

Introduction

The outcome of this document is to provide a thorough analysis of the implementation of play-based curricula within the early year's settings, whilst looking at relevant evidence and research to provide an accurate and reliable report. The Welsh government is the main body for developing and implementing curriculum changes and a new curriculum legislation. The Welsh government is currently delivering a new curriculum which is set to take place in 2022 (Welsh assembly government, 2020). In order for Wales to provide a curriculum which is more focused on personal confidence, basic skills, health and wellbeing, Professor Donaldson and his team reviewed the curriculum with 60 schools across Wales and concluded that there is a need for a reform of the current curriculum in Wales (Donaldson, 2015). Gouedard et al, (2020) states that curriculum reform is a much-needed measure in order to make schools enter the 21st century and react to an ever-changing world. Curriculum reform has undeniably been measured from a "top-down" perspective but has gradually shifted towards a more "bottom-up" approach, emphasising the essential role of teachers in the process.

Section 1

Throughout this section evidence from an array of sources will be displayed in order to provide a critical analysis of the play based early years curricula. Also a brief comparison between the foundation phase and the new curriculum for Wales will be included to provide a basis followed by a conclusion at the end of the section which will also look at the effectiveness of the curricula. Firstly a play-based curricula enables children to develop necessary skills in a structured environment, with the assistance and supervision of an experienced teacher who understands how to transform interests and experiences into learning opportunities. Play-based learning is critical for a child's social and emotional development, including the capacity to form meaningful connections with peers. Children learn to get along with one another, collaborate, interact efficiently, overcome obstacles, and settle disputes while they play together.

Strengths and weaknesses identified from previous curriculum reform reviews try to ensure the newest curriculum reform is the most effective and will achieve the best results (Taylor et al, 2015; Welsh Government, 2014). Maynard (2013) stressed a demand for the professional development of staff in order to establish a collective acknowledgement of key conditions to ensure regularity of curriculum distribution during their evaluation of the Foundation Phase. Similarly, the Independent Stock Take of the Foundation Phase (Welsh assembly government, 2008) recommended that employees undergo professional development in order to gain a better knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of curriculum pedagogy in order to apply the curriculum effectively and consistently. Children's evaluations of an activity are 'playful,' according to Howard and McInnes (2012) was a major impact in their degree of participation. It is reported by Taylor et al (2015) that throughout 2004-05 to 2013-14, the Welsh Government invested approximately £46 million in Teaching Methods and assistance for the Foundation Phase. This significantly grew in 2007-08, corresponding with the completion of the

deployment the following year, and has stayed rather stable thereafter. Between 2004-05 and 2013-14, the Welsh government spent little under £100 million. The study employed 'play' and 'not play' activities to determine features children identified with 'play' or 'not play' circumstances based on the results of an image apperception test. The study found that when children perceived an activity as "not play" (i.e., when an adult was present, when they were given a guided task, or when they were doing something at a table), they had lower levels of emotional wellbeing and task engagement. A survey also mentioned that head teachers at participating schools reported that their schools had spent approximately of £15,000 on improving their interior settings and £18,000 on improving their outdoor spaces. Indoor environments cost an average of £3,000, while outdoor spaces cost an average of £3,500, according to lead practitioners in financed non-maintained settings. Both indoor and outdoor projects had a comparable allocation of capital spending between them in terms of both interior and exterior projects. However, despite the Welsh Government (2014) suggestions for increased professional development and awareness of child development for educators, there is still no minimum level of qualification for school support workers (Siraj and Kingston, 2019; MacDonald, 2018; Waters 2016). This indicates that the new Welsh curriculum might be administered by people who don't know much about child development, play, or child-centered practise. However, as previously said, Siraj and Kingston (2019) emphasised the necessity for all employees to get professional development in order to grasp what "play" is and why it is critical to the effective implementation of a "play-based" curriculum. Currently the Welsh Government are utilising pioneer schools which display the distribution of good practice and implementation of the new curriculum reforms, also every school has a designated member of staff which is currently undertaking training on the new curriculum in order to address any potential challenges. Although it is questionable if the new actions taken will prevent previous reform difficulties from recurring. Following on regarding the effectiveness on curriculum changes a 2017 study by Weldermariam, Boyd, Hirst, et al which looked at a cross-national curriculum involving Australia, England, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America and their ideas on how to create and implement a sustainable curriculum. As a result of the data, lead practitioners in subsidised non-maintained settings (for children aged three and four) disclosed more changes in their settings than school lead practitioners disclosed for Nursery classes throughout their respective schools, in contrast to their colleagues from the Local Authority Early Years Advisory Service. According to 31% and 9% of those who responded, there are statistically significant disparities between the two groups of people. Some non-maintained and nursery practitioners observed that, while some aspects of their practise, such as observation and assessment, have become much more formal since the implementation of the Foundation Phase, the vast majority of them felt that the Foundation Phase was very similar to their existing early childhood practise. Individual acts, attitudes, and interpretations of the Foundation Phase, rather than broader structural or procedural changes, have had a key impact in transforming practise, according to these findings. After concluding a study evidence showed that there were five key areas curricula are mostly based on child-centred sociocultural, social constructivist, and Piagetian developmentalism learning theories, which link

children's learning to events, involvements, and environments, as well as interactions with physical surroundings (Lave and Wenger 1991; Piaget 1997, Vygotsky 1986). It has been reported by C. Taylor and M. Rhys that in general, lead practitioners for the Foundation Phase expressed great satisfaction with the coaching and assistance they received. Nearly ninety percent of lead practitioners in schools and funded non-maintained settings considered the Welsh Government documents and Local Authority training to be beneficial or very useful. In addition, how well-prepared Pilot and Early Start schools, non-maintained institutions, and practitioners were in terms of just being ready to provide the Foundation Phase are important considerations. Many of these materials were developed with the help of pilot schools and institutions, but a lot of those participating with in the Early Start stage of the roll-out felt they were ill prepared for the task at hand. Another concern is the quantity of advice provided to head teachers, in particular, to assist them in the execution of the Foundation Phase. This is a significant issue. A wide spectrum of stakeholders have expressed concern about the absence of a specialised training programme for headmasters. Concerns have also been made about the fact that only a small number of Year 3 teachers (or KS2 teachers in particular) have engaged in Foundation Phase training, that may also cause difficulties in the transfer of students from the Foundation Phase to the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum. The Foundation Phase had met the expectations of the vast majority of parents/caregivers, according to the survey. However, according to the results of the evaluation's poll of parents/caregivers, almost one-third of parents/caregivers either did not know what the Foundation Phase was or appeared to have been mistaken about what it was intended to promote. A further 14% of parents/caregivers say they did not receive any information regarding the Foundation Phase from any outlet, despite the Welsh Government distributing information regarding the Foundation Phase that is targeted directly at parents/caregivers. In order to conclude this section and the key findings from prior reform initiatives have been analysed, with the goal of highlighting what lessons might be gained for implementing a new curriculum reform in Wales. One of the recurring themes in the study findings is the importance of workforce professional development in order to successfully execute a play-based curriculum reform also the financing of a new curricula can prove to be costly and not every school or educational setting has the same financial backing and as evidence has shown headteachers of schools that have the most financial backing have provided more positive feedback regarding the implementation of the curricula within the early years, However multiple head teachers of the pilot schools did state that although they had the sufficient finances to implement the curriculum as best they could. They did however still feel under prepared due to the lack of guidance provided by the Welsh government who was in charge of the distribution of information regarding the curriculum and how to implement it effectively. Headteachers from lower funded schools stated that they struggled to implement the early years curricula and as best as they hoped due to the cost of the initial implementation was very high and some schools struggled to provide the areas that were suggested in order to meet the requirements for a successful curriculum ie; outdoor areas and the purchase of relevant classroom resources.

Section 2

Within play-based curricula, the purpose of this section is to critically analyse methods of evaluation, progress monitoring, and age or stage-related development models that have been used. while also demonstrating a comprehension of the notion of the "Unique Child." It is critical to remember that each kid develops and learns in his or her own unique and distinct way, and that the child, rather than the curriculum, should always be the beginning point for planning. Beginning with what each unique child offers to their learning rather than looking for what they lack and seeking to "plug the gap" is how to achieve this. The commitments that underpin the "Unique Child" concept is that curriculums are centred on the well-being of children; they include child development, inclusive practise, safety, and health and well-being. It also recognises that children from an early age are capable learners who develop in their own unique ways. It is stated by Warwick University (2005)that children and young people should be appreciated and valued for who they are not what they are capable of.

The Foundation Phase framework provides a variety of chances for children to attain holistic development by focusing on the unique requirements of each child.(Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) Additionally, it takes into account children's experiences and prior knowledge. The Foundation Phase Framework addresses the following aspects of the curriculum:

- "- Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity*
- Language, Literacy and Communication Skills*
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World*
- Physical Development*
- Creative Development*
- Mathematical Development*
- Welsh Language Development "*

(Welsh Government, 2019)

The educational programme specifies what children should be taught in each field of study, and the outcomes specify the levels of quality that should be anticipated of schoolchildren in each area of learning. The Foundation Phase Framework has also been described as a Welsh government flagship policy by Taylor (2016) following his evaluation on the framework. During which he states that the framework is by no means perfect and does have its limitations regarding its effectiveness and its compatibility with every child. He expands further by specifying that within the foundation phase profile there isn't a "follow on scheme" for children as they progress through the school years. However, Jayne Waters (2016) speaks highly of the Foundation Phase Profile in her evaluation of the Foundation Phase Profile and highlights the holistic approach whilst also outlining the requirements for teachers to obtain in order to provide an effective curriculum. One of the requirements mentioned was that the Foundation Phase

necessitated a shift in practitioner approach in order to facilitate child-initiated, play-based learning. A first hurdle for practitioners was defining essential terms, such as 'structured play,' 'active learning,' and, in particular, 'child-initiated' and 'practitioner-directed' learning. Both Piaget and Vygotsky stated play is critical for cognitive development in young children and also provides a chance for young people to acquire and develop new abilities (Feldman,2017). This is particularly evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, when learning via play plays a significant role given the fact that it is one of the most frequent methods for children to acquire knowledge (Family Lives, 2021)

The assessments carried out throughout the foundation phase consist of:

Wellcomm

High frequency words

Sound assessment

Maths patterns such as basic number bonds, these assessments are carried out on a termly basis to provide evidence of continuous progress. Within the foundation phase there is a high importance on the use of observation as this is used to provide teachers and child minders a key insight to where a child is in terms of their stage or age-related development. Ages and Stages is a term which refers to crucial points in the timetable of human development. Growth and development happen in the major developmental areas of physical, intellectual, linguistic, and social-emotional at each stage, and has been a key attribute to the success of the framework. However, there is a new tracking and assessment method that is being introduced in the curriculum for Wales (2022). It is also emphasised in the new Curriculum for Wales that personalised learning is encouraged, as well as the ability to recognise future steps and development hurdles, as well as how to help the learner in making progress toward these goals. Not administering a large number of exams, but rather tracking student progress by marking and monitoring in day-to-day learning activities that are meant to interest the students, is what embedding assessment entails. It is critical for professionals to be able to recognise where students are in their learning, what their next steps are, and how to best help students in achieving those next stages. It is necessary for a school to employ a shared structure, vocabulary, and knowledge of assessment, next actions, and how to best serve students in order to do this effectively. To allow this assessment approach, elements of the present procedures that contradict the principle of Curriculum for Wales will be eliminated and new standards will be created to guarantee that supporting learners' development remains at the core of assessment going ahead. As part of this, practitioners can expand on and further enhance assessment techniques already in use to assist learners' daily development, while also exploring new ways.

Additionally, assessment mechanisms will need to be developed, implemented, and reviewed in relation to a curriculum prepared and adopted by financed non-maintained nursery settings. No one will be asked to establish their own curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery education. Rather than that, the Welsh Ministers will establish a curriculum for these providers in 2022, complete with suitable assessment systems. and that is the introduction of progression steps 1 to 5 each step covers different ages and has different expected outcomes. By following the guidance provided by the new

curriculum and not carrying out a multitude of assessments schools are encouraged to observe more and see children as individuals. Another form of assessment in the new curriculum is to place children in the progression step that is best suited for their level of development. This is often done by age related levels, for example a child could be 6 years old but have the cognitive ability to read a book that is intended for a child that is aged 10. Therefore, the child's reading age would be placed at a higher progression step within the profile.

Progression Step	Age of children
Progression Step 1	3-5 years
Progression Step 2	5-8 years
Progression Step 3	8-11 years
Progression Step 4	11-14 years
Progression Step 5	14-16 years

After reviewing the evidence found within section 2 it suggests that there is a very mixed opinion regarding the methods of assessment and progress tracking. Initially children were expected to undertake a set of formal assessments and then graded according to performance an example of this are the levels 1-5 and with the new curriculum's methods of tracking and assessments the approach of a more continuum style approach and children are graded according to age rather than level which makes these assessments more personal and tailored to each child. That in mind the introduction of the four purposes also works in correlation with the "Unique Child" concept as it encourages children to express themselves freely through their learning. Parental feedback has been a mix of positive and negative opinions regarding the change of approach and the relevance to the curriculum the new approach has.

The following section will consist of a blog linked to the considerations needed when implementing a play-based curricula. As an Early Childhood Educator, I've often puzzled why a certain number of my co-workers and the parents of the children they care for have never prioritised play when trying to educate the children within their care. There are instructions for practitioners on how to apply play-based learning as part of the Foundation Phase (2008) and the current Welsh curriculum online. Firstly, what is play-based learning? For a child's social and emotional development, as well as his or her ability to create meaningful connections with peers, play-based learning is essential. When children play together, they learn how to get along with one another, collaborate, interact efficiently, overcome difficulties, and resolve disputes, among other things. It was noted during the Foundation Phase assessment that only 34% of practitioners reported using the outdoors every day. Which I believe can be a critical factor for a play-based curriculum as it can provide endless play and learn opportunities. According to the Welsh Government (2015), the outdoors should inspire curiosity and independence, as well as a greater emphasis on utilising the outdoors as a resource for children's learning and catering for a more child centred approach. However, a play-based curriculum is more than just taking a child outdoors and allowing them to play within their environment. The implementation has proven to be the major factor and

almost the make-or-break factor for the success of the curriculum. During the implementation phase there were a range of schools that were selected to pilot the framework. With multiple schools chosen each with different budgets, some maintained some non-maintained and with this in mind the results were different. Looking at the reviews from the head teachers at the selected pilot schools it is evident that the larger the budget the school has the more successful it is likely to be when implementing a new curriculum. As an example of how much more expensive Foundation Phase has been compared to education costs before its implementation. Reviews have estimated the total cost to the Welsh Government of primary years education for a child in Wales has increased from £25 441 to £28,019 per pupil since its implementation (based on 2012-13). This is the equivalent of an 11 percent rise in the national cost of elementary school education. That being said there are other factors to consider. One of which is staffing some schools struggled to implement the curriculum as best as they could because it required a lot of staff training to which some members of staff either refused to do or just simply were unable to adapt to the new approach. Concerns have also been made about the fact that only a small number of Year 3 teachers (or KS2 teachers in particular) have engaged in Foundation Phase training, that may also cause difficulties in the transfer of students from the Foundation Phase to the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum (C.Taylor, M.Rhys, et al,2015).

. A minimal level of qualification for school support workers remains undefined, despite the Welsh Government's (2014) recommendations for improved professional development and understanding of child development for educators (Siraj and Kingston, 2019; MacDonald,2018;Waters,2016). This suggests that the new Welsh curriculum may be delivered by individuals who have no knowledge of child development, play-based learning, or child-centred practises, among other things. According to Siraj and Kingston (2019), all staff must get professional development in order to understand what "play" is and why it is vital to the effective implementation of a "play-based" curriculum, which was previously stated. The Welsh Government (2020) is now using pioneer schools that demonstrate the dissemination of good practise and implementation of the new curriculum reforms. Additionally, each school has a designated member of staff who is currently undergoing training for the new curriculum in order to address any possible issues and, to take into consideration the suggested changes that each school would have to make. With the new introduction of the progression steps and the more continuum style approach that will support children throughout their schooling journey. With the information provided I would suggest that a triangle of needs, needs to be met in order to implement a successful curriculum and the major factor that keeps being highlighted as an issue is the finances. A school must have adequate funding and must use its budget appropriately and prioritise have the children's education and well-being at the top of their interest when spending their budget. Staff training should also be

considered as training can often increase performance and from there will also enhance children's experiences in school while helping them develop. School facilities play an important role in how well a school can implement a curriculum effectively. Schools should try and utilise its space as best it can in order to create a wealth of learning environments both inside the school building and outside. With the emphasis on outdoor learning within the new curriculum for Wales 2022 it is evident that outdoor learning and play-based learning work almost hand in hand. Article 12 of the UNCRC emphasises the significance of respecting children's opinions. This is something that everyone should keep in mind while arranging experiences and activities for youngsters. Parents and practitioners need to ensure children understand and know their rights by allowing them to speak up, share ideas and contribute to planning and ideas. When it comes to play-based learning as a teacher you are able to utilise your outdoor space by replicating the inside, developing activities within the curriculum, and giving children hands on life experience. This is related to children's use of divergent thinking, which Cropley (2015) defines as "a process in which someone comes up with many solutions for how we might perceive something." For example, a young person could see a cone as a microphone for them to sing or shout to their peers, which might connect to a subject such as music. Children are recognised to be exceptional at this procedure. Creativity and invention, critical thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness, and planning and organising are all abilities included in the New Curriculum for Wales (2019). The outdoors has the ability to help students develop all of these talents. The outdoors may also help young people grow up to be ethical citizens by teaching them to be nice to nature, care for living things, and learn about sustainability.

So, it is important to use this idea of an outdoor area as a way to develop your skills as teaching practitioners to develop play-based learning and the curriculum. Open your door, walk a few steps outdoors, and let your children breathe fresh air, kick a football, or climb a tree because the options and advantages are unlimited. Trust the research presented in the Foundation Phase (2009) outdoor learning guide and provide children with experiences that they will remember far more than completing a worksheet while confined indoors.

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