

Section 1

In 2004, the Welsh Government formally ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, No Date), which states that children have the right to play and engage in leisure and cultural activities. Additionally, under Article 15 and Article 12 mentions that children have the freedom to associate and the right to express their opinions respectively. Forging Children and Young People Rights to Action (2002) Action the Welsh Government's Programme for Children and Young People which is based on 7 Core Aims to implement UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. Core Aim one is focused on early years that ensures that every child should have a flying start in life and Core Aim four is based on access to Play (Welsh Government, 2018a).

Wales a Play friendly country is a statutory guidance to Welsh Ministers and Local Authorities to assess and create sufficient play opportunities 'Creating a Play Friendly Wales' based on Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. The Welsh Government is well conscious of the value of play for children. Every child has the fundamental right to play, and it plays a crucial part in their health and wellbeing. It plays a significant part in a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Quality play opportunities reduces social inequalities especially in deprived communities, it does not only affect the well-being of children but also the health and well-being of wider communities (Wales-a Play friendly Country, 2004). However according to research conducted by McInnes et al. (2011) play is considered as the basis of early years education and practitioners facilitate learning through play but there is a difference in pedagogic interactions and how children see it. Lack of understanding the term Child-Led activities and reluctance to give choices to children result in overreliance on adults. Furthermore, the different definition of play according to adults and children is a limitation in Foundation Phase.

According Play Policy Wales (2002) 'Play is a process of learning and development; it has contributed to the survival of our species from evolutionary point of view by developing natural curiosity and risk-taking abilities and promoting independence'. For children play is instinctive and allows them to act freely with no external pressure. Based on Play Policy Implementation Plan (2006) the Welsh Government decided to provide quality play opportunities for children addressing the play needs of children including access to open and natural spaces, inclusive opportunities for every child regardless of gender, race and disability. It also included training practitioners, mandatory funding for play facilities, improving the National Minimum Standard for open play, and parents' engagement and facilitation.

The Foundation Phase is a play based developmental curriculum for three- to seven-year-olds in Wales. It encourages children to be creative, imaginative and to have fun while making learning more effective. In the foundation phase children are encouraged to learn through practical activities and develop problem solving skills. Foundation

Phase recognizes play as a powerful tool that allows children to develop their communication skills, build relationships, take risks and experiment. The Foundation Phase in Wales is based on seven core areas of learning that includes Personal and Social Development, Well-being and cultural diversity-allows children to build self-esteem and form relationships. Language, Literacy and communication skills develop when children engage in conversations like listening, singing rhymes and reading. Mathematical Skills develop through practical real-life experiences such as understanding shapes and patterns in the natural world. Welsh Language skills develop through play-based activities using a range of resources reading books, allowing them to play independently, and role play etc. Another core area of learning is based on physical development, building knowledge and understanding of the world including creative development through rich sensory experiences and using imagination, creativity while showing mutual care and respect. The Foundation Phase also follows the National Digital Competence Framework and National Literacy and Numeracy Framework for learners aged between three to 16 (Welsh Government, 2018b).

The Foundation Phase Profile is the method of assessment in Foundation Phase aligns with the Early Years Development and Assessments Framework (EYDAF). EYDAF main aim to provide a nationally consistent baseline to assess the learning and development of children between three to 16 years of age. The Foundation Phase Profile based on child pedagogy provides an idea of a child's holistic development until the age of seven. It also supports an early identification of developmental delays and additional learning needs in children. Furthermore, the profile is divided into sets of developmental stages, the Compact Profile provides a baseline of child's development during the first six weeks when starting reception. However, the Full Profile provides an extensive detail at the end of year used for scoring the outcomes in Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2017). According to the Department of Education (2023) the main aim of Early Years Foundation Phase Profile is to assess the children's development at the end of foundation phase and support a successful transition to Key stage 1. Furthermore, it gives parents an idea of their child's development, if the child is meeting the expected standard level.

The first in the series evaluation of Foundation Phase known as Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory explained the child pedagogy of foundation phase curriculum focuses on children's personal development, social and emotional well-being, experimental play-based and that is child centered approach in teaching and learning. It also suggested staff training, Welsh Language development as discreet area of learning that will allow bilingual nation and direct teaching with children alongside child-led play (Welsh Government, 2012). From 2011-2014 a three-year independent evaluation based on mixed method of assessment for foundation phase was conducted consisted of four main aims to evaluate how foundation phase is being implemented, what is the impact, is it good enough from

economic perspective and putting in place a framework for future assessments. The study showed that the implementation of Foundation Phase Pedagogies has a positive impact on pupil involvement, attendance and wellbeing. However, there was no evidence if it is functional in reducing inequalities for children from low socio-economic background. The evaluation encouraged the Welsh Government to continue to develop and improve the Foundation Phase Curriculum and resulted in 29 Recommendation that included practitioners and stakeholders must be aware of the evaluation findings to improve their practices. Parent engagement and incorporating more first-hand playful experiences for children, teachers training further professional development and specific training for assessment were a major concern. Furthermore, supporting, training and funding the maintained and non-maintained setting to improve their learning environment. Lastly, improved adult to child ratios, incorporating outdoor learning, Welsh Language immersion in daily learning, further evaluation and monitoring and measuring the standards of quality were one of the key recommendations (Welsh Government, 2015).

According to an independent stocktake process on the implementation of Foundation Phase conducted between 2013-2014 by Professor Iram Siraj and Huw Lewis suggested the main aim of this study was to understand how language, literacy and numeracy are embedded across all areas of learning, how well it is raising the quality of learning for children from low socio-economic backgrounds, transition of children from flying start to foundation Phase to Key Stage 2. It also emphasized the effects of good leadership and trained staff in children's learning and development. For further improvement a list of 23 recommendations were made that are divided into two sets of short-term and long-term priorities. The long-term plan was based on a ten-year assessment, consolidation and implementation plan. The short-term plan includes identifying the excellent setting, supporting staff in continued professional development, considering all three-year-old children eligible for foundation phase. At the end of foundation phase, personal and social development should be scored separately than academic studies. Supporting children transition from foundation phase to key stage one, extensive training for children from disadvantage communities. Furthermore, developing and attracting career opportunities for Teaching assistant to attract experienced and qualified staff and reviewing child to adult ratios for quality education (Welsh Government, 2014).

Section 2

According to UNCRC on the rights of a child, anyone under the age of 18 is defined as a child, has a right to education and should not be discriminated against based on gender, nationality, race, culture, religion and abilities. A child has freedom of expression and freedom of thought (UNICEF, 2019). Children develop quickly in the early years, and they have a right to a flying start in life. Every child is unique, develops constantly at a different pace, and has different interests and abilities that are individual and exclusive to him. The provision allows them to develop their individual personalities based on their abilities, talents, likes and dislikes regardless of their ethnicity, culture, home language and disabilities (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021). Piaget and Vygotsky (cited in Bates, 2019) the concept of unique child and promoted learning through play. Children are born eager to learn, communicate and interact with their environment provided with enabling environment and positive relationships (British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012). Under the Equality Act (2010), Inclusion is a part of the curriculum. It is a process through which every child has an opportunity to reach their maximum potential. The needs and interests of the child are respected, and special arrangements are made to provide support if required (Welsh Government, 2016).

Vygotsky's Theory of Proximal Development emphasized the idea that every child is different and reaches the level of proximal development at a different rate, depending on different factors such as the interest in the subject, support required and provided, social interaction and experiences (Vygotsky cited in Bates, 2019, p. 48-49). Piaget, one of the most influential cognitive theorists presented the Theory of Constructivism, argued that knowledge is based on individual experiences influenced by social, mental, emotional and biological stages of development. Piaget believed that every child goes through four stages of cognitive development consecutively and the ability of a child is defined by the stage of cognitive development. Piaget said that each child reacts differently to learning and should be encouraged to learn and allowed to learn from their mistakes through the process of trial and error. Piaget (cited in Babakr, Mohamedamin and Kakamad, 2019) also explained the role of a teacher is to provide active support and respect the child's interests. Piaget believed in constructivism, whereas Vygotsky believed in the socio-cultural aspect of child development. However, both supported the idea of a unique child and have their own unique experiences and learning style.

The Foundation Phase Profile is a key part of the Welsh Government's Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF). It supports children's learning and development through assessments and provides a baseline. It provides practitioners with a holistically developmental curriculum for all children through the method of observation and formative assessments. It is designed in such a way that it supports the early identification of additional learning needs and developmental delay. The profile is

divided into two sets of skills comprises of four areas of learning: Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, Mathematical Development and Physical Development and Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity. The profile provides a consistent and nationally recognized method of scoring and progression of a child. Children from six months to seven years old have a different mode of assessment classed into three early steps classed as bronze, silver and gold. One of the main components of Foundation Phase Pedagogy is working in partnership with parents, carers and other professionals involved in a child's upbringing. The Foundation Phase contains a Compact Profile Form and Full Profile form. These profiles can be used from a nursery in a school-based setting till year two. It allows the practitioner to monitor the developmental outcomes, these developmental milestones are organized in the form of a skills ladder. The baseline assessment follows the cycle of review, plan, do, assess, review and plan. The main tool of assessment is observation, which plays a key role in everyday practice. The Foundation Phase Profile allows the practitioner to early assess and identify the need of the child. It allows the practitioner to observe, assess and plan the activities according to the developmental needs of a child. The foundation Phase profile also helps in the social, emotional development of a child, and promotes cultural diversity and well-being of a child. Language, literacy and communication skills are an essential part of the Foundation Phase providing children with opportunities to upscale their speaking and listening skills, including reading and writing (Welsh Government, 2019).

The Foundation Phase Profile aligns with the developmental pedagogy, practitioners had positive responses about the compact profile provided the range of skills to assess the child and set up the targets. The compact profile provided a better overview of well-being, personal and social development, and awareness of cultural diversity. Towards the end of foundation phase in year two there are some skills that couldn't be assessed through play and the teacher needs to set up an activity usually on the table to assess the child. Beyond the statutory period as experiment, the schools were sent the Foundation phase profile packs and finding shows that the majority of the schools didn't use the pack provided. Instead, they used an internally developed system which was more user-friendly and broke the target into small parts. Overall, the Foundation Phase Profile seemed lengthy and time-consuming, which puts practitioners under pressure. Recommendations were made that practitioners should be provided with specific training on how to use the foundation phase profile, especially in years 1 and 2 and frequent use of outdoor spaces etc. However, from September 2022 the foundation phase profile was replaced by a new Curriculum for Wales based on four core principles where practitioners are allowed to build their own curriculum (Welsh Government, 2022). The early childhood education curriculum in New Zealand called Te Wahriki implemented in 1996, supports the bilingual and multicultural system of education. The Te Wahriki is a curriculum that empowers children and allows them to become confident

capable learners with effective communication skills. It provides them with a sense of belonging and individuality having a healthy mind, body and spirit which is quite similar to the new Curriculum for Wales (Jenkin, 2016, p. 192-193)

The new curriculum which was rolled out in September 2022 is a national framework, for the learner aged between three to 16 years old. It allows the schools to develop their own curricula based on child's individual needs following four core purposes healthy confident individuals, ethically informed citizens, enterprising creative contributors and ambitious capable learners. The learning is more experience based and organized in six areas of learning are expressive arts, health and well-being, humanity, language literacy and communication, mathematics and numeracy, science and technology. Each area of learning has progression steps (Welsh Government, 2021).

The new curriculum has replaced the previous methods of assessment and now they are classed as achievements. The school can design their own curriculum and method of assessments to provide high quality teaching and learning catering to the individual needs of their learners. The Curriculum for Wales provides guidelines on what concepts should support a range of other topics, educational activities, and knowledge gain. Content-focused curricula simply assure that specific topics are taught to varying levels, not that the students will learn anything significant. The new Curriculum for Wales celebrates the uniqueness of a child, under this curriculum no two schools would be similar again. The new curriculum offers a learning continuum and supports learner progression and assessment. The assessments should be designed to support a child's learning on a daily basis, identifying the child's individual strengths, areas for improvement, barriers and challenges according to their own ability. A practitioner should also understand the learner's progress over time and reflect on it in practice. One of the most important factors is to involve and engage parents and carers in the progression and development of a child (Welsh Government, 2022). Tierney (2013) conducted research on CA assessment, and he explained that for centuries the education system has always been assessment based. In the UK fairness or equality is a part of everyday practices like taking turns and raising hands. The teachers always try to be fair in assessments, however, these assessments are time constrained, and the techniques used are not fair to every individual. According to Tierney the primary function of a classroom is learning and not assessment. However, the assessment techniques used put students under pressure and self-doubt which is not fair to individual circumstances and opportunities available. The new Curriculum for Wales has replaced the old methods of assessment and introduced a more child-centered approach to assessments, learning and development.

Section: 3

Considering the importance of outdoor play when implementing Foundation Phase Curriculum

Poor health conditions are expensive for the economy of any country. In the UK the health conditions of the population are improving. However still, now obesity and mental health illness cost around 78£ billion per year. The outdoor environment has a direct positive influence on the health and mental well-being of a society (Sustainable Development Commission, 2008). According to the World Health Organization, health is not a complete absence of a disease but a good state of mental, social and physical well-being (WHO, No Date). Considering the benefits of the outdoor environment. As an Early Years Practitioner, I was always fascinated by the idea of outdoor learning through play and the significance it has in the early years curriculum.

The Foundation phase is a curriculum for 3-7 years old children both in maintained and non-maintained settings in Wales. It is based on the principle of learning through play following the United Nation Convention on the rights of a Child Article 28 '**Right to Education**' and Article 31 '**Right to relax, play and take part in cultural activities**'. Wales was the first country to legislate play as a part of the curriculum (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). In 2022 a new Curriculum for Wales has been introduced and play has been placed at the centre of children's learning and development is based on four core purposes which aim for each child to develop as an ambitious capable learner, enterprising creative contributor, healthy and confident individual and ethically informed citizen (Welsh Assembly Government, 2021). Play is a wide term and there is no set definition to it. Based on theories and research 'Play is a fun-based activity, independent, autonomous, initiated and controlled by children exclusive to each child, allows them to explore and understand their surroundings. Play is an essential component of the Welsh Curriculum, when planned well it provides meaningful experiences to a child helping in cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. It provides children with an opportunity to gain first-hand experience, and follow their own interests, imagination and creativity. It forms a part of the active learning process and builds confidence, concentration, a sense of belonging and independence. The role

of a practitioner is to design play-based learning activities in an indoor and outdoor environment and observe (Davies, 2022).

According to Foundation Phase Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009), the natural environment is ideal for experimental learning, it allows a child to be creative, and independent, take risks, become aware of the surroundings, make noises, and learn about different textures shapes, weather, sound and smell. Nature offers fitness and numerous health benefits such as coordination and control by skipping, jumping, pulling, pushing etc. Outdoor learning allows children to use their senses of touch, smell, taste and see. It equips children with sensory experiences. The Foundation Phase Curriculum promotes independence, experimentation, discovery and the physical well-being of a child. Outdoor play provides children and practitioners with a fun, rich and imaginative environment that contributes to the basis of the new curriculum.

Froebel was the pioneer of outdoor learning. He introduced the idea of a garden for children where they can grow their own plants, explore and experience nature in a meaning full way. In Froebel's Garden, each child has a pot or a small space for gardening. Children sow seeds, take care of them and wait for the harvest. It allows children to understand nature, the effects of care and neglect, the cycle of life and death, growth and decay and changing seasons. Children should experience all forms of nature in the forms of substance, colour, sound and energy (Tovey, 2018). Ella Flatau first introduced the idea of forest school as a 'Walking Kindergarten' following Froebel's Idea of outdoor learning. She believed that young children could develop a passion for learning through nature. Forest schools provide children with an actively engaging, motivating and stimulating environment, where a child can learn through the senses to promote mental and physical well-being. Today's children have less exposure to outdoor play than their parents due to various factors, predominantly the use of technology. Nowadays, children are preoccupied with electronics which results in less exposure to nature hindering their social, emotional and physical development (Paci, 2017, p. 1-5). Like Froebel and Flatau many other theorists such as Steiner, Malaguzzi, Piaget and Vygotsky emphasized the importance of outdoor play and how children can learn better through experiencing nature.

A well-planned outdoor playground offers unique opportunities different from indoors. The outdoor environment provides children with space that allows whole-bodied movement improving gross motor skills, balance and coordination, core stability and strengthening the muscles. Activities such as pulling, pushing, hanging, jumping, hopping, running, crawling and stretching improve gross motor skills. Therefore, practising gross motor skills support the development of fine motor skills such as hand and eye coordination, handwriting, cutting, tying shoelaces etc. Outdoor play forms the basis of child-led self-directed play that supports cross-curricular activities such as Te Wahriki's interwoven principle where children engage in many areas of learning at the

same time rather than focusing on literacy or numeracy at a time for example a child building den counting the number of sticks used, comparing the height of stick required, when making magic potion adding the ingredients, improving the communication skills and supporting the holistic development (Davies, 2022, p. 108-112).

A major part of the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (2022) is based on effective principles of Child Pedagogy providing play-based learning opportunities that support the social, physical and emotional development of a child. Focusing on five key developmental pathways belonging, exploration, communication, physical development and well-being. In order to support the holistic development of a child and provide engaging experiences the importance of skillfully Enabling Adults cannot be denied.

Outdoor play provides unique, unstructured play opportunities emphasizing the child-centered approach, where every child is unique and has exclusive interests. Like forest schools and gardening 'loose parts' is a term used for open-ended materials that also stimulate curiosity, imagination, trial and error and problem-solving skills (Davies, 2022, p. 114-115). When children play in a woodland area or a natural environment there are certain risks involved that could be dangerous. According to Health and Safety Executive (2012. P. 1) 'When planning and providing play opportunities the aim is not to eliminate the risk but to minimize the risk'. It comes to the point of adult planning, guidance and risk assessments. However, considering the benefits of outdoor play and how it incorporates into the Foundation Phase Curriculum for Wales supporting the holistic development of a child and improving health and well-being the benefits are still immeasurable (Davies, 2022, p. 115). High degrees of well-being, confidence, and engagement can result from learning outside. The outdoors promotes the growth of the social, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of a person while also providing students a real-world opportunity to improve cross-curricular skills (Curriculum for Wales, 2022). According to Natural Resource Wales (2022) outdoor learning has immense importance in the New Curriculum for Wales and now has equal importance to indoor classrooms.

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