

Section one – Wales New Curriculum 2022

As of September 2022, there is a new curriculum in places for Wales. It has been explained by Education Wales (2022) that Education is changing and has especially been adapted to enthuse children from the age of 3 years - 16 years old. It will give children the foundations they will need to succeed in a changing world through purposes of learning to help them. It has been suggested by Donaldson (2014) that 'Curriculum' should mean all the learning experiences and assessments that schools plan. There will be a national framework to ensure there is consistency and core leading, but teachers and other educators will be empowered to use their professional skills and understanding to decide what and how they teach to get the best out of their learners (gov.wales, 2022).

However,

Play is a big part of a child's development. It has been discovered by UNICEF (2018) that play sets the foundation for the development of critical social and emotional knowledge and skills. In addition, raising children (2022) states that play is key to children's learning, development, confidence and well-being. Since September 2010, children aged 3-7 years old in Wales have been learning through play based activities which is recognised as the foundation phase; this was put in place due to Wales having one of the lowest Pisa ratings of 57 different countries within the subjects of reading, mathematics and science in 2006 (gov.wales, 2019). Therefore, the foundation phase was introduced and was designed to meet the development needs of all children (Estyn, 2011). In 2006 Finland were the highest on the Pisa ratings in science (OECD, 2006) and still hold a strong rating in all three subjects up to recent date. However, it has been explained by Finnish National Agency for Education (2019) that in general teachers and trainers in Finland have been for years describing children in play to be more competent and more skilful than in other areas of their life. Again, it has been stated by NCEE (2021) that Finnish Students do not attend school until they are 7 years of age and would have done a previous year of preschool at the age of 6 and will then go to primary school with a learning plan for each student. The children will then be with the same teacher for several years to build a good relationship with them, before qualifying with a basic school certificate and moving onto the next two years of education of their choice.

However, this could explain how it has come to the concern of many that there is a lack of understanding of play within some early year's settings. It is generally considered today that Play, in Particular, has proven difficult to define (Pellegrini 1991; Piaget 1951; Rubin *et al.* 1983) furthermore, (Eberle, 2014) states that scholars conventionally find play difficult to define because the concept is complex and ambiguous, meaning that there are many different and connected parts of play as well as it not having one obvious meaning. He further adds play always promises fun. But in this context, he contends will not fully qualify as play. On the other hand, (Montessori, 1964) quotes that "play is the work of a child" and furthermore states that the essential dimension of play includes; voluntary, enjoyable, purposeful and being spontaneous. It has also come to the question if the teachers have a full understanding of the children's likes and dislikes. Likewise, Hanen (2015) has explained that children learn more effectively when adults engage with them in everyday activities that are based on their interests. Furthermore, a study was carried out to see the differences in practitioners' understanding of play and how it influences pedagogy and children's perceptions of play; as a result (Moyle *et al.* 2001; Stephen 2010) gathered when examining their practice, practitioners tend to focus on children's behaviour rather than analysing their own. It also comes to the concerns that practitioners do not respect children's rights; a rights respecting school is a community where children's rights are learned, taught, praised, respected, protected and promoted (UNICEF UK, 2016).

Another point to note is that in an early year setting it is important practitioners have an effective leadership. As an early year's leader, it is the role to be in charge of setting high standards of care at the setting (family, 2022) as well as that it is the role to overcome the hurdles currently facing the early years workforces, across all settings (Teach First, 2022). Additionally, (Leithwood *et al.*, 1994) states that at its root, leadership is a problem-solving process and that the problems leaders face in a school context are some of the most challenging you can find. Such as problems that are described as 'wicked problems' (Rittel; Webber, 1973) which are problems which are difficult to define, and even more difficult to solve. However, it is still the leader's role to ensure that their staff, pupils and careers are all treated equally to ensure that as a team they get the best out of the children. However, it is suggested by the affective

leadership and management scheme (ELMS,2020) that Its purpose is to ensure that children and practitioners in those settings receive the best possible experiences and direction in their work and play and that parents and carers can have confidence in the particular setting attended by their children. Therefore, the ideal Leaders in an early year's settings should be very diverse in character as well as quality and effectiveness so that they are henceforward charged with managing the related areas of care, health and family support and integrating these with education (Siraj, 2006).

However, the National Professional qualification for Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL) require at least a Level 3 and a full relevant qualification(Department for Education,2021). All of tasks of a leader's role require skills such as certainly being able to inspire others, having a clear vision, thinking creatively, having a problem-solving approach to difficulties and a commitment to partnership working as well as developed interpersonal skills (early years matters,2022). On the other hand, Moyles (2006) states that Staff in early years settings have had to adapt to many changes and demands from local authorities and national government, who suddenly found themselves in a leadership and management role in increasingly complex small early years businesses and settings without formal training or qualifications. This points to the conclusion of how leadership has lacked in early years settings due to practiononers becoming leaders without having the knowledge and understand of the setting and by not having these they skills do not meet the needs of the requirements in the settings therefore this could have an impact on the way the children are getting taught and not allowing them to reach the best of their abilities. As well as not having a good relationship with the children, staff, parents and careers which is important as the role of a leader in an early year setting.

Thirdly, a number of key issues arise from the statement that there is a high number of children living in poverty in Wales. The latest figures from children in Wales (2021) shows that 34% of children in Wales are living in poverty. It has been explained by Health Scotland (2021) that poverty has negative impacts on children's health, social, emotional, cognitive development, behaviour and education outcomes. That is to say that the focus on improving the lives of children and families in poverty through supporting the learning and teaching of young children is also well evidenced and

particularly important for Wales (Siraj-Batchford and Sira-Batchford,2010; DfES, 2013) in other words it is important that children and their families living in poverty need to be supported within their early year settings. Unfortunately, the lack of funding in schools has an effect on pupil's development, this could have an impact on the number of poverties. However, for the implementation of the foundation of the foundation phase to be affective in Wales, it requires a fundamental change in culture within many of maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings engaged with it, which will take time to embed (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). As of 2022, Wales Local Authorities have budgeted a combined total of £3.096 Billion on total school spending (wales online,2022) it is further added "although that's a 6.3% more than 2021-22 it is below inflation and will have to absorb staff pay increases". To put it in a simple understanding, they are funding schools more money however it is still below arranging of what they should revice therefore they have to cap the wages of staff.

While expenses vary, schools commonly use funding across some primary areas. The First area; staffing is the most obvious one as without staff schools would not able to run, however it is important that there is enough staff in a school to cover the recommended adult to child ratios, unfortunately in 2014 it was reported by (welsh government, 2014) that 50% of schools met the recommended adult-child ratio. This could have impacted on the funds the school receive. Secondly, schools spend their funds on services such as courses like safeguarding for the staff which is essential for keeping children safe (NSPCC,2022) other courses to help a particular individual with additional learning needs, design to smile, first aid could be considered within the funds. The next area is maintained in the school which has been described by gov.uk (2022) that effective maintained reduces the risks associated with buildings to ensure everything is safe for the pupils. One of the most important areas that schools fund is food, in wales universal free school meals have begun for youngest children with other year groups set to recvie them by 2024 (BBC news, 2022) however, other services such as breakfast club are there for children to revice breakfast before they start school; breakfast consumption in children has been found to; improve cognitive function, particularly memory, attention and executive function (Build stronger families, 2019).The last area is general supplies for instance without the essentials needed to help children reach their best ability such as; books as children's Vocabulary is larger and more extensive, they perform better, their imagination can run wild, their creativity

skills develop and they gain a deeper understanding of the world by reading and looking at books (highspeedtraining,2019). All these areas are funded to help schools create a more affective and comfortable learning environment for students while ensuring their safety and promoting personal growth.

Section 2 – The Unique Child

Every child is a Unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured (EYFS, 2007). The unique child reaches out to relate to people and things through the characteristics of effective learning, which move through all areas of learning (Early years, 2012). It is important that children get assessed on their development as explained by Education Scotland (2017) assessment is carried out to see what children and young people know, understand and are able to do. Assessment is very important for tracking progress, planning next steps, reporting and involving parents, children and young people in learning. However, it has been said by early years matters (2022) Observations of children are vital, because each child has a unique set of abilities and talents, observations in different situations capture these first hand therefore it is important that every child is treated equally and to ensure they all get assessed and tracked on their development fairly. To ensure these needs are met it is important that the assessment should reflect everyday relationships and experiences (resources for early learning,2013).

However,

Observation is an essential part of practice that is supported to understand the individual needs of each child, every child is unique. Observing children enables practitioners to learn about and enjoy the unique qualities of each individual and child (Pacey, 2016) however, the report further adds that personalities of each child can differ enormously even when the child is from the same family or has the same background of experiences therefore, it is important to observe and analyse each child to understand their likes and dislikes to reach the best of their abilities. While observing a child, it is important to be willing to just sit and watch and listen (Stenson, Jablon and Dombro,2009) to ensure to give a good observation it is important to focus on the learning of the child, watch what movements they are making and what they are saying so that the child's voice is included. Ensure to watch out for the stage of development

that the child's reached (Essex county Council, 2022). During the observation children will be assessed on their areas of development within their age group for instance the first area that the practitioner will look at would be the child's personal, social and emotional development – being able to form positive attachments and forge friendships, as well as regulate emotions and impulse control (twinkl, 2021) which can be recognised by the mood the child is in, how they act with other children or even how they share their emotions with other children during activities. Another area of development the practitioner will observe will be the communication and language of the child how well their speaking and listening skills are, as well as observing their physical development where the refinement of gross and fine motor skills come in which can be observed in any activity as they can be easily recognised for example fine motor skills are small muscles working with the brain and nervous system to control movement in areas such as hands, fingers, lips, tongue and eyes (department of education, 2021) gross motor skills can be recognised from large muscle use such as walking, running and so on (children's hospital of Richmond, 2022) however, there is different fine and gross motor skills that children need to reach within their age group. Literacy will also be observed on the understanding of phonics, reading, writing and skills on story telling. Another area of learning that will be observed would be mathematics – recognition of the numerical value, patterns, shapes and measurement. Furthermore, it's important the children have a great understanding of the world therefore this area will also be observed as well as expressive art and design. There are many ways to observe a child such as; photographs, taking notes, checklists and many more. It is important to choose a method that doesn't put pressure or stress on the child.

However, it needs to be discussed how staff include the Unique child in the observations. From the report (Pacey, 2020) it has stated clearly that embrace and celebrate every child's uniqueness suggesting that every child should be treated equally and participate in all activities. It is also very important that staff know each child well and have a understanding and respond to the child's interests, strengths and needs as well as give each child time, space and support to express their feelings and talk about what matters to them (Leicestershire county council, 2022) it could have an effect on the children if staff do not have qualifications as they may not have a deep understanding of the needs of some children. Some of the qualifications include; level

2 support work in schools, a level 2 certificate for the children and young people's workforces, and a level 3 award in supporting teaching and learning in schools (find courses up, 2022). To come to the conclusion of observations it would be ideal to discuss the right time to observe the unique child. Observations should be carried out once a month (aussiechildcarenetwork, 2015) however the best time could be when the child is relaxed to ensure that all areas of development are the child's best ability.

Moving on to how important it is to track each and every child's development. It has been said by (EYFS,2019) the most important reason for tracking a child's progress is to check if a child's overall development is on track. Likewise, (early years careers, 2015) states that the purpose of tracking children's development in the early years is to provide a picture of the child's progress and identify any areas for further support. Tracking a child's development in the EYFS can be very time-consuming process for early years practitioners, but is essential for an individual's overall development (nursery resources, 2019) it is additionally added that regular tracking allows practitioners to notice if a child is falling behind in one area of development and then allows them to give the child extra support they need to succeed in this area. It is a fact that as many as one in four children through age 5 are at risk for development delay or disability. Unfortunately for a lot of children, these delays are not identified as early as possible (childcare.gov) therefore tracking could be the ideal method to identify these delays and are able to lead children to the right path to reach their full potential and get them the help they need. The most common method of tracking is a checklist it a simple form to record all developments of learning and will give a clear understanding of what areas need improvement. Each child will be tracked individually. It is important that the children are relaxed and just carry on with their daily routine as normal without any pressure for the tracking process.

Furthermore, as well as tracking assessments are carried out a assessment in the EYFS is an on-going assessment which is what practitioners do on a daily basis to make decisions about what the child has learned or can do already so as to help the child move on in their learning it is important to monitor them also known as a 'formative' assessment because it informs the next steps (early years matters,2022). There are two types of assessments informal; conducting natural observations, collecting data and children's work for portfolios, using educator and teacher ratings.

The other method is a formal method; using assessment tools such as questionnaires and standardized testing Resources for early learning,2014). It was reported by Welsh Government (2022) that a total of 76 education practioners were interviewed and nearly half of the schools interviewed had used, or intended to use personalised assessments twice within the academic year to establish a baseline for the learners and understand change over time through carrying out a second assessment later in the year. It has been explained by Welsh government (2022) that the purpose of the research is to examine the impact of assessment, including the Foundation Phase Profile and the personalised assessments in Reading and Numeracy (Procedural), on teaching and learning during the Foundation Phase. The purpose of EYFS assessment states that it must be completed for each child and submitted to the local authority, the main purpose is to support a successful transition to key stage 1 by informing the professional dialogue between EYFS and year 1 teachers implying that their aim is to support the child's development and meet their needs and aim for them to be met by the time reach year 1. Furthermore, by assessing the children's development and how practioners teach their pupils, a further development plan is put in place for the children and for staff to have feedback on what they could do better for the children to reach their full potential.

However, this a problem that has raised within the early year's settings upon recent times. 44% of teachers in England plan to quit within five year (the guardian, 2022) Teachers said their heavy workload was a significant factor in their decision to leave and more than half 52% in fact, said the workload was "unmanageable". Likewise, a survey was carried out by national Education Union with 44% of teaches said they would leave by 2027 and was further added by one teacher that they were despite to get out of education due to workload, constant monitoring and paperwork (sky news, 2022). On the other hand, Gov.uk (2021) states that Reducing unnecessary paperwork is a key aim of the new early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework. To ensure practioners can spend more time engaging with children.

Blog

what is the value of outdoor play?

Outdoor play offers children a range of experiences that will allow them to develop all areas of learning independently with the support and guidance from an adult.

(Frobel,1967) states that play offers opportunities for meaningful learning in all areas of the curriculum suggesting that the outdoor environment offers children the best opportunity's in all areas of development through outdoor play. The foundation Phase should have always supported outdoor play which was reported that Wales lead the UK in it delopemnt of learning outdoors and that the foundation phase will further ensure that they are in the vanguard of experiential learning, of which outdoor learning is such a vital element (gov.wales,2009) in other words outdoor learning is essential and Wales are leading the way to new developments and ideas. However, it has been reported by BBC Wales (2022) from a survey of 116,000 schools across Wales that 36% of schools were not doing any activities outside of their PE lesson, compared with 28% in 2018. This comes to the question why don't Practioners consider outdoor activities when it absolutely nessercery to a growing child's development?.

From surveys that were carried out by Bilton (2020) to examine teachers' attitudes towards outdoor play 184 surveys were completed of 350 schools giving a 53% response rate. Furthermore, from those surveys Bilton then wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the staffs opinions on the outdoor environment however, Bilton adds during the interviews, she gathered that staff that encouraged outdoor play had Personal knowledge and experience of outdoors for all the participants was extensive as they all had had experience of being outside from an early age, including living in an area where one could spend time away from the house. With this information gathered, does this conclude an answer to why practioners do not allow their students to participate in outdoor activities?.

Furthermore, it has been discovered by (Irec, 2018) that there are many disadvantages of outdoor play for example; in wales the weather is unpredictable and staff use it as an excuse not to participate in outdoor activities for example; when it's raining they choose not to go outdoors so that children do not catch a cold/flu this could be prevented by ensuring that children and the staff themselves are all dressed appropriate to the weather such as rain coats and wellington boots. Forest Schools only use the outdoors and It was reported from one forest school ,that It can be tough and challenging on bitterly cold days as children spend every day outside, rain or shine (muddy puddles, 2017).

Why not get inspired by forest schools? Forest Schools are a long-term outdoor education process that is holistic and is learner led. It allows children to develop themselves through healthy engagement with risk, problem-solving and self-discovery, all within a natural environment in a hands-on and thoughtful manner outdoors (high speed training, 2021). Forest schools concept originated in Scandinavia in 1950s(at last forest schools, 2021) and it has been reported that there is more than 500 forests kindergartens in Denmark today(Wild About Denmark, 2022), with their average Pisa score of mathematics, science and reading in 2018 being in the top 20 worldwide with a score of 501.0 (factmaps,2018) whereas Wales Pisa rating was 486 leaving Wales 12 places behind Denmark on the rating scheme (Senedd Reserch,2021). With those facts could they suggest that wales are behind due to not using the outdoors as much as Denmark. With statistics showing as of 2021 there were only 108 certificated forest schools in the uk (cpd online, 2021). With the knowledge that Wales have in leading the way to new developments and ideas if they could bring the use of outdoor activies to their daily routines, could wales bring themselves to the top of the Pisa rating scheme?

Furthermore, NRW do not want to see the loss of any of the positives currently available in the Foundation Phase Framework i.e. equal access to the indoors and outdoors and is concerned about the overall quality of outdoor learning guidance(Welsh Government,2022). Furthermore, Hopkin adds that it is understood the guidance on outdoor learning would be overreaching across the six AoLE's suggesting that outdoor play will reach out too far. However, without this, many opportunities to increase physical activity, promote mental wellbeing and provide attainment and assessment opportunities, as well as provide the required 'opportunities and activities that expand horizons within and beyond the traditional learning environment of the classroom' will be missed. That indicates that without outdoor play none of the above requirements for children's development will be met.

Furthermore, Ni Direct states that Outdoor play is very important to a child's development as playing outdoors allows children to develop self-confidence, independence and self-esteem. They also become aware of limits, boundaries and challenge in their play. There are many activities that can be included in the outdoor environment that can include helping children to develop in all areas. Staff and practitioners should encourage the children to take part however they should ensure

that they create activities that will fit the needs of each and every child as well as their likes and dislikes to make the environment fun and friendly for them. furthermore, Recycled materials are great objects to include in some outdoor activities. Recycled materials can be transformed into some of the most creative outdoor play equipment designs (playground ideas, 2022) it was further added that the most popular recycled material used on playgrounds are used car tires.

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