Section 1.

Curriculum reform is taking place in Wales with the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Welsh Government, no date). Wales has followed the national curriculum since 1988 with the addition of the Foundation Phase being introduced in September 2010 for all learners aged 3-7 (Evans, 2015 & Welsh Government, 2015a). The Foundation Phase is a play based statutory curriculum that allows children to learn through practical activities to ignite their imagination while exploring the world around them relevant to their developmental stage with activities taking place indoors and outdoors (Early Years Wales, 2020 & NDNA, 2019). A curriculum that is holistic in the development of children, encourages equality and celebrates diversity. Children are given the opportunity to build on their prior knowledge with emotional development and well-being key to ensuring well rounded individuals (Welsh Government, 2015). However, Wales is underperforming and ranked worst in the UK according to the international Pisa tests in 2019. Wales is lagging behind the other UK nations in reading, mathematics and science. Wales scored 483 in reading, the average for developed nations (OECD) for reading is 487. In mathematics Wales scored 487, the OECD average is 489 and in science Wales scored 488, the OECD average is 489. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland all scored the average or above (Wightwick, 2019). In 2014 Professor Graham Donaldson was asked by the Welsh Government to review the curriculum in Wales. Following his review, he released his report Successful Futures. Within the report Donaldson highlighted the that the current curriculum was outdated and stressed the need for a curriculum reform for children to thrive in an everchanging world and compete on an international stage. Education is more than 'imparting knowledge' (Donaldson, 2015). Similarly, Robinson (2010) stated that many educational settings were 'doing what they did in the past' and that the current system was formulated and conceived for a different time and therefore the current system is not modern enough for the environment children are growing up in. The new curriculum for Wales was developed using a co-construction approach where government, teaching professionals, enabling partners and stakeholders work together collaboratively to develop the curriculum, sharing expertise to best suit its delivery and learners. Through the co-construction approach stakeholders become involved, trust is built and stakeholders are committed to make the changes happen. Co-construction is essential in making certain the new curriculum for Wales is sustainable (Welsh Government, 2021a; OECD, 2022). However, Mourshed et.al. (2010) states for reform to be sustainable changes need to be woven into the 'very fabric of the system pedagogy'. This assignment examines possible barriers that the new curriculum reform may encounter and how stakeholders can learn from prior experiences to successful implement the new curriculum. The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Report (Taylor et.al., 2015) found a need for professional development of educators with the intention to increase their understanding of the foundation phase to make sure the delivery of the curriculum is consistent throughout Wales. Where successful implementation of the Foundation Phase pedagogy was observed, has led to large improvements of children's educational accomplishments, well-being and involvement. Furthermore, successful implementation can have a positive impact on children educational journey beyond the Foundation Phase. In addition, the Independent Stock Take of the Foundation Phase (Siraj and Kingston, 2014 a) also recommended practitioners need for professional development to certify their understanding of the curriculum to ensure a successful implementation of the Foundation Phase pedagogy. In 2015(b) the Welsh Government announced the creation of pioneer schools that will have staff undertaking training of the new curriculum to ensure consistency throughout of the understanding behind the new

reform and delivery of the new curriculum. The pioneer schools will share best practice, experiment new ideas and ensuring they are up to date with latest developments during the development of the curriculum with their cluster schools and wider networks. According to Early Years Careers (2016a) and Early Years Alliance (2016) professional development is essential in education and ensures the quality of teaching is high and up to date with current research, regulatory requirements and an understanding of the philosophy of child development. Continuous professional development allows practitioners to progress and improve on their skills. Similarly, Kingston and Siraj (no date) suggest how personal development contributes to inform, expand and extend practitioners existing professional learning and qualifications. In addition, professional development contributes to classroom quality and learning. Moreover, in 2016 the Welsh Government responded to the evidence within the evaluation report by acknowledging the recommendations to ensure the Foundation Phase is implemented to effectively support learners' development and learning by putting a group of experts together to devise a strategic long-term plan to overcome barriers such as professional development. Nevertheless, regardless of the recommendations made by the Welsh Government (2014) to improve professional development for all practitioners working with children and increasing their knowledge regarding child development, currently there is no minimum qualification needed by support staff. Support staff work closely with children and their families and some maybe facing difficult circumstances and the need to understand child development is crucial to their outcomes. Generally, the path into childcare has usually been selected by 14–16-year-olds who have limited academic success (Macdonald, 2018 and Waters, 2016). Similarly, Sylva et.al. (2011) and Workman et.al. (2018) state a qualified workforce is key to high quality provision. Therefore, the New Curriculum for Wales that is based on child-led and play-based practices could be implemented by many support staff that do not have a comprehensive understanding of the Foundation Phase principles or child development. However, during the evaluation of the foundation phase (2015) teachers expressed how support staff were vital to the delivery of the Foundation Phase and were seen to be using the Foundation Phase pedagogy more than the teachers. Nevertheless, according to Bonetti and Brown (2018) the term 'qualified' is not always clear and needs to be addressed to understand what level of qualification assures the best provisions for learners. The new curriculum is centred around the four core purposes; ambitious capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world and healthy confident individuals. In order for children to develop towards the four purposes knowledge of child development is essential and will allow practitioners to understand children, how they learn and how to better support children during their developmental stages (Barber, 2019). Time is a factor that prevents educators in taking part in professional development. Ensuring adequate time where training did not conflict with work schedules is needed to not only allow practitioners to partake in professional development training but also to implement changes and reflect on the outcomes to ensure they are not just isolated new ideas. In addition, quality of training available is another factor why practitioners are not partaking (Eroglu and Kaya, 2021, Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2022; OECD, 2009). While Waters and Payler (2015) believe professional learning and development should be 'systematic, sustainable and transformative. Thus, supporting Siraj and Kingston's recommendations in the stocktake (2014) that training should be 'fit for purpose' for all learners. Schleicher (2012) stated how within a fast-changing world delivering the same education is not sufficient enough to tackle future challenges and practitioners need to be high-level knowledgeable workers who are

constantly advancing their own skills and that of their profession. OECD (2021) conducted a report regarding professional development within Wales, highlighted that professional learning is recognised as a key strategy in implementing the New Curriculum for Wales. Professional development will allow practitioners to adapt and evolve to deliver an authentic curriculum. In addition, the report suggested practitioners should be at the heart of their own professional development and learning, therefore, practitioners are extending and enhancing their learning to support and meet the needs of their pupils. However, the OECD (2021) reported Covid-19 has a possible threat to professional learning. Stating Covid-19's effect on the economy could result in increased pressure on school funding and as a result professional development, stating professional development is generally cutback when funding is limited. During 2017(a), the Welsh Government launched a new approach to learning for all and to prepare for the new curriculum in the form of Schools as a Learning Organisations. The approach comprises of '7 action orientated dimensions' that focus on the objectives and methods to change schools in Wales to become learning organisations. The aim is to create an environment where there are opportunities to receive training for all staff to enhance their practice, team learning and collaboration, creating a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration. Through this approach practitioners will have time and resources to ensure practitioners can critically inform their practice, identify aims and priorities of their learning while practitioners are openminded to think and do things differently to what they already know (Welsh Government, 2018). According to OECD (2016) schools as learning organisations are environments that are dynamic, thus allowing schools to adopt processes, strategies and structures allowing them to learn and respond to changing situations because practitioners are becoming 'knowledge rich'. OECD (2018) reported that the many schools in Wales had made changes and are developing into schools as learning organisations however, further within the report they suggest there is large number of schools 'far removed from realising this objective'. Additionally, the report suggests that there is evidence that educators welcome the schools as learning organisations policy and its justification within the new curriculum for Wales however, state there is obvious work to be done. However, Evans (2018) suggest that the Welsh Government must communicate the position schools as learning organisations within the National Approach to Professional learning to alleviate concerns some educators may have. Additionally, added measures will only succeed if educators sense them as useful rather than an obstacle. Welsh Government (2017a) are driven to raise the standard of professional learning within Wales and consider practitioners as lifelong learners that can improve their practice to inspire and motivate the learners, they are responsible for. The Welsh Government (2021b) have express that their programme for government 2021 to 2026 will look into ways in which they can strengthen professional learning for educators. Donaldson (2015) reported that the Foundation Phase is one of the 'best things' within the Welsh education system and 'a very real strength' to develop the new curriculum'. A range of the central approaches that are used within the Foundation Phase such as learning through experience, will extend into the new curriculum, therefore, the Welsh Government (2016) emphasise the importance of improving the way in which practitioners deliver the Foundation Phase in order to have a good foundation to implement the new curriculum. This piece has critically analysed the implementation of professional development within the curricular. The importance of professional development has been considered and the potential barriers to implement professional development has been highlighted. Highlighting potential barriers ensures, going forward with the curriculum reform Wales is in the best position where educators are lifelong learners who are able to adapt their

practice to ensure children are ambitious capable learners who can thrive in an everchanging world. One important thread throughout the research is that to successfully implement curriculum reform, professional development of educators is central.

Section 2.

Assessments inform practitioners what the children within their setting know and can do, a tool that is used to effectively understand children's development and learning. Assessments support children's learning and vital for tracking a child's progress, practitioners understand the depth and breadth of learning undertaken in order to plan appropriate next steps (Neaum, 2016 and Scottish Government, 2021). Furthermore, practitioners are able to plan learning experiences that increase children's development while building on previous skills, supporting progression and continuity of learning. In addition, assessments provide a tool for practitioner to identify misconceptions and gaps within children's knowledge (Pickles, 2019). Through assessments practitioners are able to understand learning styles and identify children's interest to better support their developmental stages (Welsh Government, 2017). Supporting the model of that every child is unique. Welsh Government (2015c) state how children gain and develop their skills at different stages therefore, children should be allowed to progress at their own unique, individual pace. While children are learning and acquiring their new skills, opportunities should be given to allow them to practice them in different situations in order to reflect and evaluate their work. During their development the child's efforts should be 'respected, valued and encouraged for its originality and honesty'. Furthermore, Welsh Government (2020) recognised that all learners are unique due to their different needs and backgrounds therefore, the new curriculum for Wales will allow schools to design their own curriculum to meet the needs of their learners. The framework presents practitioners an opportunity to choose specific experiences, knowledge and skills, in addition to topics, activities and contexts that supports their learning. Having these flexibilities means practitioners can offer different learners the support needed to meet expectations and overcome gaps in attainment while aiming to achieve the four purposes for all to be ambitious capable learners, healthy, confident and ethical inform citizens of Wales and the world. This assignment will critically evaluate the methods used to assess and track progress of learner within a play based curricular to ensure the methods available for practitioners consider the uniqueness of children. Children are assessed on entry into the Foundation Phase and through to the end of the Foundation Phase in Year 2. Practitioners are able to offer a developmentally appropriate holistic curriculum by using observations and formative assessments (Early Years Wales, 2020). Observation is one method used to assess children's stage of development. The Reggio Emilia early childhood schools of Northern Italy refer to 'documentation' as a prosses observing and recording Children. Their curricular framework approach is built on the adult observing and listening to children. Efficient and meaningful observations are everyday classroom practices that guide their curriculum (Escamilla, 2021). According to the Foundation Phase Profile (2017b) observations are made over a six-week period on entering the Foundation Phase to form a baseline assessment that give practitioners vital information on the developmental stage of a child. Observational baselines instead of tests during play offer a wide range of evidence that is a true reflection of where a child is at in their stage of development, while enabling practitioners to form assessment judgments supporting the Foundation Phase pedagogy that will assist practitioners to understand individual learning styles and interests and what steps are needed to progress a child's learning and development. Furthermore, Early

Years Careers (2016b), Brown (2020) and Kurt (2019) state how observing children in play not only allows practitioners to learn individual learning styles and interests but observations allow practitioners to detect certain concerns or behaviours essential for children with additional learning needs. Observations will allow early intervention ensuring children with additional needs are fully supported that will enable them to reach their potential. However, The Evaluation of The Foundation Phase (Taylor et.al. 2015) found that there were only a few occurrences where observation and assessment was apparent, where there was evidence of assessment it occurred during literacy or numeracy focused activities. therefore, assessing children on what they cannot do rather than what they can do. In addition, the report suggested a need for training and guidance for practitioners regarding observations and assessment in order for practitioners to fully understand how to effectively use and implement into practice. Furthermore, Giardiello et.al (2013) stated how attention on the skills required to implement effective observation within early years is essential due to the fact that staff working within early years derive from different background and therefore, would have various different training and limited access to regular professional development. Similarly, Watch me grow (2018) stated that practitioners are misinterpreting the use of skilled observations to form assessments preferring tests that does not inform them of young children's deeper levels of thinking and learning. Test can underestimate a child's development potential causing practitioners to lower their goals for children and ultimately reduce the progress a child could potentially make. The Foundation Phase Profile (2017b) consists of formative assessments that are ongoing and day to day such as observations to concentrate on children's attainments aligned with the skills in the curriculum detailing how to progress children instead of concentrating on Foundation Phase outcomes. Children's skills are observed through a variety of experiences and the Foundation Phase Areas of Learning that consist of Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity, Physical Development, Language, Literacy and Communication and Mathematical Development that include components of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF). Despite this, Taylor et.al. (2015) reported that practitioners are finding the 'Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity' Area of Learning the hardest one to measure and for that reason difficult to assess. According to Welsh Government (2013) the Literacy and Numeracy Framework was designed and developed using research of effective teaching, assessment and recording while also considering the achievement of comparable international systems in order to raise standard in literacy and numeracy across Wales. For each age-related expectation, progression steps are built on prior learning to ensure children advance each year. The Foundation Phase (2015) promotes experiential learning and developmentally appropriate practice and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (2013) also states that teaching should focus on children's stage of development despite this, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework assesses children by an age-related score therefore categorising children (Taylor et.al. 2015). Taking that into account The New Curriculum for Wales (2022) provides a more holistic approach to assessing children through progression steps that are designed to sustain learning. Descriptions of learning help practitioners on how learners ought to progress through the statements of what matters that also reference pace of progression. The new progression steps are more related to stage with 'I can...' 'I am..' statements rather than standardised age-related progression from the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. The new description of learning and progression steps allow practitioners to provide both breadth and depth of learning. Observation do have their constraints, according to Complex needs (no date) stating, although observations are seen as a

good way to inform practitioners about children however, if a child is aware an observation is taking place this could cause the child to behave differently therefore, a true picture of their stage of development is not possible, furthermore, observations themselves can be time consuming impacting the running of the classroom due to the time it take to observe and record the findings. In contrast, Pacey (2016) state how observations don't need to be time consuming through the use of post it notes information can be collected and can be a part of a daily routine to build a portfolio of an individual child. Another form of assessment is learning stories. Learning stories were introduced in 2001 by Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee from New Zealand their concept was to have a personal narrative assessment that documented children's unique learning journeys. Learning stories are a record of what a child has been seen doing during their educational journey. Learning stories can be short snapshots of a child's learning or longer depending on the child and the activity. A practitioner will include their explanation of the range of skills and abilities such as curiosity, persistence and courage that the child has displayed during the learning process and is created to highlight what the child can do and is doing instead of what they cannot do supporting the uniqueness of children (Alexander, 2022 and Nixon, 2017). Popular in New Zealand, learning stories allow practitioners to assess children through 'noticing, recognising, responding, recoding and revisiting valued learning' (Te Whāriki, no date) giving a rounded, holistic view of development (Brody, 2014). However, there are some limitations to consider such as the time it takes to generate a learning story. Often learning stories are created at a later date meaning a considerable amount of time has passed since the observation, therefore, relies on practitioners recall of the event. In addition, where a learning story is a collaborative journey for instance where a group of children have the same interest, remembering who did what or said could be problematic. Consequently, learning stories may not provide a true reflection of the child's experiences and ability (Early Years Careers, 2016c). In addition, Hargraves (no date) states how learning stories 'lack validity' due to learning stories being created by one practitioners' observation therefore learning stories can differ from one practitioner to another demonstrating inconsistencies. However, these inconsistencies can be address through embedding effective assessment approaches within the practice of learning stories. Carr (2019) explain how it is important during curriculum reform that all aspects such as assessment methods, adjust to complement the new curriculum's philosophy. There cannot be a new curriculum with all the old methods of assessment therefore, methods of assessments need to align with a new curriculum. Consequently, Welsh Government (2021a) state contrary to the ongoing approach to assessment, assessments in the Curriculum for Wales is central to the curriculum design. Assessments should help promote developing a holistic image of learners including their strengths, their learning styles and areas of development with the aim to inform next steps in learning and teaching. Essentially, assessments must not be used to make 'one-off judgements' of learners overall achievements at an age or point in time alongside a best fit basis. The continuum of learning replaces the present phases and key stages, therefore, disposing of the end of key stage summative assessments, in its place a system where assessment will be part of day-to-day practice and impossible to differentiate from teaching and learning. This assignment has critically evaluated the methods of observation and learning stories as methods of assessments within a play based curricular. Considering the concept of the unique child both methods are stage related methods that assess children in a holistic approach to understand learning styles, development and progression. Throughout, the emphasis on how both methods are critical in the understanding of children and how best to support their needs as individual

is evident however, the finding show practitioners need training and guidance to ensure their understanding of how observations and learning stories provide vital information. In addition, considering the unique child, learning should be at the stage and age of the learner instead of age-related outcomes.

Blog – Should Forest School be compulsory for all educational settings?

The popularity of Forest Schools began in the U.K in the mid 1990's however, this rapidly increased during the 2000s and in 2012 the Forest School Association (FSA) was formally established. Many early years settings and schools are redeveloping their outdoor areas, using local woodlands and sending practitioners to gain their forest school leader status to ensure their children can experience the awe and wonder of nature (Weinstein 2015; Forest Research no date; Spencer-Milnes 2021). So, what are Forest Schools? Forest schools are inspired by pedagogical practices of Scandinavian countries and are regular sessions that occur in a natural environment or woodland that are holistic and learner led to help support a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world. During their sessions children will learn new skills by making dens, climbing trees and building fires while also enhancing their knowledge of trees and living creatures all the things we used to do when we were children that seems to be missing is some children's lives today due to modern technology and busier lifestyles. These skills and knowledge allow children to learn in a way that is fun, memorable and valuable. Have you ever put up a tent? Or flat pack furniture? It's a task in itself to make sense of the instructions now image a group of children building a den out of sticks, logs and greenery. This offers them a challenge where they will need to communicate and work as a team to overcome certain problems. Climbing trees will give children a sense of risk while pushing their limits as each time they climb they will go higher than the time before. Forest Schools promote independence, confidence, resilience and create creative learners as they are given the freedom to 'have a go'. The benefits of forest schools have been widely written about in studies, academic papers and on websites. They speak of the advantages that children gain by participating such as emotional, social, physical and spiritual development. I have had first-hand experience watching children develop over weeks of participation in forest school sessions, watching children who prefer indoor play, who are shy and quiet transform into confident leaders, the first one to roll down a big muddy hill or step into water that comes up to their waist and doing so with the biggest smile on their face. Therefore, why are Forest Schools not compulsory? The Welsh Government (2015a) highlight the importance of the outdoors in children's learning in the Foundation Phase Framework;

'The Foundation Phase environment should promote discovery and independence and a greater emphasis on using the outdoor environment as a resource for children's learning'

Even within the New Curriculum for Wales 2022 the importance of children's outdoor learning is evident within the four core purposes to develop independent learners while becoming ethical informed citizens who can manage risk, think creatively and problem solve. Forest schools meets these requirements and more, as children are having real life hand on experiences, creating capable learners. However, there are some barriers that prevent forest schools becoming a required element of the curriculum. A 2019 report found that the main barriers to establishing and sustaining a forest school was funding and time. Funding is needed to train staff to become Forest School leaders but not only that, money is needed to cover those staff who are out of the classroom completing the training. Within the report educators stated

funding was also needed to ensure the right equipment and clothing for the children were available. In addition, finding time in the school timetable and curriculum was also seen as a barrier. However, time was also stated as a barrier that could be overcome by the support of the head teacher and the senior leadership team. If the head teacher and the senior leadership team understand and value the philosophy behind forest schools, it was easier to prioritise. However, just because a school or setting takes groups of children outdoors does not make them a 'Forest School'. Forest School has a clear ethos that makes it Forest School. In order to be a Forest School, setting need to be trained and following their philosophy. Denmark, New Zealand, Finland and Singapore are all countries that advocate learning in nature. They have all seen an improvement in children's attainment. Therefore, is it time we invest in Forest School for our young learners. 'Natural England' in 2016 reported that 125 schools in England that had incorporated regular outdoor learning were 'happier'. Natural England also stated they are working with other schools across the nation to urge them to do the same. The report stated 79% of teachers had said the outdoor learning environment had a positive impact on their practice and 92% of teacher also commented how children were more engaged outdoors and had a positive impact on their behaviour. Looking at the evidence it is clear that Forest schools provide a positive outcome for children and teachers. Therefore, is it time that Forest Schools become integrated into the curriculum to ensure our future generations are well-rounded individuals who are capable, take risks and challenge themselves.

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