

RESPECTING THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

A UNCRC PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

ARTICLE 6: Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

- In the UK, The Children's Plan – Building Brighter Futures, brought forward by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007), established an agenda to ensure that the government policies regarding development and improvement to children and their families will continue; the plan promotes government support towards parents and families, supporting children's potential and talents, providing services that cater and are responsive to young people's needs and rights.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework in Wales aligns its principles and methods of practice with the rights of the child expressed by the UNCRC; from the beginning, the framework aimed to provide children with the best possible start in life, focusing on their growth and development for future success; (Welsh Government, 2015).
- The Welsh Government is committed to protect children and improve practice; the basis of any child-orientated policy states children and young people should enjoy the best possible health and be free of any abuse or exploitation (Donaldson, 2015).



Child Protection.

Source: Daily Times, 2018.

ARTICLE 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

- There is evidence that children's protection in Welsh schools meets the requirements: the procedures for safeguarding and reporting being accurately implemented by knowledgeable staff (Estyn, 2019).
- Farrelly (2010) asserts that in order to become a successful early years practitioner, one must include the child in the decision-making process, remembering that even very young children are capable of reactions and choices in various situations.
- The more recent Estyn report (2019) shows Welsh schools are providing more opportunities for children to express their views regarding their education, from choosing their learning activities, to receiving individual support and having a voice in shaping school policies; although pupil participation is greater than in the previous years, the report shows that in some primary and secondary schools, the pupil voice groups are controlled too much by the adults.
- The Welsh Government policy makers are taking into consideration the views of children and young people; active participation of young citizens is promoted through various programmes such as:
 - The 'your voice' participation plan by CAFCASS Cymru which has facilitated conversation between young people and the judges and magistrates assigned to their cases;
 - At the International Green Growth Forum, Cardiff, 2016, children and young people participated in discussions about the future economy of Wales in the global climate context;
 - Budgeting workshops led by Young Wales and Welsh Government Treasury officials and delivered to young people through interactive technology (Welsh Government, 2018).

ARTICLE 30: Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of people in the country where they live.

- Recent years have shown a change in thinking: instead of viewing children through developmental lens, they are being regarded as active citizens, capable of making decisions, knowledgeable and mindful (Brodie and Savage, 2015).
- The National Curriculum sets an approach of awareness regarding good practice and multiculturalism (Department for Education, 2013).
- An early years practitioner must remember that a child's development is deeply influenced by the belief, culture and language practiced at home; their educational experiences in the setting can create confusion as they are different from those at home; to practice inclusion, a practitioner must recognise this, provide the child with learning and emotional support while making the relevant adjustments for him to fit into the culture of the setting (Savage and Brodie, 2015).
- The Foundation Phase framework supports and values the cultural identity of all children, helping them to grow a positive awareness of their own culture and of others and supporting the diversity of traditions and languages that exist within Wales (Welsh Government, 2015).

ARTICLE 31: Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

- The Early Years Foundation Stage profile assessment recognizes and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016). The statutory framework for children whose first language is not English is to assess and explore language development in their home language (Department for Education, 2017).
- The UN General Comment clarifies the above article in 2013, expounding on how play is essential for children's wellbeing, development and health, engaging their imagination and creativity and being a refining learning act (UNCRC, 2013). Play is defined as "... any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves." (UNCRC, 2013). This highlights the self-determining feature of play as a child-initiated activity. Children do not perceive play the same way as adults do and the EPPE research project has found that child-initiated activities offered an enhanced intellectual stimulation and better circumstances for educators to extend the learning process (Sylva et al, 2004).
- At a national level, there are multiple organisations created to ensure the provision of play resources, training and overall facilitating and highlighting the importance of play:
 - Scotland's Play Charter adheres to the principles of play expressed by UNCRC and aims to support families, childcare providers, schools, nurseries and communities with opportunities for play (Play Scotland, 2021);
 - Play Matters in Northern Ireland is a Department of Education Project aimed to bring societal awareness on the value and benefits of play to children's health and well-being (Department of Education, n.d.);
 - Play England promotes freedom and space for all children and young people to play all through childhood (Play England, 2020).
- The Welsh Government's Play Policy (2002) recognizes the value of play and the natural tendency of children to take advantage and even risks when pursuing opportunities to play. Throughout the Foundation Phase Framework, the importance of play is repeatedly mentioned, the framework offering variate opportunities and activities both indoors and outdoors for children to experience during school time (Welsh Government, 2015).
- The Welsh Government allocates funding towards play provision from birth to the age of three (Croke and Williams, 2015).
- Wales: A Play Friendly Country is the statutory guidance for local authorities to assess and provide sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas (Welsh Government, 2014).

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