

AI Statement

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drats, notes and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Part 1

Education is a human right and a way that people can gain the skills and knowledge to develop. Education is important as individuals can use what they have learned to contribute to the world positively and develop skills such as critical thinking and problem solving which is essential for lifelong learning. This can take place through formal education such as school or university or a more informal education such as through the workplace or community workshops (UNESCO, 2023). Similarly, John Dewey (1916) states that education is lifelong and includes consistent growth and experiences. Ralph Tyler (1949) suggests a curriculum refers to the learning in educational settings such as schools. The curriculum sets out teaching methods, content and assessment that will be used to support academic aims.

A play-based curriculum involves children learning and developing primarily through play. It includes children learning, building knowledge and skills through exploring their environment, interacting socially and having hands on learning experiences. In this type of curriculum practitioners will create inviting learning environments that allow children to develop holistically through play (Wood, 2014).

This assignment will be covered in 3 parts. Section 1 will explore two play based early years curriculums and pedagogy; section 2 will look at the concept of the unique child and evaluate methods of assessment and section 3 will feature a blog on the importance of an enabling outdoor environment.

The first play-based curriculum that will be explored is The Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum for Wales was brought into practice September 2022 and is a curriculum for children aged 3 to 16. This curriculum offers more flexibility and control for practitioners to ensure learning meets the needs of each child and is purposeful. The Curriculum for Wales intends for children to develop skills and gain knowledge through hands on experiences rather than specific, individual lessons and looks more at progression rather than stages (OECD,2025). The Curriculum for Wales has 4 core purposes describing the desired outcomes for children. These 4 purposes include children being ambitious and capable, enterprising, ethical with knowledge of the world

and local areas and healthy and self-assured. These 4 purposes will shape each school and practitioners planning, pedagogy and assessments (Welsh Government,2021).

There are 6 areas of learning including Humanities, Expressive arts, health and wellbeing, Literacy, Mathematics and science and technology. Across all these areas, numeracy, literacy and digital skills should be cross curricular (Welsh Government,2020).

The second play-based curriculum that will be explored is the Foundation Phase. Before the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales there was the Foundation Phase. A curriculum for children ages 3 to 7, introduced from 2008. This curriculum aimed to encourage holistic development through play and experiential learning. This allowed children to explore, be inquisitive and problem solve, with a strong focus on outdoor learning (Davidge-Smith *et al.*,2017). The Foundation Phase focused on 7 areas of learning that aimed for children to develop holistically with a positive outlook and approach to learning. These 7 areas included personal and social development, physical development, creative development, language, literacy and communication, mathematical development, Welsh language and knowledge and understanding of the world (Welsh Government,2015).

Positive aspects of The Foundation Phase curriculum were used to create the new curriculum for Wales and because of this there are many similarities regarding pedagogy. Both curriculums include a child centred approach that focuses on the needs of the child, their interests and development rather than specific context (Taylor, Rhys and Waldron, 2016) In addition to this, another key similarity between the two curriculums is a focus on hands on learning and learning through experiences. The Foundation phase had a strong focus on learning through play. Similarly, the curriculum for Wales emphasises the need for children to learn through being inquisitive, problem solving and hands on learning experiences (Wainwright *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, another similarity of the two curriculums is the focus on holistic development as both curriculums look at the child as a whole and the unique child. Wainwright *et al* (2016) suggests that each stage of development is equally important for children's education and wellbeing. Furthermore, the two are also similar in their approach to outdoor learning and demonstrate a key pedagogical link between the foundation phase and

curriculum for Wales as Maynard, Waters and Clement (2013) state that both curriculums emphasise the developmental benefits of child led outdoor learning and see it as an important pedagogical tool to promote engagement and hands on learning experiences. Similarly, Ellis *et al* (2024) states that outdoor learning plays a key role in settings and education throughout Wales and features heavily in both curriculums. Tinney (2023) further emphasises that the curriculum for Wales has built on the foundations of the foundation phase and its principles, specifically the importance of outdoor learning as it encourages children to be inquisitive, creative and take risks which has a positive effect on overall development. Finally, the two curriculums are similar as they both focus on progression rather than age. Donaldson (2015) suggests that both curriculums follow a more flexible approach to teaching and learning which is important for meeting each individual child's needs.

However, despite having many similarities the Curriculum for Wales and the Foundation Phase also have key differences relating to pedagogy. One important difference is the role of play. The foundation phase placed great importance on the role of play and was the main pedagogical approach. Play also played a significant role in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Whilst the curriculum for Wales understands and promotes the importance of play in the early years, it also encourages differentiated teaching and learning strategies that are built upon and progress throughout school, this is important as it ensures lifelong learning and development (Wainwright *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, Roberts (2020) supports this as he emphasises that although play is a crucial aspect of early years learning, practitioners need to use and develop a wide range of teaching strategies that allow children to learn independently and be able to follow instructions.

The strengths of implementing the curriculum for Wales in practice in relation to pedagogy is that practitioners can build on their professional development and gain more freedom and independence as an educator and it also allows practitioners to focus more on the needs of the children. Donaldson (2015) suggests that this is important in a play-based curriculum as professional autonomy will allow practitioners to be more creative and enhance their professional development. However, in contrast to this, in practice professional autonomy may create inconsistency throughout

settings in Wales (OECD,2020). Additionally, another strength of implementing the curriculums pedagogy is improved collaboration within settings due to curriculum planning. OECD (2020) suggests that collaboration has become an important part of practice as practitioners share ideas, resources and advice. Furthermore, in practice the curriculums focus on progression in learning is a strength as practitioners can gain a deeper insight to children's knowledge, skills and development allowing them to adapt pedagogy (Welsh Government,2024). However, there are limitations to implementing the new curriculum for Wales for schools and practitioners such as a heavy workload and a lack of time. Research suggests this is due to the extra responsibility of designing the new curriculum and training to develop pedagogy and new approaches in addition to teaching responsibilities (Welsh Government,2025). In addition to this, research also suggests that workload and pressure is even greater for practitioners in disadvantaged areas as they will be understaffed, face budget constraints and a higher level of learner needs, consequently highlighting the lack of equity in education, this contrasts the curriculum for Wales's aim for equality in education (OECD,2020).

The strengths of implementing the foundation phase into practice in Wales, similarly to the curriculum for Wales, is the focus on a child centred approach. This approach allows children to learn through play, hands on experiences and enquiry which is heavily inspired by constructivist theories. Research suggests that this is important when implementing a play-based curriculum as in the early years children build knowledge and skills through hands on experiences and a rich learning environment, creating purposeful learning (Piaget,1952). In addition to this, Taylor *et al* (2015) suggests that practitioners believe the child centred approach of the foundation phase increased children's engagement and independent learning. Furthermore, Bruce (2011) suggests a child centred, play-based approach is important as it encourages children's curiosity and independence whilst building resilience. However, in contrast, there are limitations of implementing a play-based curriculum such as the foundation phase. Studies show that the potential and aims of the foundation phase may not be reached due to a lack of funding, resources and professional development (Taylor *et al*, 2015) Another strength of the foundation phase in practice is the development of children's

social skills and communication through play. In the foundation phase children can act, work as a team, problem solve and listen to other children which supports their social development. This is important as Vygotsky (1978) suggests that social skills are a fundamental part of children's learning. However, in contrast to this, Lillard (2017) emphasises that a limitation of a play-based curriculum such as the foundation phase is that children may be playing but that does not mean they are developing the social or academic skills they require and it is also difficult for practitioners to track progress. Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) supports this as they suggest that children learn new skills more effectively when modelled by practitioners.

To conclude, both curriculums place high importance on child centred, collaborative learning and provide opportunities for children to develop holistically. However, they do contrast slightly in their approach to pedagogy with the foundation phase focused mainly on play-based learning, and the curriculum for Wales focusing on deeper subject knowledge as learning advances. Therefore, the research discovered the limitations of play-based curriculum include inconsistent learning, difficulties tracking progress, varied experience and training of practitioners and a potential for inequality.

Part 2

The concept of the unique child indicates that each child learns skills and information differently and develops in their own time. This is often strongly influenced by the child's environment, genetics and social influences. The concept of the unique child has also influenced frameworks discussed such as the curriculum for Wales and the foundation phase (Welsh Government, 2022). The term assessment in an education setting refers to gathering information about children's knowledge and understanding. This can be gathered in many ways including testing and observations. Practitioners can use this information to gain a better understanding of the child, what they know and the best way to support them (OECD, 2013). It is important to consider the unique child regarding assessment as Boyer (2023) states that for assessments in the early years practitioners must take into consideration children's environment and development to ensure accurate findings. Additionally, it is also important to consider the unique child

during assessment as it can help to identify additional needs or tailored support needed and support practitioners to provide effective, child centred support that meets children's needs (Walker et al., 2022).

The concept of the unique child is a principle that is now embedded in the early years education and practice. This concept refers to a unique learning experience for each child that is influenced by their background, culture, environment and ability. This concept supports the idea that children should not be seen as a collective and should be given individual support that is tailored to their needs to ensure holistic development (Ambition Institute, 2025). Developmental theory supports the concept of the unique child as Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that children gain skills and knowledge through social interaction and have a zone of proximal development, which indicates what the child can achieve with tailored support and guidance. In addition to this, Piaget (1952) states that children develop cognitively at a variety of paces, which emphasises the importance of a tailored learning experience and the need for the concept of the unique child. The concept of the unique child also links closely to the curriculum for Wales as both support child centred practice and the idea that each child is unique and learns differently. In addition to this, the curriculum for Wales supports gradual progress through the progression steps and focuses on individual progress. This is supported by the concept of the unique child as staff will need to adapt their teaching style and approach to adapt to the different backgrounds and abilities of each child (Welsh Government, 2021). Similarly, the curriculum for Wales links to the unique child as the curriculum promotes equality and inclusive practice by ensuring children of all ability's needs are met, which is a key principle of this concept (Edapt, n.d).

The curriculum for Wales uses many different forms of assessment. However, during this assignment formative assessment as a tool will be explored. Formative assessment is a key part of the curriculum for Wales and is used to track children's progress and for practitioners to see what ways they can best support them. The curriculum for Wales highlights assessment as a key part the curriculum and education as practitioners can see what has been understood and how to go forward (Welsh Government, 2020). Formative assessment in the curriculum for Wales is a tool that collects information about learners in various ways such as observing play,

questioning, having conversations with learners, self-assessment and from classroom based activities. Formative assessment is important for practitioners to track progress and adapt their teaching to suit each child's individual needs, in the early years observation can be an important assessment tool to understand children's ability, needs and progress (Welsh Government, 2020). An important feature of formative assessment in the curriculum for Wales is that it is child centred and learners are directly involved in their learning and feedback. This is important as children can be accountable for their own learning and progress, give feedback and ideas to practitioners. Moreover, this allows learners to become ambitious and capable which is a key element of the 4 purposes in the curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020). As a result of this formative assessment plays a vital role in supporting children's learning and progress throughout the curriculum (Welsh Government, 2022).

Assessment in the foundation phase is completed with a variety of approaches that centre around the needs of the child. In this assignment observational assessment will be explored as it is a key element of assessment in the foundation phase. Observation in the early years helps practitioners to gain an understanding of children's ability, understanding and development. Practitioners are able to gather evidence of this by observing children around the classroom and through play (Welsh Government, 2015). Assessment through observations is a more natural and authentic form of assessment that allows practitioners to observe children's strengths, weaknesses and their interests allowing practitioners to tailor their teaching and planning around the needs of each child (Welsh Government, 2022). Furthermore, observation as an assessment tool supports gradual progression and recognises that each child develops at a different pace (Welsh Government, 2022).

When critically analysing formative assessment and observational assessment, both tools have strengths and limitations. Studies by Braund *et al* (2021) suggest that formative assessment can support positive relationships between learners and practitioners as children have a direct involvement in their learning. In addition to this, practitioners can use the evidence gathered from formative assessment to support each child's learning and progress. They will do this by adapting their teaching style and

activities as recent studies show formative assessment supports practitioners planning and teaching to meet the needs of the unique child (Grimmond, Neilsen-Hewett and Howard, 2022). Additionally, formative assessment can be a more organic way to collect evidence through play-based learning as children's learning is not interrupted (Minson and Nuttall, 2022) Furthermore, formative assessment supports children's holistic development as it allows the practitioner to view multiple areas of development such as social, cognitive and physical development giving practitioners a deeper understanding of each child and their needs (Neumann *et al.*, 2019). However, there are limitations of formative assessment. Formative assessment is widely based on practitioners' decisions and judgement, this can be a limitation as they can be interpreted differently and are not consistent, this can reduce the reliability of the data collected (Snow and Van Hemel, 2022). In addition to this, formative assessment can be time consuming for practitioners which may increase workload and burnout for teaching staff (Grimmond, Neilsen-Hewett and Howard, 2022). Furthermore, self-assessment which is a part of formative assessment may be challenging in the early years as children may lack the language and cognitive skills needed to self-assess which would lead to inconsistencies in the data collected (Braund *et al.*, 2021).

Observation as an assessment tool also has many benefits. A key strength of observation is that it can support practitioners to discover children's needs and interests through their learning and play which is beneficial as practitioners can identify any support needed and provide early intervention. Research shows that early intervention can boost learning outcomes, especially for learners with additional learning needs (Marinus *et al.*, 2024). In addition to this, observation in a play-based curriculum allows practitioners to respond to learners' needs and interests and adapt their planning and teaching to reflect the unique child (Grimmond, Neilsen-Hewett and Howard, 2022). Furthermore, observation as an assessment tool is beneficial as it builds positive relationships between learners and practitioners as practitioners will engage with learners during play by listening, observing and interacting. Research shows that positive relationships between children and practitioners ensures an impactful, fun learning experiences (Linder, D'Amico and Fan, 2024). However, limitations of observation as an assessment tool include reliability. The child's

behaviour and how they act on the day of observation may not show their ability accurately. Research emphasises that children's behaviour when observed can be affected by their environment and emotions at the time. Therefore, to ensure reliability practitioners should observe children multiple times in various different environments over time (Marinus et al., 2024). In addition to this, observation can make it difficult for practitioners to assess children's knowledge in specific subject areas, therefore a range of assessments methods should be used to ensure reliability and to gain a deeper understanding of the unique child (Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024). Furthermore, observation can also be a time consuming and stressful assessment tool when observing multiple children in a busy environment. Practitioners will need to record and document information adding to their workload; therefore, this will have a negative impact as practitioners will spend less time interacting with children and building positive relationships (Cowan and Flewitt, 2023).

To conclude, both formative and observational assessment link to the concept of the unique child. Formative assessment supports the concept of the unique child as staff can identify learners' ability and knowledge and areas they may need support. This allows practitioners to adapt their teaching and content to support the needs of the unique child as every child learns differently. Similarly, observation allows practitioners to gain a holistic view of the child in a more organic, play-based environment which supports the concept of the unique child as their behaviours, skills and development emphasise each child's uniqueness.

How important is an enabling outdoor environment for your child's holistic development?

(The Waltons Trust,2023)



In the early years we know that the outdoor environment plays a key role in children's development as the outdoor environment supports children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development whilst also supporting language skills, creativity and understanding. An enabling outdoor environment is an outdoor space that encourages children to take risks, explore, gain independence and work with their peers, but how does an an enabling outdoor environment support each area of your child's development and why is it important? (White, 2019).

Physical development

An enabling outdoor environment is great for your child's physical development as it will provide opportunities for your child to climb, walk, run and jump. This is essential for supporting children's physical development and gross motor skills. Outdoor play provides children with more space to explore which is important as it supports children's coordination, strength and spatial awareness (Gray and Coates, 2018). An enabling outdoor area will also provide children with tools such as natural materials, sticks and trowels. This is important for physical development as it supports children's fine motor skills. They do this as open-ended materials allow children to hold things, squeeze and dig which strengthens muscles in their hands essential for further learning such as writing and self-care tasks such as doing their zip up (White,2019).

Social development

An enabling outdoor environment is also important for your child's social development. The term social development refers to how children play with others, communicate, create friendships and share. There are usually more opportunities for social interaction outside, which makes an enabling environment essential for social development in the early years.

Outdoor environments encourage children to work together cooperatively usually through building tasks or group games. Studies show that enabling outdoor environments encourage children to interact with others more as they have more freedom, can create their own activities and decide what role they want to play (Bilton, 2020).

The outdoor environment can also boost children's confidence and independence as it allows children to take a leadership role in play and interact with other children which is important as it builds confidence and allows children to make friendships (White, 2019).

As outdoor areas usually include shared resources such as bikes, scooters and other play equipment, children are able to learn how to deal with arguments and conflict which supports their social development. Studies have shown that negotiation and conflict in the outdoor area can support emotional regulation and allow children to understand compromise and what is fair (Bilton, 2020).

Another key element of social development in the outdoor area is the benefits for children's communication and language development. The outdoor area provides children with many opportunities to develop language. This is often through play as children will talk with one another, discuss ideas and resolve any issues. White (2019) emphasises that outdoor play encourages children to talk as it is less academic and structured which allows children to be more creative and imaginative. Language and social skills are important in the early years as studies show there are links to academic success, wellbeing and development (Law et al., 2017).

Cognitive development

An enabling outdoor environment will support your child's brain development as they will be able to use their problem-solving skills by completing activities such as building and completing obstacle courses. Open ended play like this allows your child to think in different ways and make decisions which is important for brain development (White,2019).

An enabling outdoor area will also support your child's cognitive development by encouraging children to explore their environment and be inquisitive. They can do this by exploring the natural environment and looking at what they can find. Natural items such as soil, water, plants and insects can spark curiosity in young children which promotes the use of questions and investigations. Studies show outdoor environments inspired by nature can enhance children's cognitive development as they have the opportunity to explore and discover new things, this is important as through outdoor learning children develop skills such as prediction and observation (Waite, 2017).

An enabling outdoor environment also encourages early mathematical thinking and concepts such as counting and sorting. In the outdoors children can use natural resources such as stones, sticks and water which children can use to count, measure, estimate and create patterns. They can also begin to use mathematical language. This experience of mathematics in the outdoors is important as it builds children's confidence and understanding with concrete resources, bringing mathematical concepts to life (Bilton,2020).

Emotional development

An enabling outdoor environment is important to support children's emotional development in the early years. Emotional development refers to how your child controls and expresses their emotions and feelings and how they build self-esteem and resilience (Knight,2018).

An enabling environment will provide children with challenges such as jumping, climbing, balancing and problem solving. When children complete challenges and are resilient it builds self-esteem and confidence in their abilities, giving them a feeling of accomplishment (Knight,2018)

Enabling outdoor environments can also support children's emotions as they can exercise, move their body and have the space to explore freely which can support children to manage big emotions effectively. Effective outdoor areas can create a calming effect for children which limits stress and supports their emotional wellbeing, this is especially important for children with additional learning needs that may find it difficult regulate their emotions (Waite,2017).

To conclude, an enabling environment is essential for your child's holistic development as it includes all areas of development such as physical development, cognitive development, social development, language development and emotional development. Studies show that the use of effective, good quality outdoor environments can support your child's development in every way as it is child –centred, promoting wellbeing and creativity (White,2019). However, the success of an outdoor environment and its efficiency is heavily based on the parent or practitioners experience and knowledge of creating purposeful, safe outdoor tasks (Maynard,2019). When implemented successfully outdoor learning can transform your child's education and development.

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