and students learn. The New curriculum is aimed to be set out in September 2020 and 2022 to create better learning outcomes within education, it is also set out to capture teachers' professionalism and have a positive impact on education overall in wales (OECD, 2020 'b').

The New Curriculum for wales has four main purposes at the heart of it, it is set out to achieve:

- Ambitious capable learners
- Enterprising creative contributors
- Ethical informed citizens

- Healthy confident individuals

From January 2020 schools and education/child settings should start designing their own Curricula ensuring that the four purposes are included within their plans. By schools, educational/child settings complying and including the four purposes within their planning it is in line with article 29 of the United Nations Rights of the child – as children's education should help their overall well-being and empower their strengths (CYPCS, 2021). Settings and teachers are encouraged to be creative when teaching subjects, the aim to step away from the standard age and stage assessment.

Although the intentions for the New Curriculum are for more positive outcomes, Bera (2020) recognise some challenges and risks that may occur during the process of implementing the New Curriculum. For example, the New Curriculum will require new resources which settings will have to invest in, for some disadvantaged areas this can be a problem, again referring to Bernstein's (1975) theory of poverty being an issue when it comes to education and learning (Pavett, 2014). Bera (2020) are also concerned that flexibility may be an issue when implementing the new curriculum. Although some teachers disagree or dislike the standard assessments, there is a risk that the achievement gap can be lost if there are no clear progression goals. As teachers have the flexibility to create their own curriculum which is bespoke to the needs of their learners.

However, there are believed to be more positive outcomes and changes regarding the new curriculum for wales 2022. For example, the new Curriculum will be a more experienced approach to learning and development for children (nursery world 2022). The way children are usually assessed will change and the progression steps will be more flexible, unlike the foundation phase. The new Curriculum will recognise that all children are different and progress and develop at different stages, this will take away the judgement of children hitting or not hitting developmental outcomes (Welsh Government, 2019).

Overall, viewing both the foundation phase and the new curriculum for wales there seems to be a better approach to learning with the new curriculum compared to the

foundation phase. The OECD assessed the new curriculum for wales for a few years and have come up with and suggested the next steps to go in the right direction for implementation. The OECD came up with a report after analysing welsh educational policies and study visits and have recommendations for future implementation such as:

- “Developing a shared understanding of what the vision looks like in practice”
- “Supporting the realisation of the curriculum across all schools in Wales”
- “Focusing the co-construction process on next steps for schools”
- “Consolidating policy coherence around schools”

These actions are required to create positive changes in schools throughout wales (OECD, 2020 ‘a’).

Section 2

Every child is a unique child who learns and develops in individual ways, all children learn at different stages in each area of development. Each child has different interests and hobbies and can mature at their own individual rates. For example, some babies can walk by the age of 12 months whereas others are unable to do this at that age. It is important that practitioners understand and consider that children have individual interests and different learning styles. Children communicate in different ways, so it is important that practitioners understand each individual child and how they learn to help them progress and develop in their own ways (The Early Year's Foundation Stage, 2005).

A unique child is always learning and developing, babies and young children develop quickly in the early years. Research shows that a baby’s brain develops the quickest in the first 5 years than it does in a lifetime (Raising Children, 2020). Children have a right as stated in section the United Nations Rights of the child, for a provision that allows a child to develop their strengths and abilities, regardless of their cultural

background, language, gender or any learning disabilities (Save the Children, No Date).

A unique child is born ready to learn and interact within their environment, children should be given opportunities to develop within an enabling environment and interact with positive relationships with others (Foundation Years, 2012).

It is important that practitioners assess children's development, so they can keep a record of where that child is developmentally and plan progression steps for each individual child. They can then use the results from assessments to further plan activities or recognise where the child may need extra support. Children's progress can be monitored through various assessments and information can then be shared with parents and other professionals if needed (Parent zone Scotland, 2021).

There are many approaches to assessing children's development one being learning stories. A learning story is a fun record of the child's development that can be shared with family members. Learning stories were created in New Zealand by Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee in 2001 (Get Educa, 2017).

Learning stories are created by practitioners by observing the child and keeping a record of the child's progress, ideas, strengths, interests and development through a story format (Naeyc, 2016). Learning stories can be used on children of all ages to track development. Practitioners will add information on what and how the child is developing in that area and create a story. It usually focuses on what a child can do and the child's strengths, rather than what they cannot do or their weaknesses. Although Learning stories are not a curricula requirement it gives the teachers a guide to know where each child is developmentally. Therefore, it is beneficial as the teacher can plan for the next steps of progression for that individual child from the results of the learning story. When a child is engaged in an activity that they have initiated, it is usually something that sparks their interests. Therefore, it is likely to see a positive reflection of a child's progression as it interests the individual child, more activities that the child enjoyed can then be set up with the next steps of progression in mind (Early years careers, 2016). Learning stories are made up of photos and actual pieces of

work the children have completed themselves - This method gives a holistic view of development. The child, family and practitioners can visually see the progression a child makes from learning stories, compared to tick sheet assessment style methods, this is a more relaxed fun way to assess children (Get early works, no date). However, like most assessments there can be challenges for example sometimes learning stories cannot show a true reflection of a child's development as learning stories can be time-consuming for practitioners. Observations are taken of the children and if things are happening at a quick pace or the practitioners gets distracted they could miss out on opportunities to make a record of the child's development. Whereas compared to other methods of assessment such as tick sheet style assessments For example an Age/stage assessment. The Age/Stage assessment methods are beneficial for practitioners who feel like time can be an issue when observing the child (Prasanna, 2022).

Another approach of assessment is the Foundation Phase Profile, this assessment builds up a holistic view of a child's development, it is a guide for teachers to create a baseline assessment on children on entry to school (Wales Online, 2015a). This approach starts with observations taken by the practitioners when the child starts school called a baseline assessment, this helps the practitioners identify where the child is at developmentally. By observing the children playing and engaging activities, practitioners can create a portfolio of evidence of the children's achievements and development. These can be kept and then reviewed in time to see if progress has been made. The Foundation Phase Profile is a summative assessment that keeps the progress of a child's development over time, this gives a true reflection of a child's development as you can see the progression made from the previous observations made. The outcomes from the observations will then be assessed against a ladder skill chart, to see where the child is at in developmental areas. The practitioner will decide where on the skill ladder each individual child is from the observations made. Then they can put in place an action plan to further the child's personal development to get them on to the next step of the skill ladder. The practitioner will then score the Foundation Phase Profile assessment outcomes and give each child an outcome of bronze, silver, gold or foundation phase outcome 1 to 6. These stages will then

represent what age that child is at developmentally, for example, if a child scores Foundation phase outcome one then the expected age of development would be 24-36 months (Welsh government, no date 'b').

As each child is a unique each child, they all learn differently, depending on things like the environment. So, it is important that children get observed in different environments such as indoors and outdoors and observed doing a range of activities as some children can behave and engage differently in different settings and environments. This is in line with Froebel's belief that environments can inspire children's behaviour (Oxfordshire County council, no date).

Both approaches require observations to be made. Planning should be inspired by the outcomes of the observations taken by practitioners to support each individual child's requirements and progression. Both approaches support individual development by gathering information and observations (Wales Online, 2015a). However, the Foundation Phase Profile compares children's development and outcomes against an age/stage development chart. It is not always a true reflection on how a child develops, as it doesn't show all the children's strengths or weaknesses. It only shows a short amount of time that the practitioner observed for example 15 minutes observations. Not all children develop the same, therefore every child has the same assessment on them from the Foundation Phase Profile is not a true reflection on a child's development and does not support or allow for the unique child.

There has been a controversial debate on how children are assessed and whether they should be assessed academically when they start school for example a research report by the Centre for Education Economics suggest that children's well-being has drastically decreased, and it is in tension with children's academic achievements (Clarke, 2020). Heller – Sahlgren suggest that children's well-being and high achievement do not go "hand in hand" and that there needs to be a decision made on which is more important, children's well-being or academic achievements (Heller – sahlgren, 2017).

However, many parents and practitioners disagree with the way children are assessed in the UK, they disagree with the fact that children are academically tested when they start school. The way children are tested in the UK puts pressure on the child. Other countries such as Sweden encourage their children to be creative and learn in a fun manner for example through educational games and songs. Children in Sweden are not graded like they are in the UK when they enter school, they do not have baseline assessments like the UK (Bohjort, 2019). This matter has been picked up in the OECD reports and suggestions that changes need to be made in the way wales assess children's development (OECD, 2015 'a'). These changes can be seen in the new curriculum for wales which is set out to take place in 2022, It has a holistic approach to learning and development and will not have a specific age/stage approach method like the foundation phase profile in the areas of learning and development (Welsh Government, 2019 'c') This approach supports the unique child, as every child reaches different stages at different ages, there should be no judgement on a child's development or progress.

Section 3 –

Do parents understand how beneficial the outdoors can be for children's development and how can they implement this at home?

From working in the childcare industry for 14 years, one thing I have noticed over the years is, how much children can learn and develop from playing and exploring the outdoors. But the question is, do parents understand the benefits it has on a child's development? There are many ways a parent can encourage outdoor learning, but over the years of having conversations with parents, there seem to be so many missed opportunities for outdoor learning at home. From what I can gather from these conversations I have had with the parents, they seem to think that areas of development - for example, mathematics and science can only be achieved in a classroom. My aim is for parents to view the outdoors differently and see the huge benefits it can have on a child's development. The foundation phase framework promotes outdoor learning and supports the benefits it has on children's development (Welsh Government, 2015 'b')

From observing the children and from my own point of view, I have noticed that they get a sense of freedom, they seem to be calmer, happier and more engrossed in activities when outdoors rather than indoors. Several researchers will agree that children who are often playing outdoors are happier than children who spend most of the day indoors (Child mind institute, 2022). The outdoors is not only enjoyable and fun for a child but can also benefit them in so many ways. I will now go on and explain in detail how each area of learning within the Foundation framework can be achieved outdoors for parents and how important it is for a child's development.

Children will engage with science, for example - the children who spend time outdoors and observe the world around them - will experience weather changes, so will learn about the temperatures, for example on hot sunny days and wet cold days. The weather can also spark curiosity and other scientific learning, for example, shadows can be made on sunny days and if children are playing with water – they could experience the evaporation process (NDNA, 2019). We as practitioners should encourage parents and children to go for walks in all weathers to allow the child experience and learn about these weather changes. Maybe then the parents will notice and see through their own eyes, what a simple walk can achieve for a child's scientific development.

Mathematical concepts can also be achieved through the outdoors, nature and natural resources such as the leaves that can be found. For example, a child can count the leaves they see and experience the different shapes of the leaves/sticks. Patterns can also be achieved through the natural resources that can be found in an outdoor area (Teach early years, 2022). Parents can spend a morning or afternoon in the garden to achieve this, a simple task of comparing the patterns and shapes of leaves will benefit a child's mathematical development hugely and can be done from the comfort of their own familiar outdoor environment.

The outdoors allows and encourages children to be creative and use their imagination, children can explore the outdoor area and collect their own resources to build and

create projects such as wood, to make dens. This is something a parent can also get involved with. Quality time spent together searching the outdoors and encouraging the child's imagination to create their project. Not only will this benefit a child's creativity but also their self-confidence and thinking skills (Play works, 2014).

Physical and mental health can also be promoted by the outdoors. Children can run freely and have the opportunity to be physically active for example, climbing, running, hopping and jumping. Parents can take their child for a walk to the park or through a woodland area for a child to achieve all these physical developmental progressions. As research suggests, fresh air and natural light are beneficial for children's mental health. Once a child has spent time outdoors, their brains will function better, and they can feel more energetic alert and happy (Children's Wisconsin, 2022).

Playing and spending time outdoors can be beneficial to a child's language, literacy and communication skills. For example, children who explore the outdoors alongside other children will begin to have conversations with one another, this could be about the nature around them such as the textures of the tree. Children will also engage with one another and improve their social skills, turn-taking can be made, and words can begin to form and be represented by the nature around them (Cymru National Resources Wales, no date). This is something that can be easily done with a parent and child, for example talking and communicating in the garden or the park.

Welsh can also be promoted outdoors, activities set up outdoors can promote the Welsh language and understanding. Children can learn the Welsh words for what they see around them for example a tree, members of staff can repeat the Welsh word for a tree which is 'coeden'. The children will learn these new Welsh words with visuals which will help them remember. Promoting Welsh can be a challenge if the parent does not speak the Welsh language however, teachers and practitioners in my setting can offer guidance on simple Welsh songs/words if the parents are interested.

Letting children experience the outdoors often and allowing them to explore in the nature can have many beneficial outcomes for their personal and social well-being. For example, children can gain independence, build confidence and self-esteem by

achieving tasks they have been set or tasks they have set themselves outdoors. Something as simple as a child walking along a fallen tree branch can make them feel proud and have a sense of achievement. Parents can encourage and join in with the fun of setting and completing tasks outdoors and watch their child's confidence grow. As you can see above- the many benefits and developmental progression that the outdoors can promote in the simplest ways that parents are unaware of. From my experience and speaking with parents they do not understand the importance of outdoor learning. In my opinion, I think it is vital that children get the chance to be outdoors not only in school but at home too. There are many websites that can help and guide parents with lots of free advice and activities to promote outdoor learning, for example, <https://www.ltl.org.uk/parents/> (LTL, no date). My hope is to encourage parents to use the outdoors more with their children and see the many benefits it has on not only their child's overall health and well-being but also their own mental health and well- being. Mind (2022) support that outdoors and nature has a positive effect on overall mental well- being for both adults and children.

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