‘Critically compare a global curriculum with a UK curriculum’

ECES6013/C

The Foundation Phase Framework compared to the Montessori schools and their Curriculum

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Introduction

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The National Curriculum for Wales comprises of four set stages, for children to complete while studying in school. After completing the Foundation Phase, children then move on to the key stages which focus on attainment targets for the pupils to reach, with set goals and assessments to evaluate their development. These four steps are:

1. The Foundation Phase - ages 3-7
2. Key stage 2 - ages 7-11
3. Key stage 3 - ages 11-14
4. Key stage 4 - ages 14 - 16.

The purpose of the Curriculum is to ensure that all pupils in Wales consistently study the core learning to aid their development as a whole.

Within the first stage of the National Curriculum for Wales there is the Foundation Phase.

According to the Welsh Government (2015), the Foundation Phase Framework “ sets out the Welsh Government’s requirements for the Foundation Phase for three to seven year olds in Wales.”

Within the Foundation Phase, children of ages three to seven are guided by practioners to learn the Statutory Areas of Learning. These areas of learning consist of developmental stages such as social and personal development, language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical and Welsh development, physical and creative development and focuses on their knowledge and understanding of the world.

Although the Foundation Phase focuses on these areas of learning, there is also a large emphasis on play, creativity and child-lead learning through play throughout this developmental stage to encourage a fun and natural learning environment

(Gov, 2015)

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Following from this, the Montessori Curriculum will also be discussed and compared to the Foundation Phase.

Maria Monterssori, a theorist, developed an approach to learning where it is focused on areas of a child's development which include “independence, Observation, Following the Child, Correcting the Child, Prepared Environment and Absorbent Mind”. (DailyMontessori, 2020).

The Montessori curriculum is based on the Montessori method, which ranges from birth to adulthood which trailers learning experiences to meet the child’s individual needs and learning processes. According to Barbara (2012), Montessori’s aim to educate children was to “recognise that young children are active learners, needing choice and independence, whilst being guided by a sensitive teacher who facilitates their learning by preparing an environment favourable to their learning”. This suggests that the pedagogy of the educational practitioners within a Montessori education system must be entirely focused on how a child learns best in a setting. Within the Uk, the Montessori approach is delivered to children of a ‘pre-school’ age, similarly to the Foundation Phase in Wales.

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In contrast to the Foundation Phase, which it’s framework is set for Wales, the Montessori Method or curriculum is used throughout the globe. This suggests that there is a large quantity of scientific evidence to suggest that the montessori method is successful in educating and developing the child in a way that is comfortable for them. In addition, since the foundation phase framework is set for Wales compared to the rest of the world, this suggests that there may not be as much evidence that supports the fact that this is as successful as the Montessori method. To support this, according to the National Centre for Montessori in the Public Centre (2020), there are roughly 20,000 Montessori Schools around the world which base its principles on Maria Montessori’s

theories,principles and pedagogy which provides education “for children between the ages of two/three and six” (Barbara, 2012). In contrast, within Wales there are roughly 1300 primary schools in Wales, while assuming each one follows the foundation phase framework, there is a large contrast in numbers compared to the Montessori schools. It can be argued that the contrast of foundation phase framework number of schools is because this is a framework only within Wales, suggesting that the reason this is not a globally taught framework is because it is set for Wales, and is relatively small compared to the rest of the world, whereas montessori can be taught anywhere, which is why it may not seem as popular as the Montessori Method. I find the fact that the Montessori way of teaching is used in so many countries across the world very interesting as it is clearly a well structured, organised and scientifically proven method to help a child develop. Furthermore, we are going to look at how the Foundation Phase framework has similar factors within its framework which relate to Montesorri’s theories and this method.

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Similarly to Montessori’s areas of development, the foundation phase has seven areas of learning within the framework to support the child and their learning. According to Pacey Cymru (2015), these 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

- Creative Development

This supports the theory that The Foundation Phase in Wales has similar aspects to montessori's theories and is based around her pedagogy. In addition to this factor, the foundation phase has a large emphasis on play and creativity, which can be compared to the Montessori's Schools where it's morals is based on the fact that play is the best tool for learning. In Addition, according to the Foundation Phase Framework (2015), throughout all the sections of which state the child will learn during the foundation phase, it always states that the child should have the ability to explore "different types of play and a range of planned activities, including those that are child-initiated" within the taught subject. For example, under the literacy and communication skills section, children could have the opportunity to role play scenarios in which they learn new terms and communicate with new class-mates and create conversations. This allows the child to explore the subject through play and create an interest in learning, which compares very closely to Montesorri's theory to recognise that the children are active learners, learning through experiences and play.

Slide 6 - In contrast to the Foundation Phase Framework, since the framework has specific areas of learning with targets to reach for each age group, such as 'language, literacy and numeracy', this suggests that the children will work towards a target based goal in order to achieve the area of learning. To support this, the framework itself has sections which state that 'children will be able to…' by a specific age. For example, under the reading target, it states that by year 1 within the foundation phase, children are able to "decode unknown words containing blended consonants and vowels by using strategies, e.g. segmenting phonemes, onset and rime" (Gov, 2015). This suggests that children must be able to do this by this particular age in order to have been educated and develop efficiently. However within montessori classrooms, there is no age related target based learning as according to Barbara (2012), within a Montessori classroom, children "of several ages are grouped together in an effort to reflect a family", and not learning subjects as a whole, this supports the child's learning by creating a comfortable environment to learn when they are ready, which relates closely to the theorist Piaget's beliefs that "a child's ability to learn depended upon their current stage of development" according to Siraj-Blatchford (2009), suggesting that in a Montissori school, an enriching environment will help a child development, in turn allowing them to learn efficiently. This contrasts to the same age grouped classrooms in the Foundation Phase which all work together to achieve targets by the following year. This suggests that although the Foundation Phase framework states to be child-focused and play-based, the fact that it's play based may be slightly taken away from it's learning due to the targets that the educational practitioners meet and may not have had the support to reach their stages of development as Piaget states, in turn not learning as they should. I believe this may not always be the case, but looking at the Montessori curriculum, it's target is to teach the child when they feel comfortable to learn in an environment and through "spontaneous development of the whole child" (Barbara 2008) , not when they are told to learn and have to learn an area of development in a certain time within the foundation phase. This suggests that the main difference in the way the Montessori Curriculum and the Foundation Phase in Wales is Montessori's theory that the approach believes in "the child's self-construction and the role of the adult as a supporter and facilitator of this process"

(Barbara 2008), rather than the role of the adult within the Foundation Phase in Wales as an educator, who's main role is to educate the child towards these set targets within the framework.

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Although there are many contrasts between the Montessori Curriculum and The Foundation Phase in Wales, there are also some similarities. It can be argued that the Foundation Phase bases its principles and policies along the lines of the Montessori Curriculum. According to the The Maria Montessori Training Organisation (2019), the Curriculum Policy states that they value the "way in which all children are unique, and the Montessori Programme promotes respect for the views of each individual child, as well as for people of all cultures", in addition, according to Etsyn (2017), they support that the Foundation Phase's policy, and "how the best schools plan the foundation phase and balance child-led discovery with adult teaching". From these two references, there is a clear similarity between the Montessori Curriculum and the Foundation Phase that they both value the child and how it is in the curriculum's best interest to create a child-led, supportive and child initiated learning in order to provide the best education. Since the Montessori ideas and ways of teaching was first introduced in 1907, this suggests that the Foundation Phase may have based it's principles around Maria Montessori's theories.

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In addition to this, although the Foundation Phase and Montessori curriculum are similar and have similar policies, both curriculum's relate to Lev Vygotsky's theory on learning through play. Vygotsky's theories can be considered that they were a pioneer for these curriculum's in today's society as his theories seem to be so embedded in to today's teaching. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development emphasised how scaffolding by educational practitioners will encourage children's development and learning. According to Verenikina (2003) scaffolding is "a metaphor to describe and explain the role of adults or more knowledgeable peers in guiding children's learning and development". We can see this is apparent in both the Montessori Curriculum and The Foundation Phase as in the Montessori Curriculum policy, the words 'promote, encourage, and to help" (The Maria Montessori Training Organisation 2019), this is also apparent in the Foundation Phase which suggests that these two curriculums are similar because these words used within their policies show that they are words which describe what Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and his scaffolding theory states, which in turn results in the two curriculum's having a large emphasis on supporting the child by scaffolding their learning in order for them to have the best education possible.

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Similarly to Vygotsky's theory, through Maslow theory of hierarchy of needs, there is an evident comparison between the two curriculums. This is explored through the hierarchy as according to McLeod (2018) "Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs. Needs lower down in the hierarchy [pyramid] must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up". This suggests that this links directly with the two curriculum's as the children will learn best when they are motivated, which the both curriculum's child lead approach relates to. In addition, with Maslow's theory, this suggests that before the children can learn, each part of the hierarchy of needs needs to be met before they are motivated. For example, within both curriculum's there is an emphasis to ensure the child is in a comfortable learning environment, these environment's may meet the psychological needs of safety and belongingness according to the hierarchy, therefore allowing the child to feel motivated to learn.

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To conclude, it is clear to see that although the Montessori Curriculum and the Foundation Phase in Wales has many contrasts, it also has a range of similar points which links with current and policies and theories such as Maslow's Heirachy of Needs,

Lev Vygostky's theory of learning through play and Piaget's theory, which in turn create a close comparison between the two curriculums as their theories and policies share similar approaches.

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