

Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyles

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Introduction:

The aim of this poster is to provide a conceptual theoretical understanding of health, wellbeing and lifestyle in the Early Years curriculum. This poster will critically examine the factors that influence the health, wellbeing and lifestyles of young children and how practitioners in this field can help and improve their physiological and safety needs in the attainment of holistic wellbeing, as proposed by Maslow's theory (Stoyanov, 2017). Furthermore, this poster will endeavour to show the wide range of applications of these three concepts in curriculum, relevant legislation, and practical guidance.

Health:

According to the Pan African Medical Journal (2018), the definition of health is rather complex to understand on a surface level. Much of the literature in health pays particular attention to the person's state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not as a "mere absence of disease or infirmity" as suggested by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1948; cited by Krah, Robinson, Murray and Havercamp, 2021). However, there is a different perception as to what 'health' means in the context of curriculum and pedagogy.

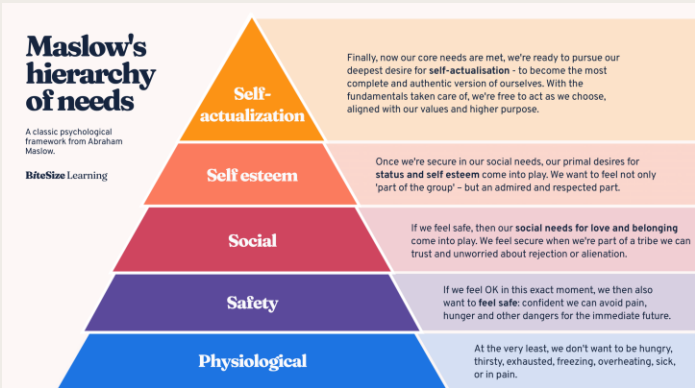
Preliminary work on health undertaken by the Public Health England (2017) has shown that the broad economic and social circumstances that together influence the health of a person throughout their life is known as a 'social determinants of health'. A recent study by Marmot (2010) examined the fundamental political, economic, social, cultural and policy changes which profoundly impacted the social determinants across the UK. He proposed that poverty is the root cause of unhealthy choices and that a lower social hierarchy restricts low-income families with the opportunity to gain access to quality education, sustainable environments, healthcare and employment prospects (Marmot, 2020).

In June 2018, the Welsh Government published a report in which their vision was to build a healthy and prosperous Wales, delivering a high-quality care and prudent healthcare system for the wider public sector. The intended outcome was to build the foundations of a society that was based on equity, fairness and a greater subjective wellbeing in essence. However, such explanations in this report often forget to mention about young children's mental, social and physical health, and its implications for the future economic prosperity of our future generations. That is why, after the COVID-19, the Welsh Government (WG, 2022), worked with stakeholders and practitioners in the education sector to fund the new non-maintained curriculum for Wales since its rollout in September 2022. The curriculum was designed to give children the right provision required to develop as

healthy, confident individuals who can apply their knowledge of diet and exercise in fulfilling physical and healthy wellbeing in their daily lives (WG, 2020). The evidence is clear that the implementation of the new curriculum for Wales is sought to improve the quality of life for pupils in the development of their holistic health in the future.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government (WG, 2022) emphasised that effective, child play pedagogy, that is deeply embedded in strong relationship, is essential to realising the ambitions of the new curriculum. It is important that the learning environment for which children are being provided by professionals in the settings is open to play and play-based learning and authentic and purposeful experiences (WG, 2020) in fulfilling their own safety and physiological needs, something that is often perceived as a fundamental human right according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Naaz and Khalid, 2023). In the same vein, article 24 and 31 of the United Nations Convention of the rights of the child (UNCRC) specifically recognises that children have the privilege to rest and leisure and enjoy their highest attainable standards of health in the impetus of their own lives (UNICEF UK, 2019).

Lastly, to better understand the mechanism of the social determinants of health and its effects, the Dahlgren and Whitehead model will be proposed. The personal characteristics occupy at the center of this model, and includes age, sex, genetics, and other constitutional factors (Public Health England, 2017). Whereas, the social and community networks are furthest away from this model including family, relatives and the wider public sphere. According to Dahlgren and Whitehead (2021), the Dahlgren-Whitehead model has a wide range of feasible applications in curriculum and policy. Overall, this model has proved to be conceptually useful for professionals in the Early Years to make thoughtful decisions, working towards a common goal that is to effectively reduce health and social inequalities at non-maintained schools.



Source: BiteSize Learning (2024)



Source: University of Nottingham (2014)

Wellbeing:

Wellbeing is a fundamental aspect of psychology and in raising our understanding of empirical research and modern experimentation (Ryan and Deci, 2001). As Galdeshi and Beezhold (2015), argue that wellbeing is not a mere absence of mental illness, but rather it is a state of positive wellness that exists on a continuum. The concept of wellbeing plays a fundamental role in widening our perceptions of the new curriculum in practice.

According to the Welsh Government (WG, 2022), some children have a biological desire to repeat actions such as 'lining object up, filing and emptying containers, and covering things or throwing them,' thus illustrating the notion of schema in practice. Children exemplify these schemas when exploring heights, speed, distance and movements – which encompasses this idea of 'trajectory.' Similarly, this view is supported by Piaget's theory of cognitive development, who writes that children during their preoperational stage develop some basic language skills and gross motor skills in the attainment of their subjective wellbeing (Ahmad, Hussain, Batool, Sittar and Malik, 2016). However, for Vygotsky, play is seen as a predominate in children's life and it is deeply embedded in the social interactions that pupils forge during the school day, and this creates an environment that is known to contribute to well-being (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

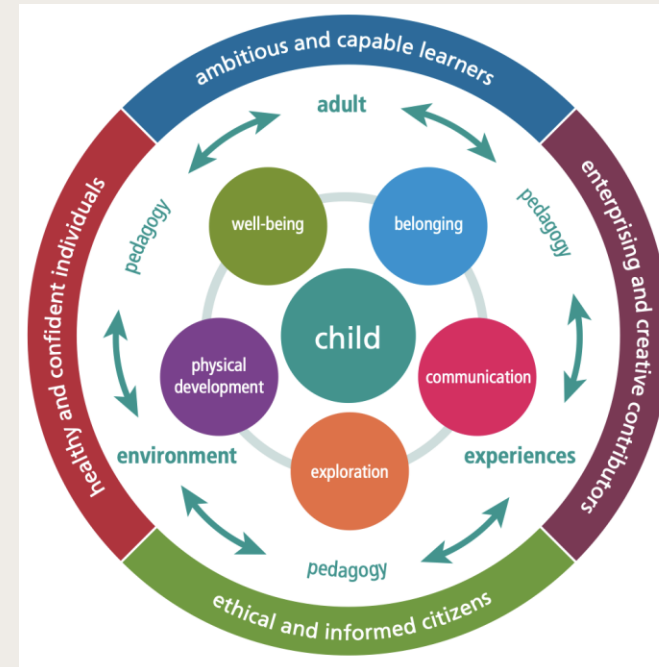
Current UK statutory guidance within the Early Years Foundation Stage recommends that practitioners should continue to reinforce children about their physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing, and embed these practices in the school environment (Peill, 2022). However, in one of the briefing papers that was proposed by the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, there has been a massive shift from the last few years in conceptualising children's knowledge of what constitutes wellbeing in their learning parameters (Statham and Chase, 2010). For example, the Good Childhood Enquiry surveyed 8,000 young people aged 14 to 16 years across 16 distinct areas in England within schools or establishments, asking them what their thoughts were on the essential things that made up this fulfilling childhood (Layard and Dunn, 2009). The three most relevant components that were perceived as important for a 'good life' were: family, friends, and leisure opportunities in realising their wellbeing criteria (UK GOV, 2017). Similarly, this case study seems to resemble with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, a law in Wales that seeks to improve the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of Wales by calling for public bodies to consider the implications of their decisions for future generations (WG, 2015).

Hedonic wellbeing is when a person's goal in life is to pursue for the greatest pleasure in life and that happiness is the totality of one's moments. However, Eudemonic wellbeing is a deep sense of fulfilment that comes from the expression of virtue and happiness in life (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Lastly, the WG (2022) emphasised that effective, child-play pedagogy, ‘that is deeply embedded with strong relationships, is essential to realising the ambition of this curriculum’. Through play and playful experiences, children gain a sense of awe and wonder, learning more about the world they inhabit with others (Play Wales, 2022). This helps them realise and learn the fundamental rules of social behaviour, and in the establishment of their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing as laid out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 (WG, 2015). Similarly, Page (2011, cited by University of Sheffield, 2021) writes that professional love, that is build on the foundations of trust and integrity between students and pupils, is key to establishing a supportive and attuned environment that is conducive to wellbeing. Her work complimented with Bowlby’s attachment theory, and she suggested that there is a better need for professionals to conceptualise the complex emotions of caregiver roles as parents and child in the classroom environment (University of Brighton, 2014). In this way, professionals who demonstrate this reciprocal ‘love’ and ‘affection’ to pupils are more likely to give them a flying start of life, in terms of their subjective wellbeing, and enable them to become successful learners in the future (WG, 2020).



Source: WG (2025)



Source: WG (2022)

Lifestyle:

According to NHS Wales (2010), lifestyle refers to the people's behaviour patterns. This perception can be changed if people uphold different cultural values and beliefs, which are impacted by socio-economic circumstances (NHS Wales, 2010). In the field of healthcare, it is important more than ever for professionals to understand the changing landscape of lifestyles. Not only is it multi-faced but it also has a wide range of applications in education, legislation, sociology and healthcare (Kim, Lim and Park, 2025).

Estyn, the education and teaching inspectorate for Wales, recognises that good health and wellbeing of employees and staff is an essential component of promoting organisational performance and improving their subjective lifestyle. They are committed to working with a wide variety of stakeholders and institutions to ensure that pupils and staff work in an environment that is conducive to productivity, and which supports their healthy lifestyles. Providing regular checks to staff who participate in these activities (Estyn, 2024).

Government strategies that might potentially improve the lifestyles of children in the curriculum is through revisiting the UNCRC policy and strengthening their commitments to apply these rules in practice (GOV UK, 2017). Article 54 of the UNCRC covers the very foundations of children's life and it emphasises on their 'civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (UNICEF, 2022). Every child has the right to be safe from violence (Article 19), an education (Article 28) and sufficient standards of living (Article 27) in the attainment of living a healthy and balanced lifestyles (UNICEF, 2022).

Lastly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation aims to give people the best flying start to life, in supporting their transitions of a future free from poverty, one which should hopefully improve their lifestyles and quality of life in the long term (JFR, 2025). However, the Welsh Government has implemented a "Flying Start Programme" in giving disadvantaged families the provision they need to have access to high-quality childcare, and a robust healthcare service. This is an expansion of the support given to 2-year-olds in Wales (WG, 2024).

Application :

According to the Welsh Government (WG, 2022) observation plays a fundamental role in the curriculum. It should be grounded in our knowledge that the child is at the centre of the process. Effective observation allows us to see what motivates, interests and engages young children in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and competencies required for the future (Sawyer, 2003). Similarly, both Vygotsky and Piaget depict observation as a form of 'emergence,' but whilst Piaget applied this 'heuristic notion' in discrete stages, Vygotsky perceived development as a continuous process, in learning pedagogy and wider curriculum (Moli, 1990, cited by Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

Moreover, practitioners may wish to use Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) in the Early Years Curriculum. This is a concept which endeavours to explain how adults, and pupils are working together to think about different problems in a feasible way and to analyse these concepts (Learning Journals, 2021). Since the rollout of the New Curriculum for Wales, there was a great emphasis for practitioners to create authentic teaching experiences in Progression Steps One and Two by using SST (WG, 2022). For example, practitioners may observe that a child is deeply engaged in repeating activities, such as tipping over containers, building with blocks, and wrapping up objects in fabric, and so they

may inquire questions to stimulate discussions in their own learning environment (WG, 2022). Likewise, this idea seems to complement well with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems Theory, which suggests that child development is influenced by the reciprocal relationships that they forge with those in their immediate environment, such as teachers in their classroom environment (CERJ, 2022). The microsystem of a pupil is significantly important into realising their SST, health, wellbeing and lifestyles (Jevtic *et al.*, 2023).

Lastly, multi-agency working is important in the field of Early Years Education because it ensures that children are safe from danger or harm as part of safeguarding and child protection (NSPCC, 2023). According to Gasper (2009), partnership working is about professional agencies aiming to improve the quality of their planning, organisation and reflecting on their work jointly as part of their team, each striving to aim for the best. They also work diligently hard with children, parents, families, and local communities to give them provisional support and developmental services.

Conclusion :

The purpose of this essay was to analyse children's and practitioner's understanding of health, wellbeing and lifestyles that is deeply embedded in the curriculum. The study has found that generally students with higher subjective levels of wellbeing, and healthy lifestyles will work better than their other counterparts. The results of this research support the idea that effective pedagogy, that is centered on strong relationships with pupils and teachers, is key to realising the ambition of the Welsh curriculum. Moreover, the environment that children work in must be filled with authentic and purposeful learning experiences that will realise their wellbeing and holistic development. Further research regarding children's perceptions of play in Wales may be useful to see if these concepts are represented in practice.

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