

ECEY6010- Early Years Curricular

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Part One.**Introduction.**

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) state that every child has the right to an education (Children and young people's commissioner Scotland, no date). The United Kingdom Government (2016) outline that every child regardless of their background, culture or deprivation level are entitled to receiving and accessing an education. Within Wales the education curriculum is a statutory framework which has been developed and published under Section 71 of the curriculum and assessment (Wales) Act 2021. The curriculum is the core concept for schools to be able to function and support the child's needs (United Kingdom Government, 2016). This statutory framework supports schools in ensuring all learners across Wales from the age of three years old to sixteen years of are not only learning consistently but also learning what they consider to be the key concepts. The Welsh Education Curriculum is important as it supports practitioners to provide children with a more holistic approach while in the education setting (Welsh Government, 2024).

Play based curriculum is a concept used to describe a curriculum that supports a child developing holistically. According to right to play (no date) play based learning does not only support the core curriculum areas such as maths and English but also develops emotional and social skills. The Welsh Government have developed a quality framework for early years childhood play, learning and care in Wales. According to this framework by children having access to play based learning it provides holistic development while supporting providing children with a nurturing environment (Welsh Government, 2024). However, the happiness is here blog (no date) disagrees with the impact play based learning has on children and state that real play is an important concept that children need to have access to and adults leading the play to support learning can blur the lines between real play and play based learning.

Throughout this assignment there will be a wide range of concepts discussed. In part one of the assignment the focus will be on early years curriculum and if there is a focus on a child's wellbeing. Part two of the assignment will concentrate on the unique child. During this section of the assignment, assessment and tracking will be

analysed. Finally part three will feature a blog with the focus on wellbeing and the impact relationships have.

Curriculum for Wales.

The curriculum for Wales supports schools with the guidance to develop their own curriculum to support their learners, it is built of six areas of learning (AOLe's) which come together to achieve a child reaching the four purposes (Welsh Government, 2024). The four purposes should be developed around what this means for their learners while in school and the citizens they are growing into (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh Government published a document called play/active learning (2008) which throughout states that children need access to play and that play is an area of a child's learning that is valued. Throughout this document it underpins that children having access to play goes beyond cognitive benefits but also social and emotional benefits. For children aged 0-5 years attending a wide range of settings from early year's settings, maintained nurseries and childminders they have access to a quality framework for early childhood play learning and care in Wales. Within this document it outlines play not only needs to be valued as a learning tool but also as a resource for carrying out observations. This framework suggests that children need engaging experiences to gain a deeper understanding and curiosity of the world around them (Welsh Government (2024).

Within the Welsh Curriculum's areas of learning a key area is health and wellbeing. Throughout this area of the curriculum, it covers the fundamental area of a child's physical health and development, mental health and emotional and social wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2020). This area of the curriculum for Wales places a focus on beyond physical and mental health but also broadens a child's knowledge of relationships and social influences (Welsh Government, 2020). The Welsh Government have recognised the importance of a child's wellbeing and the impact play has on a child's development (play Wales, 2024).

Reggio Emillie.

The Reggio Emillie approach has had significant success motivating children as it puts a focus on the child (Gardner and Jones, 2016). Children accessing learning through the Reggio Emillie approach supports their overall holistic development and this approach places a focus not only on the environment but also on their

relationships. The Reggio Emillie approach focuses on how a child's wellbeing is built up over different aspects such as physical, emotional and mental health similar to the Welsh Curriculum (Reggioemillia, no date). Through this approach the environment is crucial and it outlines that settings should have different spaces for children to be able to move freely to different play provisions (Beckley, 2012). Reggio Emilia approach considers the environment as a third teacher and highlights the importance of using the space that is available.

Compare and contrast.

The curriculum for Wales and the Reggio Emilia approach both highlight the importance of not only children accessing play but also children developing holistically. Both approaches have a key focus on a child's wellbeing and placing them at the centre of the learning process not only while in early years but also as they grow later in life. Another similarity of the approaches is the recognition on a child's physical, emotional and social development. However, while there are similarities there are differences within both approaches. The Curriculum for Wales provides settings with a statutory guidance that supports settings to build on to ensure they are able to reach the four purposes with education staff still taking the lead. The Reggio Emilia approach places the learning on the child taking the lead and developing their own experiences.

Strengths and limitations.

According to the Welsh Government (2023) the curriculum for Wales sets standards high for not only the children but also the settings, they suggest that throughout the Welsh Curriculum not only does it provide them with aspirations but it also allows all children to be supported while acknowledging and overcoming poverty that relates to education attainment. The curriculum for Wales due to the four purposes places a focus on equity and inclusion which develops another strength of the new curriculum in Wales (Welsh Government, 2025).

The Reggio Emilia approach is not suitable for every child to follow and thrive using. This approach is unlike the Curriculum for Wales when tracking data and a child's progress, and is more child led which can be a limitation (Wilson College, no date). Due to the freedom to explore this provides a very unstructured period of time in the setting (mulberry, no date). Many children especially those with additional learning

needs thrive off routine and structure and following the Reggio Emilie approach may cause dysregulation to their day as they would not be able to cope with the free time. However, while limitations have been acknowledged there are strengths of settings following this approach as it promotes collaboration which also supporting a child strengthening key cognitive skills for example problem solving (Wilson College, no date).

However, after analysing both the curriculum for Wales and the Reggio Emilie approach it is evident that settings within Wales would face limitations to implementing this approach within there setting. This is due to the curriculum for Wales setting statutory guidance for settings to follow and having more structure to how they deliver learning. Early years settings within Wales would also struggle with space within their setting and being able to allow children to access different provisions.

Conclusion.

Overall, throughout part one of the assignment there have been acknowledgment to the importance of play on a child's overall wellbeing. This assignment has placed an emphasis on the importance of a child developing holistically and how both the curriculum for Wales and the Reggio Emilie approach can support their developing. To conclude children having access to play based learning supports further than cognitively but develops core skills required as they grow into citizens of Wales.

Part Two.**Introduction.**

Every child is considered to be unique and will not learn at the same pace as their peers but at their own pace (Leicester City Council, no date). Children in the Early Years are in a fundamental time period of development, and it suggests that not only is every child unique, but their individuals need will reflects this (Children in Wales, no date). According to the unique child foundation (no date) every early years child is an independent learner and the environment they access underpins not only their development but also their overall learning and experiences.

The Department for Education (2025) state that children will develop at their own rate and not all children will achieve the same milestones at the same time.

Assessments cannot be carried out once and then forgotten about this is an ongoing process which needs to be monitored and adapted in accordance the child's unique needs (Welsh Government, no date). A child's progression in learning is core in relation to the Curriculum for Wales. Practitioners carrying out assessments correctly and having a robust assessment tool allows settings to not only monitor a child's progress but also to ensure they are receiving the correct level of support to meet their unique needs (Welsh Government, 2024). According to the Welsh Government (no date) when practitioners are carrying out assessments they need to take into account the individual needs of each learner and adapt where appropriate. Carrying out assessments in early years settings goes beyond supporting and monitoring the overall outcomes of the child but it is also a tool for practitioners to broaden their understanding on the support the child requires in order to thrive (Department for Education, 2025). The purpose of early years settings carrying out assessments on the children they are supporting is to identify areas of need that requires more support, reflect on practice and the progress of the child (Welsh Government, no date). Welsh Parliament (2024) published an article which states that carrying out ongoing assessments not only act as a core element of teaching and learning but also allows the opportunity of reflecting on if a child has made progress.

Assessment in the curriculum.

Assessment is a key component for supporting all children's holistic development but it important that practitioners take into account learners develop at their own pace

and especially important to remember this when assessing children who have additional learning needs whether they have been diagnosed or not (Welsh Government, 2023). Dexter and Middleton (2025) suggest that practitioners assessing children with the unique child in mind supports developing a broader understanding on their individual needs while allowing the opportunity for strategies to be created especially when supporting emotional queues which will positively impact their overall wellbeing.

The curriculum for Wales considers assessment to be carried out through if the child is applying what they have learnt in practice and then refacing on this (Welsh Government, 2023). However, as mentioned previously throughout the assignment the curriculum for Wales state that children all learn at different paces this is not reflected in their assessment guidance. Within in the guidance set for schools, they have provided settings with progression steps to supporting monitoring a child's progress (Welsh Government, 2023).

Shalia (no date) suggests that settings following the Reggio Emille approach can face many barriers when assessing children. She states that there are no concrete tool or resources that assesses and monitors a child's development progress and is reliant on the practitioner to build this. Throughout Shalia blog's she discusses that practitioners are required to create a tracking sheet for each individual provision throughout the environment and then create their own date through that.

Welsh Government (2023) suggests that when has a child has additional learning needs whether this has been diagnosed or not they need to be considered when carrying out assessment, they believe that through assessment it allows the unique child to activate their prior knowledge while creating an assessable assessment for all learners.

Throughout looking at the curriculum for Wales and the Reggio Emille approach within early years settings it is evident that assessment is a core area of ensuring children are making progress and to tailor the support they require on an individual basis. While there are benefits to each approach there have also been limitations outlined especially when ensuring that the unique child's needs are met. Each assessment tool will need to be tailored to the need of the child, and it needs to be remembered that a child's overall emotional state can affect the assessment results

so there will not be accurate data from these assessments. Assessment guidance set out in the curriculum for Wales can support the unique child if adapted correctly to their individual needs.

Conclusion.

Overall, it has been evident throughout part two of the assignment that when considering assessment, it is multi-layered and each assessment needs to be tailored where applicable to support the overall needs of a child. Throughout this part of the assignment the unique child has been considered and the importance of considering them when carrying out any assessments in the settings. Finally it has been underpinned that all children will develop at their own pace and this is not a linear process that needs to be considered especially when monitoring and reflecting on a child's progress to develop the areas of need and to create a plan moving forward.

Part three.

WELLBEING IN THE EARLY YEARS.



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Does play influence a child's overall wellbeing?

What is wellbeing in the Early Years?

According to the Early Childhood Play, learning and care plan in Wales (2024) the framework suggests by settings following it that it can support a child's overall wellbeing and support building positive relationships. But what is wellbeing?

Durham City Council (no date) have acknowledged as a Local Authority that a child's wellbeing underpins them being able to thrive and build the core skills they require as they develop later in life to succeed. NSPCC (2025) agrees with the impact wellbeing has on a child's life stating that all professionals working with children play a role in shaping their wellbeing. However, Brown and Mander (2021) state that wellbeing has not got one single definition as it has a multitude of dimensions and wellbeing is built up of different concepts.

Wellbeing Dimensions.

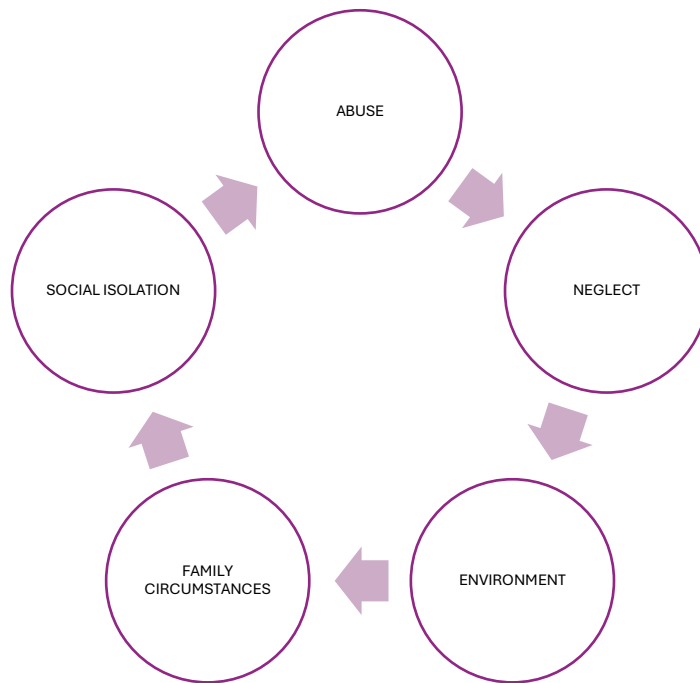
Some of the dimensions that wellbeing is built on include:

- Physical
- Psychological
- Mental health
- Emotional
- Social wellbeing

(Brown and Mander, 2021).

Factors that can affect wellbeing?

There are a variety of factors outside a child's, professionals and parent and carers control that can affect a child's wellbeing.



(NSPCC, 2025)

So, is there a decline in an Early Year's child's wellbeing?

NHS Wales (2026) state that mental health in children is currently facing a crisis, according to the report published by public health Wales it is estimated more than 135,000 children are estimated to have a diagnosable mental health condition and this is in Wales alone. In a post published for the United Kingdom Parliament it was suggested that children's wellbeing in the United Kingdom is increasingly lower and it is the lowest in Western Europe (Cary and Webb, 2025).

Poverty rates in Wales.

The children's commissioner Wales (2024) states that it is estimated that thirty percent of children in Wales are living in poverty.

So can play improve wellbeing and will poverty influence experiences ?

Impact of play on a child's wellbeing.

Play is often not given enough credit for the overall impact it can have on a child's development especially on their overall wellbeing. allowing children to have access to play is a key aspect for them to flourish. Play is considered to be a resources use to support children in expressing their feelings and this is why play is often used as a way to deliver therapy to children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) this is because when toxic stress increase allowing the child to play can lower these supporting emotional regulation (Lindley, 2024). Practitioners, parents and carers getting involved with play supports children with not only essential learning opportunities but also supports building positive secure relationships (Benham, 2024).

Allowing children time to play builds:

- Secure attachment
- Builds and supports creative skills
- Builds on imagination
- Develops empathy skills
- Develops social skills

(Lindley, 2026).

Allowing children the opportunity to experience play with parents, carers, practitioners and peers supports holistic development. It is a resource that needs to be valued deeper and professionals especially minsters need to broaden their understanding on the overall impact play has on a child's wellbeing especially when supporting children have experiences childhood adverse experiences. National Health Service Wales (NHS) (no date) states that children's overall mental health and wellbeing is not only improved through play, but it maintains. Play Wales (no date) suggests that while play can have an immediate impact on a child's wellbeing it also supports long term outcomes for those children who have regular access to it as it helps developing life skills.

Different play.

There are many different types of play and stages of play. Play can be accessed through a variety of different ways and can be adult led or specifically child led.

Stages of play:

- Unoccupied play
- Solitary play
- Spectator play
- Parallel play
- Associate play
- Cooperative play

Types of play that can be used to support a child's

- Role Play
- Sand play
- Block play
- Fantasy play
- Sensory play
- Creative play
- Rough and tumble play
- Constructive play.

Block Play.

Block play is also another type of play which is inclusive as there is a lot of evidence that suggests it supports children with additional learning needs. This type of play also supports self-regulation, self-expression and social skills especially when the child needs support to finish from an adult or one of their peers. This type of play can be carried out independently or with peers and can be both structured and unstructured (Peabody, 2021).

Sand tray therapy.

Sand tray play is a phenomenal type of play to incorporate into a child's experiences as it built up of both technical and theoretical approaches. Sand play also supports children with sensory simulation which also connects with a child building attachment. Allowing children to use sand play as form of play provides them with an outlet to express their emotions while also building resilience. This form of play is inclusive as it can be verbal or non- verbal. (Sweeny, 2021).

(Figure 2, Platform, no date).



Barriers.

Throughout this blog it is evident of the crisis that early year's children are currently facing with their wellbeing and mental health. However, it is also evident of the impact play can have on lowering dangerous stress levels and increasing feel good chemicals such as dopamine.

While there have been a lot of positives and strengths mentioned throughout the blog and important factor to take into account is that parents, carers and practitioners will also face challenges in promoting a child's wellbeing through play.

There are many barriers than can affect a child's experience of play, by these barriers affecting play this can negatively impact a child's overall mental and wellbeing not only immediately but also in the long run. Some of the challenges parents, carers and practitioners may face in ensuring children are experience meaningful play experiences include:

- Knowledge- a parents, carers and professional lack of knowledge on the impact play has and the type of play can affect how meaningful the overall play experience is.
- Financial- settings are experiencing significant budget cuts which in time will see a decrease in the quality of resources that are available to the children.
- Time- parents, careers and professionals struggle to fit everything into one day, especially in settings where they are expected to carry out assessments and teach the curriculum. Without having the knowledge how to incorporate play into learning this can be a significant barrier.

Call for action!

What is it we want to see?

We need ministers and those above to see the impact play has beyond wellbeing. Allowing children to play supports holistic development and importantly supports developing the relationships they are building with parents, carers, professionals and peers positively. We need those with power to broaden their understanding on play and to stop undervaluing the impact it has especially as while children are play, they are also learning. In an ideal world by those in power understanding play they would be able to then support parents, carers and practitioners overcome the challenges that they are facing daily. Actions that can support progress:

- Knowledge- delivering training by play excerpts to support knowledge of parents, carers and professionals in regard to play. This will be an area where parents would have the opportunity to learn to play with their child has not every adult experienced that as a child.
- Financial- allowing settings to have money within their budgets for play equipment as even though there are a lot of free resources than can be used settings would also be able to improve their environments to ensure the children are experiencing meaning full play experiences in an enabling environment.
- Time- settings need to be given the time for play and this needs to be reflected in the learning where it is not frowned upon for play based learning not only in the early years but throughout the school as there is no age cut off for play.

If there is not a change with children experience more play both at home and in the settings they attend there could be a further decline in early year's children's wellbeing and seeing an increase of those children who are diagnosed with mental health conditions. While we will see the impact immediately there will also be a long-term impact when the child grows into an adult.

Change is needed, stand together and promote play to ensure children are thriving, learning and promote their wellbeing so they grow into the best version of themselves.

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