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Building an argument in your work using research to analyse and critique



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Structuring your work

- Break down what it is you need to cover
- Your assignment (or each section) should have a brief introduction and conclusion.
- Each paragraph should be structured and include references
- Each paragraph should be linked back to your topic
- For this example we will be working from the question:
 - Critically analyse the implementation of play based early years curricula referring to evaluative research evidence and reports

What do I need to cover

- Always check the marking criteria and listen to the assignment Panopto on Moodle – these provide valuable insights into the requirements for the assignment.
- Break down the questions so you can plan your assignment out before you begin –
 - Why?
 - What do I need to research?
 - What topics do I need to cover?
 - What is it asking me to do?
- The ‘golden thread’ – keep linking back to your topic like a ‘golden thread’ running through your work

Breaking down the question

- Critically analyse the implementation of play based early years curricula referring to evaluative research evidence and reports
 - Topics –
 - play-based early years curricula
 - Implementation of curriculum
 - Evaluative research and reports of curriculum implementation
 - What am I being asked to do?
 - Critically analyse – do I know what this means?

Introduction – What to include

- Start with a statement about the topic in question what are you looking at? – **statement 1**
- Secondly you may want to define your topic (NOT a quotation) – **statement 2**
- Thirdly you can highlight the key issues – **statement 3**
- Fourth conclude your introduction with a summary of your focus and findings – **statement 4**

Example introduction

Curriculum reform is currently at the forefront of education in Wales with the rollout of the New Curriculum for Wales set for 2022 (WG, 2020). The need for reform of the current curriculum in Wales has been highlighted as essential in order for Wales to meet the needs of future learners and to compete on an international stage (Wightwick, 2018; OECD, 2017; Donaldson, 2015). Mourshed et al. (2010) recommends that in order for reform to be implemented effectively, the reform must take place at all levels. This assignment analyses the potential barriers to the proposed curriculum reforms in Wales and discusses lessons that can be learned from previous curriculum reform difficulties (Tayor et al., 2015).



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Example introduction

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Main Body Paragraphs

- Each paragraph should follow a simple pattern and you are not limited to one sentence for each point. This pattern can also be repeated for each paragraph – particularly important when you are developing your analysis and critique at level 5 and 6.
- What?
- Who Said?
- So What?



What?

- This is your topic sentence – what is it you are going to be discussing in this paragraph? How does it relate to your overall focus?
- For example –
 - Lessons can be learned from evaluations of previous curriculum reform attempts to ensure the effective implementation of the new curriculum for Wales (Taylor et al., 2015; WG, 2014).



Who Said?

- This is your opportunity to discuss and analyse evidence that supports your point. You can demonstrate your ability to find, analyse and even critique evidence available on the topic.
- REFERENCE!!
- For example:
 - The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et al., 2015) highlighted a need for the professional development of staff in order to demonstrate a shared understanding of key terms to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery.

So What?

- This is where you link your discussion and evidence back to the topic – why is it relevant to your discussion? What does it add to your argument?
- For example-
 - Currently WG (2020) are using pioneer schools to lead the sharing of good practice and implementation of the curriculum reforms, and each school has a member of staff undertaking training in the new curriculum to address some of these issues.



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Full paragraph example – what, who said and so what.

Lessons can be learned from evaluations of previous curriculum reform attempts to ensure the effective implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales (Taylor et al., 2015; WG, 2014). The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et al., 2015) highlighted a need for the professional development of staff in order to demonstrate a shared understanding of key terms to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery. Currently WG (2020) are using pioneer schools to lead the sharing of good practice and implementation of the curriculum reforms, and each school has a member of staff undertaking training in the new curriculum to address some of these issues.



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Introducing synthesis and critique

- When moving into level 5 and level 6 we are looking for synthesis of evidence, increased analysis and critique. But what are they?
- Synthesis – this is where you are bringing the similar ideas and evidence together to support your points. We will discuss this on the next slide.
- Increased analysis – discussing the research evidence in more detail – what did they do in the research study? How many were involved? What were the recommendations?
- Critique – what are the limitations of the evidence? Is there someone that has opposing evidence? Are there reasons this may not apply to your topic? – again we will look at this over the next few slides.

Synthesis 1

- There are a few ways of showing synthesis of evidence and ideas
 - The basic way is as follows:
 - Lessons can be learned from evaluations of previous curriculum reform attempts to ensure the effective implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales **(Taylor et al., 2015; WG, 2014).**
 - **This is a good way to begin evidencing synthesis within your work, however, extending your synthesis to a discussion is more effective and demonstrates your analytical skills far more.**

Synthesis 2

- Synthesis of evidence through discussion – the best way to demonstrate synthesis of evidence and ideas within your work is to analyse similar evidence alongside each other.
- For example:
 - The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et al., 2015) highlighted a need for the professional development of staff in order to demonstrate a shared understanding of key terms to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery. **Similarly, the Independent Stock Take of the Foundation Phase (WG, 2014) recommended the need for the professional development of staff in order to have an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum pedagogy to enable effective and consistent curriculum implementation.**



Increased analysis

- This is something that you can work through and build on throughout your studies. Initially at level 4 finding and understanding relevant evidence to support your work is a great start. As you become comfortable with this you can build on the level of analysis of evidence. From this analysis you can then begin to develop critique.
- Keeping with the same assignment question we will demonstrate how to introduce and develop your analysis of research evidence.

Critically analyse the implementation of **play based** early years curricula referring to evaluative research evidence and reports

- One topic that can be linked to this question is why is play-based so important.
 - Practitioner understanding of what is meant by ‘play-based’ has been identified as an important element of successful curriculum implementation (Taylor et al., 2015). **Howard and McInnes (2012) found that children’s perceptions of an activity as ‘playful’ was a significant factor in their level of engagement.** In order for a ‘play-based’ curriculum to be implemented successfully it is important that practitioners have a clear understanding of what is meant by ‘play’ and the impact on children’s learning.



Increased analysis of evidence

- Howard and McInnes (2012) found that children's perceptions of an activity as 'playful' was a significant factor in their level of engagement. The study used 'play' and 'not play' activities based on the results of a picture apperception test to identify characteristics children associated with situations that were 'play' or 'not play'. Interestingly the study identified that situations where children identified the activity as 'not play' (these included an adult being present, a directed task and table based activities); the children demonstrated lower levels of emotional wellbeing and engagement in the task.



Further extension of discussion

- Based on the increased analysis of evidence on the previous slide we can now build on the 'so what' element of the paragraph
 - When considering the increased level of engagement and emotional wellbeing of children when they perceive and activity as 'play' or 'not play'; in order for a 'play-based' curriculum to be implemented successfully it is important that practitioners have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'play' and the impact on children's learning (Taylor et al., 2015; Howard and McInnes, 2012).



Critique

- What is critique?
- Critique is a level 6 skill we look for and encourage you to work towards through your studies.
- Critique means to make a judgment about the evidence you are discussing –
 - to what extent does it support your evidence?
 - What are the strengths or limitations of the evidence/argument?
 - Is there someone/something that opposes this view?

The magic word...

However...



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Critique considerations

- Study limitations
 - Number of participants/area
 - Type of participants
 - Date of study
 - Focus of study
- Alternate views
 - A study that has different findings
 - A learning theory that has a contrasting view
 - A policy or curriculum that does not align with the findings
- Critique of your topic
 - Or the evidence may allow you to critique your topic
 - The findings do not support the current view/stance for your topic
 - The findings support a need for change/reform within the current topic

Adding critique

- We are going to stick with the same example and develop the critique within the paragraph. So our starting point is:
 - Lessons can be learned from evaluations of previous curriculum reform attempts to ensure the effective implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales (Taylor et al., 2015; WG, 2014). The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et al., 2015) highlighted a need for the professional development of staff in order to demonstrate a shared understanding of key terms to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery. Similarly, the Independent Stock Take of the Foundation Phase (WG, 2014) recommended the need for the professional development of staff in order to have an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum pedagogy to enable effective and consistent curriculum implementation. **However** Currently WG (2020) are using pioneer schools to lead the sharing of good practice and implementation of the curriculum reforms, and each school has a member of staff undertaking training in the new curriculum to address some of these issues.

So topic related critique may look like this..

- **However, despite** recommendations by WG (2014) to increase the professional development and understanding of child development for staff in education, there is still no minimum level of qualification for support staff working in schools (Siraj and Kingston, 2019; MacDonald, 2018; Waters, 2016). This means that potentially the new curriculum for Wales will be delivered by staff who do not have a thorough knowledge of child development, play or child-centred practice.
- If we then add this to our paragraph and adjust we end up with...



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Lessons can be learned from evaluations of previous curriculum reform attempts to ensure the effective implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales (Taylor et al., 2015; WG, 2014). The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et al., 2015) highlighted a need for the professional development of staff in order to demonstrate a shared understanding of key terms to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery. Similarly, the Independent Stock Take of the Foundation Phase (WG, 2014) recommended the need for the professional development of staff in order to have an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum pedagogy to enable effective and consistent curriculum implementation. **However, despite recommendations by WG (2014) to increase the professional development and understanding of child development for staff in education, there is still no minimum level of qualification for support staff working in schools (Siraj and Kingston, 2019; MacDonald, 2018; Waters, 2016). This means that potentially the new curriculum for Wales will be delivered by staff who do not have a thorough knowledge of child development, play or child-centred practice. Currently WG (2020) are using pioneer schools to lead the sharing of good practice and implementation of the curriculum reforms, and each school has a member of staff undertaking training in the new curriculum to address some of these issues; although, whether this will go far enough to avoid the difficulties of previous reform remains to be seen.**

We can also add critique to the second example

Howard and McInnes (2012) found that children's perceptions of an activity as 'playful' was a significant factor in their level of engagement. The study used 'play' and 'not play' activities based on the results of a picture apperception test to identify characteristics children associated with situations that were 'play' or 'not play'. Interestingly the study identified that situations where children identified the activity as 'not play' (these included an adult being present, a directed task and table based activities); the children demonstrated lower levels of emotional wellbeing and engagement in the task. When considering the increased level of engagement and emotional wellbeing of children when they perceive an activity as 'play' or 'not play'; in order for a 'play-based' curriculum to be implemented successfully it is important that practitioners have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'play' and the impact on children's learning (Taylor et al., 2015; Howard and McInnes, 2012). **However...**



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Example 2 with critique

- **However**, as previously discussed Siraj and Kingston (2019) identified that there is still a need for the requirement for professional development of all staff in order to understand what 'play' is and why it is important for the successful implementation of a 'play-based- curriculum.
- So the full paragraph with critique becomes...

- Howard and McInnes (2012) found that children's perceptions of an activity as 'playful' was a significant factor in their level of engagement. The study used 'play' and 'not play' activities based on the results of a picture apperception test to identify characteristics children associated with situations that were 'play' or 'not play'. Interestingly the study identified that situations where children identified the activity as 'not play' (these included an adult being present, a directed task and table based activities); the children demonstrated lower levels of emotional wellbeing and engagement in the task. When considering the increased level of engagement and emotional wellbeing of children when they perceive an activity as 'play' or 'not play'; in order for a 'play-based' curriculum to be implemented successfully it is important that practitioners have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'play' and the impact on children's learning (Taylor et al., 2015; Howard and McInnes, 2012). **However, as previously discussed Siraj and Kingston (2019) identified that there is still a need for the requirement for professional development of all staff in order to understand what 'play' is and why it is important for the successful implementation of a 'play-based- curriculum.**



However...alternatives

- Conversely
- In contrast
- Despite these findings
- Although
- Alternatively
- In contradiction
- In comparison



The Conclusion

- A conclusion should bring your points together and be a concise closing statement summarising your argument and linking back to the overall question and topic.
- A conclusion informs the reader that your work is finished and effectively links back to the topic complete your 'golden thread' running through your work.
- You should include
 - A reminder of the focus of your assignment (**Statement 1**)
 - A summary of the key points and ideas discussed – NO NEW INFORMATION (**statement 2 –could be a few sentences**)
 - A suggestion, recommendation or concluding statement (**statement 3**).

Example Conclusion

- This piece has critically analysed the implementation of a play-based curriculum. The evidence base indicating the importance of a play-based curriculum has been discussed and the potential barriers to implementing this type of curriculum reform have been analysed. Key findings from previous reform attempts have been reviewed highlighting what lessons could be learned when implementing a new curriculum reform in Wales. One of the consistent messages throughout the research evidence is that in order to successfully implement a play-based curriculum reform, the professional development of the workforce is key.



In summary

- Remember this is a process, start with the basics of
 - What
 - Who said
 - So what
 - And remember the 'golden thread'
- Use your assignment feedback to identify your strengths and what you need to work on next
- We do not expect level 4 students to be critiquing and analysing in-depth this is something we will guide you towards as you progress through your studies
- We will be supporting you to develop these skills through your degree through lectures, assignment feedback and guidance