

The Foundation Phase in Wales was a curriculum framework for children aged three to seven years old. It aims were to promote holistic approach to child development, well-being, and learning through play-based experiences both indoors and outdoors (Welsh Government, 2015a).

The historical development of the Foundation Phase can be traced back to the Welsh Assembly Government's publication of "Learning Country" National Assembly for Wales (2001). This document set out the vision for education in Wales, emphasizing the importance of early years provision in promoting lifelong learning (Welsh Government, 2013). The Foundation Phase was officially launched in 2008 and s became an integral part of early years education and care in Wales.

The key principles underpinning the Foundation Phase included experiential learning, Individualised progression, inclusive practice, and partnership working (Welsh Government, 2015a). These principles are reflected through various aims of the curriculum framework such as fostering creativity and critical thinking skills, developing emotional intelligence and social skills, promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles, nurturing bilingualism or multilingualism if applicable (Welsh Government, 2015b)

In terms of policies and legislation related to early years education and care in Wales that are relevant to the Foundation Phase implementation includes "the right way, A Framework or Children's Rights" which outlines children's rights-based approach across all areas of policy making in Wales. Childrens commissioner for Wales (No date).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Foundation Phase program comprehensively mixed methods research design was used. Surveys were conducted to gather information from teachers, parents, and children about their experiences and perceptions of the program. Interviews with key stakeholders such as educators, policymakers, and experts in early years education were also carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes of implementing the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2015a).

The findings from "Evaluating the foundation phase final report" provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Foundation Phase in promoting holistic development and learning for young children in Wales. Overall, the evaluation indicates that the program has been successful in providing play-based learning experiences that foster creativity, critical thinking skills along with

personal development through emotional intelligence development (Welsh Government, 2015b). It has also been effective in promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles among children. However, weaknesses have also been identified through this evaluation. For instance, provision for outdoor experiences could be enhanced further as some schools reported limited access or resources for outdoor learning (Welsh Government, 2015c). There is also a need for continued professional development opportunities for educators so they can effectively implement play-based approaches within classrooms while fostering individualized progression (Welsh government, 2015d).

Based on the evaluation, it has been found that staff training plays a crucial role in the implementation of Foundation Phase pedagogies in classrooms and settings. Siraj-Blatchford And Manni (2006) It has been observed that teachers who have received greater levels of training are more likely to incorporate practical, physically active, and outdoor activities in their teaching methodologies. However, it was highlighted that only 66% of teachers and a mere 37% of school Additional Practitioners had completed all eight Welsh Government Foundation Phase training modules. This highlights the need for more comprehensive and accessible training programs to ensure that all staff members are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement the Foundation Phase pedagogies. OCED (2015) moreover It is possible to argue that if more educators underwent this training and were more inclined to implement Foundation Phase pedagogies, then student achievement levels could potentially see greater improvements than what has been seen so far. It seems that cutting back on training and support costs could ultimately hinder any additional benefits that the Foundation Phase may offer. In fact, the evaluation recommends that much more emphasis be placed on providing training and support for educators working within the Foundation Phase.

In conclusion, the final evaluation of the Foundation Phase provides valuable insights into its effectiveness while highlighting areas that require attention. The findings indicate that this curriculum framework has been successful in promoting holistic development and play-based learning experiences for young children in Wales. However, there is room for improvement in terms of outdoor provision and continued professional development opportunities for educators.

In terms of early years education and care, each child possesses individual abilities, interests, learning styles, as well as cultural backgrounds that contribute to their uniqueness. It is essential for early years practitioners to recognize and value these distinct qualities to provide a nurturing and inclusive environment for every child. As children progress through their educational journey, their beliefs about their own abilities play a significant role in their motivation to achieve. These beliefs undergo significant changes during this time, as children begin to understand ability as a trait that may be consistent over time. They also learn to reason more effectively when it comes to the relationship between their intellectual abilities, the effort they put in, and their overall performance. As their beliefs about ability become more coherent, children become more sensitive to negative evaluations and more concerned about their abilities. The specific conception of ability that they adopt will have a major impact on their motivation, affecting everything from their willingness to take on challenges to their ability to bounce back from setbacks. Dweck (2017).

The unique child can be defined as an individual who has their own set of characteristics that differentiate them from others. This includes their strengths, weaknesses, talents, preferences, and background experiences. Every child is born with innate abilities and potential that should be acknowledged and nurtured throughout their educational journey.

Early years practitioners play a crucial role in supporting the unique child by recognizing and celebrating each child's individuality. They need to create an inclusive learning environment where all children are respected and valued for who they are. This involves understanding each child's needs, interests, and learning styles.

To support the unique child effectively, early years practitioners employ various strategies. They use observation techniques to gather information about each child's strengths and areas for development so that they can tailor their teaching methods accordingly. They also adapt the curriculum to accommodate different learning styles and provide opportunities for children to explore their own interests.

By valuing each child's uniqueness, educators promote positive social-emotional development by fostering self-esteem, confidence, motivation to learn, resilience, empathy towards others' differences, and self-identity formation among children.

Despite its benefits, the recognition of each Child's Uniqueness may face certain challenges such as limited resources or time constraints, misunderstanding or biases regarding cultural diversity, inclusive practices within staff members etc. However, to overcome these challenges, promoting professional development opportunities on diversity, sensitivity training, fostering strong partnerships with families, and creating supportive environments must come into play. An emphasis on open communication between parents, caregivers, and professionals foster collaboration, respectful engagement, and shared understanding which ultimately supports the growth, the well-being, and success of children.

In conclusion, recognizing and valuing the uniqueness of each child in early years education and care is crucial for their holistic development. Early years practitioners have a pivotal role in creating an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and respects individual differences. By acknowledging each child's uniqueness, educators can enhance their self-esteem, motivation to learn, social skills, and overall well-being. Despite challenges that may arise along the way, it is essential to overcome them through effective strategies and foster a supportive learning environment where every child feels valued and included.

The new curriculum for Wales puts the child at the centre of their learning journey, A practitioner will observe each child closely and take an interest in their individual development journey. By doing so, they are able to plan activities and learning experiences that cater to each child's unique interests and focus on what they can do, rather than what they cannot. the goal is to support every child's strengths and build on those for further development. Daynurseries (2022). Welsh government (no date).

This contrasts with the foundation phase where assessments were focused on achieving outcomes within a certain time frame for children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on societies worldwide, affecting various aspects of people's lives and well-being. One particular group that has been greatly affected by the pandemic is young children. The disruption caused by the pandemic, including social restrictions, changes in daily routines, and limited access to education and social interactions, can have profound effects on their social and emotional development. This essay aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 on early childhood development, with a specific focus on social and emotional development. NSPCC (2022).

Social and emotional development refers to the acquisition of skills necessary for individuals to form positive relationships with others, regulate their emotions effectively, understand their own feelings as well as those of others, and develop empathy and pro-social behaviour (Nolvi et al., 2023). It encompasses both interpersonal skills such as communication and cooperation and intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness and self-regulation.

Social-emotional development plays a crucial role in overall well-being during childhood as it lays the foundation for healthy relationships, mental health, academic success, and future life outcomes (Knowles et al., 2022).

COVID-19 has significantly disrupted various aspects of young children's lives. Social restrictions implemented to control the spread of the virus have limited face-to-face interactions with peers outside immediate family members or caregivers (Nolvi et al., 2023). Moreover, closures of schools or limitations imposed on educational settings have hindered opportunities for structured playtime with peers or participation in group activities that are essential for social skill development (Knowles et al., 2022). Additionally, disruptions in daily routines due to lockdowns may affect children's sense of stability and security.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges to young children's social development due to reduced opportunities for interaction with peers. Socialization plays a crucial role in the development of social skills, empathy, and understanding of others' perspectives. With limited face-to-face interactions, children may miss out on opportunities to practice these skills (Nolvi et al., 2023). The absence of regular peer interactions may also lead to feelings of loneliness or isolation.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the emotional well-being of young children.

Disruptions in daily routines and exposure to news about the pandemic can cause anxiety, fear, or stress (Knowles et al., 2022). Young children may struggle to understand and process their emotions effectively during these challenging times. Moreover, prolonged periods of uncertainty or changes in living situations can exacerbate emotional distress. Parental Influence on Social and Emotional Development During COVID-19

Parents play a vital role in supporting their child's social and emotional development during this challenging time. They serve as primary caregivers and sources of comfort for young children facing disruptions caused by the pandemic (Nolvi et al., 2023). Parents can provide stability, structure, and consistent routines at home to help alleviate anxiety or stress related to external factors beyond their control. Engaging in open communication with children about their feelings and providing reassurance can also promote healthy emotional coping strategies.

Educational Settings: Challenges and Opportunities

Educational settings have faced numerous challenges due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Early years education providers have had to adapt quickly to virtual learning environments or limited physical interaction while still promoting social-emotional learning (Knowles et al., 2022). Maintaining meaningful connections between educators and students is crucial for fostering healthy social-emotional development during this challenging time.

Strategies for Supporting Social and Emotional Development During COVID-19

Educators can implement various evidence-based strategies to support young children's social-emotional development during the pandemic:

1. Foster a sense of belonging and community through virtual platforms or limited in-person interactions.

2. Incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum, focusing on skills such as emotional regulation and empathy.
3. Provide opportunities for children to express their feelings and thoughts creatively through art or storytelling.
4. Encourage open communication between children, educators, and parents to address concerns or anxieties effectively.
5. Promote mindfulness and relaxation techniques to help children manage stress or anxiety.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on young children's social and emotional development. Disruptions caused by social restrictions, changes in daily routines, limited access to education, and reduced peer interactions have presented unique challenges for their overall well-being. However, parents' active involvement in providing stability, structure, and support at home can mitigate some of the negative effects (Nolvi et al., 2023). Likewise, educators can implement strategies within educational settings that promote healthy social-emotional development during these challenging times (Knowles et al., 2022). Further research is needed to better understand the long-term implications of COVID-19 on early childhood development and inform future policies aimed at supporting children's well-being during global crises like pandemics. By prioritizing the social-emotional needs of young children during this time, we can ensure their overall resilience and well-being in the face of adversity.

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