

No AI was used during this assignment:

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Part one:

Education was described by John Dewey as “*process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, towards nature and fellow men*” (cited in: Landorf and Wadley, 2022). Landorf and Wadley (2022) cite Dewey’s definition of education and explain how Dewey believed humans learn through experiences which increases ability. Naziev (2017) agrees however, adds how education should be based on ‘qualities’ which are beneficial and connected to all. Supporting Naziev (2017) comment is Donaldson (2015, p15), who discusses how a curriculum is based on a variety of subjects which remain relevant and beneficial within current education. Donaldson (2025, p15) discusses how these subjects are taught to all children at various stages throughout their time in education, corresponding with other nations, who have adopted the same approach, allowing key skills to be taught internationally, developing economic, social and personal needs. Through the implementations of curriculums, objectives can be set which provide a common purpose, a reference point and allows for reflection and progression, alongside developing intentions and coherence (Donaldson, 2015, p15).

One of type of curriculum is the play-based curriculum, primarily aimed within the early years, it involves children learning and understanding the world around them through exploring, imagination and play (Saracho, 2020). Saracho (2020) describes how play is essential within early education, due to allowing children to learn how to express feelings, opinions and expand their knowledge. Although Saracho (2020), discusses how practitioners need to ensure environments are stimulating and enabling for the learners. Maria Montessori emphasized how environments should provide a child-centred approach, which allows children to free play, whilst also providing opportunities for guided play and practitioners enhancing the learning through open-ended questioning, co-playing or commenting on their discoveries, however at the child’s own pace (Lillard, 2013).

Combining the information above, this paper will give a short look into the current Curriculum for Wales (hereafter CfW), alongside the Reggio Emilia Approach (hereafter REA) and compare the two, alongside looking into the current challenges the CfW has in implementing play-based learning. For the second part of this paper, research will be undertaken on how the CfW, assess development and if the

assessment looks at the child as a “unique child”. To conclude the final part of this paper will research into whether implementing a universal childcare system will benefit educational outcomes.

One curriculum which implements play based learning is the CfW. Inaugurated in 2022 in a bid to reform the curriculum, across both primary and secondary schools within Wales, was the Welsh Governments investment to implementing an “holistic approach” within teaching (Evans, 2025 and Organization for Economic Co-operation and development (hereafter OECD), 2020). According to Evans (2025) the CfW allows for decisions linked to “*teaching and learning*” to be made within the place of practice rather than a “*prescribed*” curriculum. The Welsh Government (no-date) states how the CfW offers the opportunities for schools to create their own curriculum, however, still involves a level of consistency through the 27 mandatory statements, which all children are required to develop an understanding of throughout their time in education. OECD (2020) continues to describe how Wales’s ambition is to create learners who are confident, informed, ambitious, capable individuals which become active members of society through using the shared vision of the four purposes as a starting point to their curriculum design. The Welsh Government hope is, through implementing the CfW, and providing an “*holistic education*” it will supports children and young people’s well-being, tackle poverty and allow them to “*thrive in the 21st century*” (Welsh Government, (C) 2024: OECD, 2020 and Evans, 2025).

Another approach which implements play based learning is the Reggio Emilia. The Reggio Emilia approach (hereafter REA) founded and implemented across Italian pre-schools, however also internationally, focuses on children being active and capable individuals within their own learning (Windridge, 2026). Participation and lived experiences are the main strategy within the REA, which promotes responsibility, emotions and cultural knowledge embracing the environment as an educator (Reggio children, no-date). Landi and Pintus (2022) discuss how the REA intentions are to “*make learning visible*” and philosophy rich, not constraint by any schema. Loris Malaguzzi the founder of REA aimed to give children various resources to express themselves and named this “*the hundred languages of children*”, by allowing children to use materials which pursued their interests and curiosity (Windridge, 2026).

Although the REA is not a curriculum, there are various similarities and strategies the CfW has adapted or implemented from the REA. Both approaches focus highly on the United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (hereafter UNCRC) with particular emphasis on articles 13-31, *“the right to freedom of expression and the right to relax and play”* (Unicef, no-date). Both the REA and the CfW, place play as one of the key areas of learning and opportunity for expressive development especially amongst the early years, through support from enabling adults and environments according to Early Excellence (2026) and the Welsh Government (C, 2024). Early Excellence (2026) and the Welsh Government (B, 2023) both discuss how the two approaches value the importance of providing environments which allow opportunities to explore, build independence alongside challenges, while igniting curiosity, knowledge and life skills. Coinciding each approach highly promotes the use of both indoor and outdoor spaces, authentic, organic resources which enhance knowledge about cultures and the world (Reggio children, 2022 and Welsh Government, B, 2023). Through researching the Early Excellence (2026) and the Welsh Government (B, 2023) each place acknowledgement on how enabling adults that see children as individuals and value their interests, through building relationships, listening and using open-ended questions provide environments which are *“communication rich”*. However, the main similarity between the two is both take on the holistic approach to education, aiming to enable all learners to become capable, confident, creative and informed citizens of the world (Welsh Government, 2022: Landi, Pintus, 2022).

Whilst there are various similarities, the REA and the CfW also have many differences, one of which is the age bracket. The CfW is created for all children between the ages of 3-16, while the REA is primarily based on pre-school aged children between 3-6 years (Windridge, 2026 and Welsh Government, C, 2024). Another key aspect is the REA is an approach not a curriculum unlike the CfW, while the CfW gives schools opportunities to create their own curriculums, there are still mandatory what matter statements and legislation to which schools must implement. While REA, is more project lead which can be short to long periods of time, involving planning in the moment (Early Excellence, 2026 and Welsh Government, C, 2024). Lastly while both approaches assess the learning that has been made and look at how to progress this further, the way in which the two document is slightly different

(Early Excellence, 2026 and Welsh Government, C, 2024). The REA uses visual documentation which focuses on reflection and the learning implemented, whereas CfW assess children through progression steps, which offer five brief statements to which the practitioners match the learner's outcome with the closest statement brief (Welsh Government, C, 2024 and Landi and Pintus, 2022).

While the REA has inspired early years provision internationally and within the CfW, there are still many challenges Wales faces in implementing this play-based curricula approach. According to Windridge (2026) the pressure to ensure children are school ready and meeting literacy and numeracy standards, can interfere with more inquiry-based and holistic learning. A report by Power, Newton and Taylor (2020, p5) discuss how this can place great demand on teachers to come up with innovative ways to teach these core skills through a child-centred play-based format. Power, Newton and Taylor (2020, p5) discuss how coming away from structured subjects and clear goals, may result in less experienced teachers falling behind and missing steps which may be detrimental in the future. Nicholson and Hendry (p33) agree stating how teachers are concerned that through educating within a play-based approach, how will the numerary and literacy outcomes be achieved, due to the environment being catered for child-led experiences, therefore concerned they are accountable for children who fall behind. Power, Newton and Taylor (2020, p5) continue to add how this may affect disadvantage children, as schools will not be the only place children will need to develop knowledge, however home environments will also play a key role. Power, Newton and Taylor (2020) state to ensure disadvantage children have the same opportunities, teachers "*will require high levels of skills*", commitment and workload, therefore schools should distribute experienced teachers evenly throughout a school. While Nicholson and Hendy (p33) say this may still prove challenging due to lower levels of staffing in some classes and the lack of understanding and respect for the development of play-based learning from some staff may create inconsistencies.

In relation to the challenges of implementing a play-based curriculum, it is clear to see the strain and workloads teachers may face in meeting all children's individuals' needs and learning outcomes, due to children having different interests and abilities. While there is no evidence of the full impact on the CfW yet, seeing how internationally implemented the REA is and the similarities and inspiration the CfW

has taken from it, there is hope that done effectively the CfW, can also achieve a holistic education which will be seen in future generations.

Part two:

The Department of Education (hereafter DfE, 2025, p7) describes the “Unique child” as a child who is confident, resilient, capable and a keen learner. Birth to 5 matters (2021, p22) agrees, however adding how the “unique child” is self-directed and regulated learners, who take ownership of how, what and when they learn, whilst also evaluating their own success. For practitioners to study and identify where a child is developmentally at or how to support further progression, assessments are completed (CEA, 2025). According to the Welsh Government (C, 2024), assessments have three primary functions to support learners’ progression, giving individual daily support, reflecting, identifying and capturing the learners progress and developing a knowledge of group progress for reflection. The CEA (2025) discusses how through assessments gathering evidence about an individual’s performance, it provides an idea of where a child is developmentally, identifies strengths, while also providing strategies to support and bridge gaps within development. Therefore, the Welsh Government (C,2024) states assessments should not be a “*one-off judgement*” of achievement, a best fit criterion or relating to a set age of the learner at that time, however rather of a “*holistic picture*” of development. Continuing the CEA (2025) adds how assessments allow settings to increase pupil outcomes, identifying areas that need further development and help evaluate resources and programmes within the curriculum. However, within the Early Years Foundation stage (hereafter EYFS) framework, it’s states the importance of understanding the “Unique child” within assessments (Grenier, 2025). This continues to be the commitment within the new curriculum for Wales (hereafter CfW) which discusses how assessments are “fundamental” to ensuring learners are individually supported alongside being challenged (Welsh Government, C, 2024). Grenier (2025) discusses how practitioners should respect each child’s individuality, how each child develops in different ways and at different stages, while recognising and tailoring support to the child’s needs towards progression.

Currently within Wales there is a new curriculum being rolled out which is designed to support the “Unique child”. The CfW allows teachers to design their own curriculum which caters for their learners, through allowing topics based on the children’s interests (Welsh Government, A, 2023, p5). The CfW design is to allow all children to learn through creative real-life lessons which provide meaning and

knowledge, whilst building skills and educational experiences personal to the child's needs (Welsh Government, A 2023, p5). The CfW, discusses how children will move forward when their understanding is deepened or skills are improved, however this may happen quickly or over time depending on whether the child has understood the topic or developed other interests (Welsh Government, A,2023, p6). Therefore, the CfW states, learning will not always be linked to the age of the children or the same time as others (Welsh Government, A, 2023, p6).

The CfW assessment is based on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) act 2021 code, which requires settings to provide provision which is in accordance with the principles of progression. How a setting implements this is personal choice, however, must meet these requirements according to Welsh Government (2021, p4). The Code provides five progression steps, across each area of learning and experiences across the curriculum (Welsh Government, 2021, p4). Each progression step provides a brief guidance on the directions and pace the learner maybe progressing towards, which provides practitioners with an idea of what teaching and learning can be taken forward (Welsh Government, C, 2024). Although these progression steps are not age rated, it is for schools to ensure effective transitions is implemented throughout the learners moving through classes, groups, years and settings, however ensuring the well-being of learners is prioritised (Welsh Government, C, 2024).

The CfW implementations of the progression steps style of assessments, offers many beneficial factors for both learners and practitioners. According to CAMAU (2018) the word progression steps refers to learning as a "expedition". Shepard (2018, p169) supports this comment and stats how qualitative data is more beneficial than quantitative data. The Welsh Government (B, 2024) discusses how this type of assessment promotes deepening understanding and knowledge, whilst improving skills which is at learner's pace. Shepard (2018, p169) continues to discuss how through progression assessments, it allows for feedback discussions, which offer opportunities to improve, rather than a scoring assessment, which may be more detrimental to a child's enhanced learning. Shepard (2018, p171) goes on to discuss how progression step assessments, offer opportunities for the practitioners to develop professionally, due to working alongside the learner and seeing a deeper understanding of how the leaner is thinking. The Welsh Government (B, 2024)

further emphasis this statement, through stating it allows for “professional discussions” building consistency across settings and helps towards self-improvement.

Although collaboration within other settings is not always the case according to Paul, Newton and Taylor (2020, p12) who indicated that some collaborations between the pioneer schools was “*patchy*” as some see each other as competitors. However, there are many more challenges to implementing the progression steps assessments. The progression step assessment follows a formative style of recording, which involves observing a learner, and recording and analysing information, this can be time consuming for practitioners, due to having to input this information for each learner (Care learning, 2025). This can also provide inadequate results, due the risk of the “*Hawthorne effect*”, which described by Sedgwick and Greenwood (2015, p1) as learner who is aware they are being observed, therefore changes behaviour or responses. Subject to this is the risk of bias or personal opinions and interpretations from practitioners influencing recordings which could make inaccuracies within a learner’s development, affecting future planning for the learners’ personal needs according to Care learning (2025). Paul, Newton and Taylor (2020, p 8) highlights how through not having clear progressional guidelines, teachers with less experience may “fall behind” without realising, which could lead to vital parts of the progression steps not being implemented or experienced by the child. This puts more strain on practitioners according to Care learning (2025) due constant observing and documenting, which Paul, Newton and Taylor (2020, p10) states requires high differentiation. Care learning (2025) adds this pressure may impact practitioners’ enjoyment interacting with the children, due to the administrated workload.

Despite the challenges the formative progression step assessment style has during implementation, its design is aimed at supporting the individual learner. According to Welsh Government (B, 2024) it is a process of ongoing assessments which help build a holistic understanding of a child’s, strengths, interests and needs, which enables practitioners to tailor learning to the unique abilities of the child. Power, Newton and Taylor (2020, p4) continue to discuss how the progression steps, creates a starting line of a learner’s educational journey, whilst also showing the pace in which they progress. CAMAU (2018 p17) discusses how this form of

assessment focuses on the learners' achievements and skills through reference points within their learning continuum, however, allows for practitioners to support and challenge in accordance with learners' individual needs. CAMAU (2018, p18) further adds how the way assessments are written supports understanding from child's perspective, through a positive statement like "*I can*" rather than "*s/he should*", means all children travel on the same progression regardless of ability and additional learning needs. Donaldson (2015, p83) agrees on how the terminology used within the assessment outcomes, helps children understand and extend their own language to include "*I need to..*". *Donaldson (2015, p83) continues to add how through the positive and understandable terminology, children will be able to report and share their achievements and areas for development with care givers.*

Collaborating all the research above, there is clear guidance on the description of the "Unique child". Through practitioners understanding the concept of the "unique child" as an individual with different strengths, abilities, needs and pace of learning, it allows for bespoke planning and teaching to be implemented to support personal development. However, this cannot be affectively implemented without the support of the Exosystem. Exosystem described within Bronfenbrenner Ecological System theory as indirect procedures to which the child does not directly encounter, however influence their lives such as local government procedures (Guy-Evans, 2025). The research undertaken, demonstrates how the Welsh government is implementing this by giving schools the abilities to create their own curriculums. However still providing guidelines and progression step assessments, which all focus on the individual learner's educational journey, rather than age and stage related evidence. Although, the discussions above also highlight the challenges within implementing this style of assessment, the pressure upon practitioners to differentiate learning and provide regular assessments to create a profile of the learner's progress. The CfW is a recent implementation and the economic results of the benefits of this style of curriculum and assessments will not be fully evident for a few years yet.

Part 3:**How creating public day care could boost the United Kingdom's educational outcomes....**

Currently within the United Kingdom (hereafter UK) childcare before compulsory school age comes at a cost, unless families meet certain governmental criteria to be eligible for free or subsidised childcare. Although, the governmental criteria vary throughout the country due to the quasi-federal governmental system, meaning options available to families within England for example are different to families in Wales. The UK government (2025) states how early childcare and education promote children's development, curiosity, confidence and love for learning. The Department for Education (hereafter DfE, 2026) continues to emphasis that the UK governments vision is *"For all children to enjoy a childhood rich in opportunity"*. However, not all children are experiencing this *"rich opportunity"*.

Who does not meet the criteria?

Taking Wales and England as examples for this narrative, Wales currently offers funded part-time, high-quality childcare, for children under the age of 4 years within disadvantaged areas according to geographic results showing the highest households on benefits (Welsh Government, A, 2024). Although authorities may adjust these guidelines to support certain families, children who live outside this threshold, do not necessarily have the same access and opportunity to other children, despite having the same household circumstances, however live in a more privileged area. The BBC NEWS (2018) reported that *"two-thirds of the poorest children"* were being failed due to being *"excluded as they lived outside the designated"* areas. Coinciding is the "30 hours free childcare a week" scheme in England, which offers support for working parents of children aged between 9 months to 4 years, 38 out of the 52 weeks of the year (GOV.UK, no-date). However, GOV.UK (no-date) highlights how eligibility is based on a child's circumstances the age, income and parents' employment status. Nally (2025) BBC report discussed how parents' feel this is not accessible to society working hours, due to parents working on average 10 hours a day and only having a possible combined 8 weeks off a year. The 30 hours free childcare averages 6 hours per day, leaving parent's

having to pay the extra hourly rates, alongside only operating 38 weeks of the year, leaves parents funding 6 weeks (Nally, 2025).

My proposal to implement the “*rich opportunity for all*”! (DfE, 2026)

I propose that the UK Government introduce public universal childcare for all children between the ages of 9 months to 5 years across the country. Through the implementation of universal or costs subsidized highly by the UK government, all children will be given the same opportunities. Research has shown children who have access to high quality childcare have many developmental benefits, some of which are language, social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills which are all enhanced due to the opportunities to explore, play and build skills within childcare setting (Welsh Government, 2026 and Right to Equality, 2023). Following on from the developmental benefits is the results on children’s academic performance especially within mathematics and reading results, alongside positive behaviour according to Welsh Government (A, 2024).

How does this link with the play-based curriculum or changes to the curriculum?

Children having opportunities to experience high-quality childcare have shown to be more prepared for starting school according to Welsh Government, (A, 2024) and Schoch *et al*, (2023). Welsh Government (A, 2024) also adds how it can also provide opportunities to identify and support with interventions to support those children with additional needs, which help with transitioning to school life. Further research by Schoch, *et al*, (2023) demonstrated children who attended high-quality childcare, developed foundational skills, which had long term benefits. The results showed children had higher attainment within education due to earlier opportunities to build relationships and developing an understanding of their own and others emotional intelligence, alongside the development of language, literacy, cognitive, math, reading and reasoning skills. The UK in 2022 was ranked 14th in the international PISA results based on international assessments on children’s mathematics, reading and science abilities according to Compare Education System, (2026). The Programme for International Student Assessment (hereafter PISA) is an international assessment of over 90 countries, which measures 15 years olds’ science, mathematics and reading abilities, to assess their knowledge in preparation for economic life, whilst also creating a table based on results and performance to

pressurise on governments into changes educational systems (Ozer, 2020 and OECD, no-date). Through a universal childcare system, all children will be provided with the same opportunities and early access to support, improving children's overall development and wellbeing, alongside educational outcomes within the PISA criteria.

Success internationally!

There are many countries which have taken on the universal or subsidized childcare approach, with results showing beneficial outcomes within both educational and society. Two of the top countries who implement this whilst following a similar curriculum to Wales is Denmark and Sweden, through advocating "free play", focusing on problem solving, children's interest and participation (Denmark.dk, no-date and The Swedish school system, 2026). Both these countries offer a universal or subsidized public childcare system, with families paying no more than 30% of the childcare, despite the family income (Waldfogel, 2001, p106). Although Denmark and Sweden do not rank as highly as the UK on the PISA scale, these countries are ranked top for "*best education systems in the world*" alongside the UK according to World population review (2026) and Compare education system (2026). A study by Laaninen, Kulic and Erola (2024) discussed how children who attended childcare setting significantly gained within school, retaining grades and high graduation rates alongside reducing additional learning needs through implementation of early intervention.

Collaborating all the research and similarities above, implementing a universal childcare system, can only further improve the UK's educational and societal outcomes. It will allow all children to have the same opportunities and starting point on school entry level and bridge the societal gap, as parent will be able to work. Through the implementation of universal childcare, we can ensure the DfE (2026) statement "*For all children to enjoy a childhood rich in opportunity*" can be applied to all children, giving them the best start in life.

(1004)

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