

Early Years Curricula

Section 1: Critically analyse the implementation of play based early years curricula referring to evaluative research evidence and reports (1500 words)

According to Welsh Government (2019), the Foundation Phase Framework is a curriculum aimed at children aged 3-7 and contains seven areas of learning that should be achieved by following the curriculum. The seven areas of learning are language and literacy, physical development, personal, social, and emotional development, Welsh language development, mathematics, creative development, and knowledge and understanding of the world (Twinkl, no date).

Professor Graham Donaldson carried out a report which includes a review about the foundation phase. Within the review Professor Donaldson and his team had various meetings across Wales to see what schools had to say. These meetings were with teachers, headteachers, school managers and school staff. The review happened between March and December 2014 and included approximately 60 schools. Estyn reports, government policies and other reports were also looked at as well as talking to the children and parents or carers (Donaldson, 2015).

Amongst the people that were spoken to, Donaldson was told positive things about the foundation phase, the national literacy framework as well as routes for learning and Welsh language/ bilingualism. However, Donaldson was also told by teachers, that they would like more power and control over how to teach and what to teach within the curriculum. Teachers also believed that assessment arrangements were not working well to support the children's needs. Within the review, the children and young people explained that they believed the curriculum was out of date especially with technology, software, and digital skills. Teachers and children both stated that they wanted the lessons to be fun and interesting as well as having a greater focus on life skills (Donaldson, 2015).

Following the report, there became a suggestion of the purpose of a new curriculum which states that the curriculum should have four purposes that mean all children will be ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, healthy, confident learners as well as being ethical, informed citizens. These purposes should underpin all teaching and learning in Wales. The report also suggests that there should be 6 areas of learning and experience which are all important but will contribute in diverse ways to the four purposes. These six areas of learning and experience will run from ages 3 until 16 (Donaldson, 2015).

According to Donaldson, (2015) there should be a focus for all teachers which is literacy, numeracy, and digital competency. These skills are so important that they should be developed and strengthened throughout the whole curriculum. The report also suggests that a digital competence framework should be developed to establish progression in their learning.

The report suggests that simpler assessment procedures as well as a stronger role for assessment to support learning and that current assessment arrangements are seen to be confusing. By involving the children in their assessment, it will encourage them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. A suggestion was made that the Welsh Government should develop an assessment and evaluation framework which should not depend on external or internal tests as this fail to reflect the curriculum (Donaldson, 2015).

Within a second report which was the evaluation of the foundation phase, there were many key findings. One of these key findings were that pupils within the foundation phase were more likely to achieve level 4 or above in English (Key stage 2). Another finding was that schools who use the foundation phase have higher levels where pupils were involved as well as higher wellbeing during learning. A further key finding was that majority of practitioners involved within the foundation phase believe that it has helped to improve literacy in both English and Welsh as well as improvements in numeracy (Welsh Government, 2015).

Within the evaluation of the foundation phase, final report some recommendations were made about the foundation phase and how it could be improved within practice. One important recommendation was that more information regarding the role of literacy and numeracy assessments within year 2 should be given to parents or carers as well as having an emphasis on more first-hand learning experiences to make it more enjoyable and appropriate for their children. A recommendation was made for practitioners to be given advice which is practical about how to implement the national literacy framework within the foundation phase. However there needs to be more emphasis on how literacy and numeracy should be taught using a variety of different approaches within the classroom which will also help practitioners understand how different approaches can complement one another (Welsh Government, 2015).

There have been multiple recommendations regarding training for the foundation phase. Training support officers should visit practitioners often to support implementation of recent training modules as well as specific training for teachers of key stage 2 to help with progression and continuity whilst children transition from foundation phase to key stage 2 (Welsh Government, 2015). Training for the foundation phase would be ideal however there is often a lack of funding available but also staffing issues therefore training for everyone is not always available.

Regarding how well the foundation phase has been implemented, according to Estyn (2011), the foundation phase has had a positive impact on the wellbeing of children across different schools as well as children aged 5-6 who achieved well whilst studying through the foundation phase. However, in a small number of schools, this was not the case simply due to practitioners not understanding the principles of the foundation phase, therefore if more training was implemented, this result could possibly be different. Within schools where the foundation phase has been implemented well by practitioners, there was a focus on high standards of literacy but again within schools where the foundation phase was not strongly implemented, Estyn (2011) found that there was not enough direct teaching of reading, but also opportunities that enabled the children to enhance their reading skills were not always available to the children.

The foundation phase was found to be positive on the wellbeing of children as well as the increased enjoyment and motivation of children. Estyn (2011) also found that by using the outdoor area, boys are becoming more engaged in their learning, however there was also the issue of no outdoor provision in a small minority of schools.

Estyn (2011) made recommendations to the government as well as the schools they visited. One recommendation was that the balance between child-led play and adult-led play should

be better as well as ensuring there are regular opportunities that are well-planned for children to improve their reading and writing skills. Another recommendation that was made was for the outdoor provision to be enhanced to support children's learning which has now become a big focus during the new curriculum for Wales.

To support what the Welsh Government (2015) suggests, Estyn (2011) agreed that training should be given to ensure that all practitioners understand the principles of the foundation phase. The recommendation that Estyn (2011) made for the Welsh Government was to issue guidance on outdoor learning, balancing child-led and adult-led learning and the teaching of reading and writing in the foundation phase to complement what is in key stage 2.

There are indications that the foundation phase has benefited children's learning, however it has benefited their wellbeing more than their standards. Within most schools, the children's participation, enjoyment and attitudes are enhanced through outdoor learning and child-led activities. Estyn (2011) has no evidence of the foundation phase improving child's standards of learning however more evidence could have been given if more schools were visited and if more practitioners were aware of the principles of the foundation phase, the results may look differently.

According to Waters, J. (2016) states that there has been a major change in approach as the early years curricula that preceded the Foundation phase created a developmental view of the child's learning where the role of the adult educator was to manage the child's learning and development in stages that are age-related but also to measure the progress against agreed and accepted cultural norms within society (Fleer 2006, Wyness 2006). The foundation phase had the potential to challenge developmental approaches already in place to understanding the development of children (MacNaughton 2005, Grieshaber 2008).

Section 2: Considering the concept of the 'Unique Child', critically evaluate methods of assessment, progress tracking and age or stage related development models within play-based curricula (1500 words)

According to Early Years Matters (no date), the concept of 'unique child' simply means that every child is different and that they all learn differently and at different paces. Although all children learn differently throughout their early years, they all need to feel safe by being protected by adults so that their confidence and resilience can grow. The Welsh Government, (2020) state that all schools are different and that they want every school to design their own curriculum. There is also an emphasis for the unique child meaning that children build their confidence and self-esteem as well as giving them opportunities for independence. Through independence and self-esteem, children find their voice and as Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) states that every child has the right to be heard and listened to (UNICEF, no date).

As we look at the new curriculum for Wales, we can see a link with Te Whariki as both state that children should learn alongside others however having a strong sense of themselves is also very important. Their physical skills as well as their imagination and problem-solving skills should be allowed to be developed throughout their education (Famly, 2020).

Vygotsky was a developmental psychologist who believed learning was a social process which supports what the new curriculum is saying about children learning alongside others. Vygotsky also believed that the levels of children's cognitive development differ, and some may need more time than others.

A type of assessment method was developed from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which is the dynamic assessment method where language is tested to highlight the learner's current knowledge and potential improvements (Research gate, 2018). The benefits of this type of assessment method are that practitioners can assess what the individual can do with certain support, effective teaching strategies are able to be identified as well as gaining an improved understanding of individual needs (HSR Psychology, no date). Although this form of assessment has many benefits, there are certain challenges that face using this form of assessment. One challenge is that it can sometimes be unreliable depending on the practitioner that is assessing as the child and practitioner may have a stronger relationship compared to with another practitioner which therefore means the child may perform better for one practitioner compared to another (Speech pathology, 2015). This links with the attachment theory of John Bowlby where a child has the need to attach to at least one primary caregiver. If the affection is disrupted, affectionless psychopathy can occur where lower intelligent levels are seen (Health Research Funding, no date).

Learning stories are another type of assessment methods which is a type of story which explains and describes how the child interacted with a certain experience or interaction (seriously kids, no date). Learning stories have a big impact on learning as they give a child the sense of identity and no two learning stories will be the same so therefore this will link with the unique child. They also are beneficial as they are individual to the child and include the child's perspective. Parents can also get involved with their child's learning stories at home (Get Educa, no date). However, funding, staffing issues and lack of time can make learning stories a negative type of assessment for larger settings with more children, however smaller settings may choose to use this type of assessment if time and staffing is not an issue to them.

Different cultures may use different types of assessments and Devarakonda (2013:52) describes culture as multiculturalism being normal within society and it is important for all children and adults to be proud of their culture. However, culture means different things to different people, and it can simply mean the way of living, environment as well as someone's beliefs. Culture can have an impact on assessment methods as culture can affect how children build values, language and understanding and if a language is not understood in school this can be a barrier to the child and therefore have an impact on the assessment method being used. A translator or the language of the assessment should be changed to suit the individual. This will help the child feel included and may feel a sense of comfort.

Within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), observation is mentioned in multiple places and is described as the practice of looking at and listening to children to find out how they are developing, what they enjoy doing and what is being learnt through their play and experiences. These three things are important to observe according to the EYFS as it enables the practitioners to seek whether the child's development is at the correct level. It also enables the practitioners to see whether the tools and resources are suitable to further the child's development. Observations happen within their daily routine and on a regular basis

and the observations made are made available to parents to discuss the holistic development of the child (Early Years Matters, no date). Observations have many positive outcomes and one of these being that they can help practitioners to identify why children may show certain behaviours e.g., challenging behaviour. Observations are also an opportunity for the practitioners to see how the children interact with their peers as well as showing the child's style of communication e.g., facial expressions, hand gestures (Hi mama, no date). Although observations sound quite a beneficial way of assessing, they can be quite time consuming, and the process cannot be rushed if the practitioner wishes for the observation to be precise and accurate. Another disadvantage of observations is that not everything can be observed, and some children do not cooperate and may refuse for the practitioners to observe their daily activities.

As well as observations, there are two types of assessments that happen within the EYFS which are the formative and summative assessment. The formative assessment is done daily and is used to make decisions about what the child has learnt and can already do and is also used to decide where to guide the child next in their development. This type of assessment is agreed upon by parents and practitioners and the child if age is appropriate. Compared to the formative assessment, the summative assessment takes place twice a year within the EYFS where the first takes place when the child is between 2 and 3 years old and then again when they reach the end of reception class. The outcomes of the first summative assessment are discussed with parents to identify the child's learning needs and their strengths. Although assessments and observations are made within the EYFS, the EYFS is not intended to be used for on-going assessment for early years or reception class (Early Years Matters, no date).

Welsh government (2022) state that as part of the supporting learner progression assessment, that the purpose of assessing each learner is to support every individual to progress at an appropriate pace and ensuring they are supported and challenged in a suited manner. To do this the new curriculum for Wales has stated that the three key reasons for assessing are supporting individuals daily, reflect on individual learner progress over time and understanding group progress to reflect on practice. For learners to make progress which is meaningful, the relationship between curriculum, assessment and pedagogy is important.

All of the above factors have contributed to the Welsh Government in creating the new curriculum for Wales which began in September 2022. The new curriculum has 4 main purposes which are that all learners in Wales are ambitious and capable, enterprising and creative contributors, ethical and informed citizens and finally healthy and confident individuals. Another factor of the new curriculum is that every school creates their own curriculum as well as focusing on how things are taught compared to what is being taught. The curriculum is aimed at all children in Wales who are aged 3-16 and the aim is that all schools cover the same core learning (Welsh Government, 2019).

Section 3: Write a blog for professional publication linked to considerations needed when implementing a play-based curriculum/curriculum change.

Outdoor learning means different things to different people, but it can be equally as important to many people too. English Outdoor Council (2018) define outdoor learning as active learning outdoors where those outdoors learn through what they are doing but also what they may find. Those taking part in outdoor learning not only learn about the outdoors but also about those around them and themselves too. Many skills are developed through outdoor learning which include enquiry, experiment, feedback and cooperative learning.

There is no limit to what the outdoor environment can provide as well as it being able to broaden horizons as well as stimulating new interests. Within the new curriculum for Wales there is a big focus on the outdoors and there is a focus on the area of science and technology with the aim to enhance learners' knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Montessori is one of the most well-known educationalists (Aubrey, k and Riley, a. (2019) and Montessori always based her work around the child being the most important tool in education and she saw the child as unique and individual who would develop their inner potential with guidance. Montessori stated that a curriculum that was designed to meet the needs of society was not as important as social liberty. Montessori then went on to develop activities based upon what the environment could offer as well as the needs of the child. Montessori believed that the outdoor area should be used as an expansion of the classroom. Montessori was one of few people who rejected the idea of children learning best through curriculums according to Daly et, al (2006).

Montessori was one theorist who noticed the importance of the outdoors; however, Froebel was another individual. Froebel, according to Tovey (no date) placed a garden at the centre of his theory and believed it was a place for children to learn at their own individual pace placed closely by practitioners or adults to support their learning journey. Tovey (no date) believed that the role of the adult was just as important as the outdoor learning environment as adults are there to be supportive, observant but also to be able to extend play and learning. Outdoor play has many opportunities for learning and to have first-hand experience with nature which is vital for minds that are growing.

Piaget and Erikson both believe that children's development happens when a child interacts with the outdoors and both theorists have stated that children that are active in the world are participants, and that their development will happen in stages. The outdoor environment is ideal as it is although sometimes some requirements are needed but often, they are simple. The environment should have a choice and freedom, but boundaries are often used to control the situation. Challenge and risk are often provided as well as allowing the children time to explore the environment.

Rickinson et al, (2004, p.36) previously said that indoor planning was easier than outdoor planning as well as there being some barriers for some settings wishing to incorporate outdoor learning. Some of these barriers are simply a lack of time which as we know can have an impact on multiple things like risk assessments. Some practitioners simply do not have the confidence as well as some settings not having suitable resources to implement the outdoor learning environment. Being outdoors improves children's well-being in different

ways as well as providing opportunities to learn different skills and to access different types of learning which leads to increased creativity.

Some people may think that outdoor learning is about a forest however it can happen anywhere like the playground, garden or even a local field. Curriculum outdoors based learning has been shown to have a huge impact on children's learning, their mental health but also their motivation according to Love outdoor learning (2020).

Within the Foundation Phase, it was stated that the outdoors was an ideal environment for learning and experimenting due to it offering opportunities which are unique and allows creativity. There are also many opportunities to move around, take risks and to be loud. There are multiple things to be learnt from the outdoors such as the weather, sounds, smells and textures which will further develop the child's development. All aspects of the child's development are enhanced from being outdoors like their physical and creative development. Children who learn these skills can learn better in future as well as being able to retain the information. The child's health is benefited from being outdoors as they are given opportunities to run, jump and skip therefore developing their gross motor skills and their general fitness. They will also be able to look at how the weather changes and how plants grow. The foundation phase should have promoted discovery and independence using the outdoor environment (Welsh Government, No date).

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