

Assignment

Part One-Critically Analyse the challenges of implenting play based curricula

Part Two- Considering the concept of the Unique Child .

Part Three- Blog on how much support is provided in Wales for parents of children with Additional Learning Needs(ALN).

Part Four-References

I utilized the ChatGPT exclusively for proofreading, as well as suggesting improvements to my phrasing and grammar. No AI tools were used to generate any of the ideas, arguments or content for this submission.

Part One-Critically analyse the challenges of implementing play based curricula.

Introduction-

An early years curriculum is a structured framework that guides the development , learning and care of children from birth up until the age of five years. This is important as it builds up the foundation for a child's life long learning , social

development as well as the child's emotional wellbeing during the most critical phase of their brain development. The early years curriculum is a holistic framework that replaces formal academic subjects with intentional play based experiences. Rather than viewing children as recipients of knowledge, the early years education relies on foundational child development theories to treat young learners as active agents in their own growth. Jean Piaget's Constructivist Theory(1936) aligns directly with the approach of the early years curriculum which describes children as being little scientists who actively construct their own understanding of the world through direct hands on experimentation. Fredrich Froebel(1826) invented the first kindergarten , reinforced this by arguing that early learning environments should be carefully designed with open ended materials that will stimulate natural curiosity and self directed activity. A modern early years curriculum acts as a blueprint that translates the theoretical models that link into the curriculum , into safe and simulating daily practices.

Having a structured early years curriculum is very important and has the power to maximise a child's social, cognitive and emotional development at such a critical time of a child's formative phase of brain development. Highlights from Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory(1934) show that higher order thinking as well as language develop primarily through social interaction, making a curriculums collaborative peer activities vital for children's development. Lev Vygostsky also

introduced the Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD 1978) , which provides an in depth research platform in why a curriculum is necessary, it also guides educators to provide targeted scaffolding or temporary support. This allows for children to master new skills which are just beyond their current independent reach. Furthermore, by embedding structured imaginative play into the curriculum , children are able to develop emotional regulation and empathy alongside conflict resolution skills.

A play based curriculum is an educational framework that uses the child's natural inclination to play and bases that as the primary vehicle for learning, treating play as a rigorous process in where children solve problems, experiment and build critical cognitive and socio emotional skills. Modern play based curricula have successfully balanced this child led free play, which promotes autonomy and agency, alongside teacher guided play where educators intentionally structure the environment and use subtle questioning to scaffold learning. Research conducted by Stagnitti et al(2016) and Vogt et al(2018) demonstrates that structured play directly improves oral language, mathematical foundations and executive function.

In section one of this assignment, the curriculum of Wales will be discussed. In section two the concept of the unique child will be discussed. In section three a blog on Additional Learning Needs(ALN) will be discussed and in section four all references will be included in a list.

The Curriculum of Wales 2022.

The Curriculum of Wales(2022) was officially introduced and rolled out to early years settings, primary school and secondary schools in September 2022. The Curriculum of Wales(2022) is a highly flexible educational framework for children from the age of three up until the age of sixteen. When it was first introduced it would only be applied for children up until they begin secondary schools , however through the advancement of years , in September 2026 it was implemented for children up until they leave secondary school. The Curriculum of Wales(2022) moves away from the traditional key stages and rigid subject boundaries and instead empowers individual schools as well as teachers to design their own creative, interconnected lessons which tailor to the specific needs of the pupils.

The Curriculum of Wales(2022) directly accommodates Additional Learning Needs(ALN) by ensuring inclusivity, flexibility and person centred practices into its statutory core. The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Wales Act(2018) works alongside the Curriculum of Wales(2022) framework replacing rigid age related milestones with fluid progression steps which allows teachers to tailor resources, pace and environment to the individual development of each child without the requirement of formal exemptions. The progression steps also mirror Jean Piaget's Constructivist Theory(1936) which acknowledges that children do not learn in rigid , uniform stages but rather at their own individual development pace. This system also prioritises early identification and structured intervention , led by a dedicated Additional Needs Learning Needs Co Ordinator(ALNCo) in every school

ensuring that any barriers to learning are dismantled. Alongside this approach the Individual Development Plan(IDP) which is a legal and mandatory creation. It is also a single document covering learners between birth up until their twenty fifth birthday, this document integrates the learners personal view as well as their learning and targeted interventions. By educational settings mandating inclusive classrooms , differentiated teaching strategies and collaborative goal settings , the Welsh system transforms the curriculum from a rigid checklist into a highly supportive tool that allows for every individual child to reach their full potential. Despite The Curriculum of Wales(2022) designing an inclusive structure for Additional Learning Needs(ALN) , there are struggles within the Curriculum of Wales(2022) this is due to critical shortage of funding as well as specialized staff , this then creates enormous delays in implementing legally mandated Individual Development Plans(IDP), resulting in settings feeling overwhelmed.

Language for The Curriculum of Wales is implemented into settings under the Languages, Literacy and Communication(2022) framework which delivers significant cognitive and also presents steep operational disadvantages within educational settings. Colin Baker's bilingualism theory(1993) support the Curriculum of Wales(2022)views of rather than treating languages as isolated subjects , treat them as deeply interconnected and translingual. Colin baker's bilingualism theory(1993) encourages children to use their entire language and blend it whether it be Welsh, English or home language and use it to process complex concepts.

The curriculum of Wales(2022) ensures the embedment of cultures within all educational settings in Wales . They believe that this approach treats a child's heritage as the foundation for all learning. The Cynefin approach was first formally introduced into the draft framework for the Curriculum of Wales in January 2020 , when the guidance was first published to schools on the HWB platform. In September 2022 the Cynefin approach became a statutory legal requirement when the new curriculum was officially phased into educational settings. The Williams Working Group (2021) enhanced the curriculum for Wales by ensuring that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories and contributions are mandatory components of every child's education rather than being optional add ons, this also helped develop the Cynefin into an all-inclusive , anti-racist framework. Using this quote as reference towards the Cynefin approach , it is about the visibility of their stories, the validation of their heritage, and the absolute insistence that minority ethnic histories are not add ons but are instead woven into very fabric of our national identity(Charlotte Williams OBE,2021).

The curriculum of Wales(2022) uses the organization of six holistic areas of learning and experience(AoLEs) in which dismantle rigid subject boundaries, and instead promote real world learning. Donaldson,(2015) quotes that the six areas of learning , shift education away from the narrow, isolated school subjects and instead move to a more highly integrated real world model. The six areas which include Health and Wellbeing, Expressive Arts, Humanities , Languages , Literacy and Communication ,

Mathematics and Numeracy and also Science and Technology which altogether act as broad categories that allow teachers to make meaningful and cross curricular connections.

Conclusion-

In conclusion, the Curriculum of Wales offers a highly flexible , progressive educational standard that delivers significant developmental benefits. Although its ultimate success remains challenged by distinct operational disadvantages(Donaldson,2015). The use of the Cynefin approach allows the curriculum to successfully keep the individual child at the centre of learning, this approach also directly supports Lev Vygostky's(1978) social constructivist's principles by using the encouragement of purposeful play, active translanguaging and targeted scaffolding , which makes it a highly inclusive tool for children with Additional Learning Needs(ALN) and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

However , reports from Estyn(2024) highlights a critical decline in educators who are fluent Welsh speakers , underfunding as well as the decreased numbers in specialized SENco staff. these resource shortages create an unsustainable planning and documentation burden on educators , leading to educators and teachers experiencing burn outs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies(2023) warns that a completely decentralized , skills based model risks unintentionally widen the attainment of the gap between well funded settings and socio economically deprived areas that lack extra support.

Maria Montessori Play Based Curricula

Maria Montessori(1870-1952) was a visionary Italian physician , educator and scientist who throughout her career revolutionised the world of early childhood education. She applied rigorous scientific observation to her work to be able to understand how children naturally learn , this then lead to the creation of her world wide known Montessori Method(1907). Montessori in 1907 opened her first classroom named the Casa Dei Bambini(Children's House) in Rome, which shifted the typical educational path from rigid , teacher led instruction and instead towards child centred independent exploration.

Maria Montessori's play based curricula is deeply tied to the Welsh Curriculum(2022) and their Additional Learning Needs(ALN) Code. Both frameworks follow the desire of rejecting rigid , standardized timelines in favour of a more inclusive , person centred approach. Montessori's concept of the play as the child works relies on settings preparing environments which features hands on, multi sensory materials. Allowing the use of this structure links greatly to the Welsh curriculum's universal design for early years learning. Adele Diamond(2011) and Kathleen Lee(2011) established that Montessori's targeted and self direct play would actively strengthen the executive functions of the child , which included self regulation, working memory

as well as cognitive flexibility. These are the exact developmental markers that are prioritised for neurodivergent learners within the Welsh framework.

Montessori's play based and child led framework also directly falls into the language approach that the Welsh curriculum implements. Under the Welsh Languages, Literacy and Communication(LLC), Areas of Learning and Experience(AoLE) and the Cymraeg 2050 bilingualism strategy, languages are taught through a continuous immersive pathway rather than isolated grammar drills. Using this model also aligns with Montessori's concept of the Absorbent Mind(1944) and the Sensitive Period for Language(1907)which positions children of early years childhood as the crucial neurological window for effortless language acquisition.

Implementing Montessori's approach into the Welsh Curriculum(2022) to include diversity is a mandatory cross curricular theme . The Welsh Curriculum's goal to is to shape, ethical , informed citizens of Wales and the world(2015). Montessori's approach link directly to the Welsh Curriculum's Humanities Areas of Learning and Experience(AoLE) which prompts pupils to explore their local heritages(Cynefin) whilst developing a deep, empathetic understanding of global cultures.

Observation was one of Montessori's foundational research platform which allowed her to gain scientific research on children of early years. It aligns directly with the assessment philosophy of the Welsh Curriculum as both frameworks favour the tracking an individual's unique learning journey. Montessori trained educators to be silent observes , allowing for them to carefully document a child's interaction with the prepared environment which allows children to gauge their focus, developmental readiness and sensitive periods without the interruption of an educator. This observational mindset mirrors the statutory Welsh Government Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care(ECPLC) guidelines , which mandates the Notice, Analyse and Respond cycle capturing the children's capabilities across all areas of learning.

Conclusion-

In conclusion, the link between Maria Montessori's theory and the Welsh Curriculum reveals a strong shared belief that education must be child centred , inclusive as well as adaptive. Rather than enforcing rigid, age refined benchmarks. Both frameworks prioritise the natural development of the individual child through the self directed exploration , hands on learning as well as a continuous learning pathway. Linking Montessori's principles such as the Absorbent Mind() , purposeful play and scientific observation to policies of the Welsh Curriculum such as the ALN code, the Cymraeg 2050 bilingualism strategy and the Humanities AoLE, it becomes clear that Montessori's methodology provides a highly functional , battle tested blueprint for realizing the modern Welsh educational vision.

Part Two- Considering the concept of the Unique Child .

Introduction-

The Unique Child is a foundational principle for the early years education, it states that every child is a competent, resilient, capable and an entirely distinct learner. Rather than viewing children as empty vessels that need to be filled with information uniformly, the Unique Child approach recognises that each child develops alongside their own personal timeline, this is shaped by a highly individual mix of the child's genetics, environment, culture and personal agency.

An assessment in early years is a continuous observation based process, which includes tracking, recording and analysing a child's holistic development as well as their learning and wellbeing. Rather than being a formal examination of the child. Research from D. Royce Sadler(1943) supports assessments to act as an active feedback loop where observations are directly utilised by practitioners and educators, to gap the bridge between the child's present capability and their future learning milestones. Margaret Carr(1941) also helped transform early years documentation by introducing the concept of Learning Stories(2001), which shifted the assessments from rigid checklists and instead towards narrative profiles that are able to capture a child's holistic identity, interests and peers interactions.

Using the integration of The Unique Child within early years assessments is an academically vital tool, this is because it standardizes evaluations of children and treats every child as an individual. It prioritizes children's unique cognitive, linguistic, and socio emotional baselines.

Main Body-

The Curriculum of Wales directly links to the concept of The Unique Child, it centres its entire framework on the individual learners needs, strengths and also the personal pace of the learners development. Being guided by a Person Centred Approach, the curriculum of Wales moves away from the rigid age based expectations and instead focuses on the three distinct progression steps, being able to recognise that children develop at different rates and may require tailored pathways. It mandates that educational settings design a bespoke, flexible curriculum that respects each child's cultural identity, personal interests and specific learning barriers adapts the education to the individual child rather than forcing the child to conform to the system. Using this child centred approach embeds into the Welsh curriculum's Four Purposes, which aim to support every individual child regardless of their starting point, and instead promotes the child in becoming an ambitious, capable and confident learner who can thrive throughout their educational journey.

Friedrich Froebel(1782) play based curriculum also links directly to the concept of The Unique Child, by viewing every learner as singular and naturally creative individual who develop from within at their own individually unique pace. Froebel(1782) pioneered the idea of the Kindergarten(1840) translating into the

garden of children, where educators act as careful gardeners who nurture rather than force each child's innate potential and inner spiritual wholeness. throughout Froebel's structured open ended play materials that were known as gifts as well as occupations , Froebel(1782) was able to design a learning environment where children were able to lead their own self activity, allowing for them to naturally unfold their interest, distinct personalities and thinking styles. By placing self directed purposeful play at the centre of the early education system, the Froebelian approach respects the child's freedom whilst also protecting the child's rights to learn without adults imposing in play and also always for the treatment of each individual child's curiosity as the essential foundation for all future growth.

Conclusion-

In conclusion, the concept of the Unique Child serves as the vital bridge that connects Fredrich Froebel's(1782) pioneering philosophy with the modern curriculum of Wales. Froebel's(1782) historic research shows that early years educators must respect the child's inner potential by using self directed , open ended play to enable the child to be able to unfold their naturally instinct of self play. The curriculum of Wales(2022)operates by using a modern era by legalizing and mandating a flexible, person centred framework that has the ability to adapt the individual child's development pace rather than forcing children to age based milestones. By being able to blend Froebel's(1782) respect for natural, autonomous growth with the curriculum of Wales(2022) structured progression steps , educators have the empowerment to place the child's identity strengths and voice into the centre of learning.

Part Three- Blog

What support is offered to parents of children with Additional Learning needs throughout their educational journey in Wales ?

A personal interest for myself as an early years practitioner and working with children who have Additional Learning Needs , I have always considered whether the parents have full support and how the support is delivered and the time period in where the support is given for parents .

In Wales, statutory support for families with children with Additional Learning Needs(ALN) begins from birth up until the age of twenty five . This ensures that families have a legal safety net before they begin formal school.

The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal(Wales)Act(2018) empowers families by replacing a complex, fragmented system and instead uses a single legally binded framework which centres around the child's voice. Using the Person-Centred Practice(PCP) approach, the Act elevates parents from passive

observes and instead involves co producers of their child's education, ensuring that their insights directly shape all support decisions.

In Wales, Individual Development Plans(IDPs) were officially created as a legal document in September 2021. For parents with children who have Additional Learning Needs(ALN) the Individual Development Plans(IDPs) are a powerful legal shield as it is mandatory in educational settings, once an Additional Learning Provision is written into the plan , the educational setting or local council is legally obligated to deliver it and cannot cite funding shortages as well as staff shortages. Furthermore, as the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are built around Person Centred Practice(PCP) , the law enforces that parents must be co active producers of the document , ensuring that the parents voice , insights and concerns are placed in the heart of the child's educational journey . Carl Rogers(1970) argued that children only truly learn when they are listened to and treated as equal partners in their own growth. By the Welsh government embedding Rogers(1970) Person Centred Practice an Individual Development Plan(IDP) forces educational settings to look past from a medical diagnosis and focuses on the child's unique strengths, passions and personal voice, giving parents the reassurance that their child is being treated as an equal . The Individual Development Plan(IDP) embeds to Wolf Wolfenbergers Theory of Social Role Valorization(1983) by replacing old, segregated educational statements. Following the IDP framework which is designed to evaluate the children who have Additional Learning Needs(ALN) from a medical deficit status, but rather into a fully included valued member of mainstream educational settings.

Snap Cymru(1993) is a charity based association which plays as a viral role for families in acting as a free, independent and completely impartial partner throughout their child's educational journey. They provide parents with access to dedicated caseworkers who help translate complex legal actions alongside helping families understand their rights under the Additional Learning Needs Act(2018) and giving thorough explanation of their child's Individual Development Plan(IDP).

The ALN Parent and Carer Guide(2025) which was formerly known as the ALN parent toolkit serves as an essential user friendly manual that enables parents to confidently navigate the educational support system in Wales. A guide developed by the Welsh government , this resource is able to clarify complex legal frameworks, by being able to offer free step by step explanations of the families statutory rights and the official process which is involved in identifying Additional Learning Needs(ALN). It is able to directly support parents by being able to detail exactly what is expected to happen during a person centred review, outlining how to work alongside with early years settings and schools to create and Individual Development Plan(IDP) and explaining the formal pathways available if a disagreement does arise. The guide also ensures that parents are not just spectators but instead are fully informed active partners who posses the knowledge needed to be able to advocate effectively their child's education.

Welsh Government School Census Data(2025) revealed that 37,575 children with registered Additional Learning Needs(ALN) or Special Educational Needs(SEN) are educated within mainstream school settings across Wales. This widespread inclusion supports parents by ensuring that their children can access equitable education at local community schools alongside their peers, rather than having to face relocation to separate facilities. Under the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act(Wales,2018) which concluded its phased implementation in August 2025, this allowed for mainstream settings to be able to co create Individual Development Plans(IDPs) alongside parents.

In mainstream schools across Wales , the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator(ALNCo) serves as the primary legally mandated link between families and the education system that operates under the ALNET Act(2018). ALNCo's actively support parents by leading the collaborative design of the Individual Development Plans(IDPs) ensuring that families views, wishes and feelings are all central for making any decisions. They also break down complex educational and medical needs into clear information whilst also co ordinating specialized interventions within classrooms and also regularly hosting Person Centred Reviews to evaluate a child's progress. ALNCo's also guide parents for their legal rights and can direct them to independent services such as Snap Cymru(1993) and also help maintain open communication channels to ensure families never feel isolated whilst having to navigate their child's learning journey. In order to become an ALNCo in a maintained school , they must qualified registered teacher who has completed their formal induction.

Conclusion-

In conclusion, the journey of navigating support for a child with Additional Learning Needs(ALN) in Wales no longer requires parent to have to walk the journey alone. Under the ALNET Act(2018), the Welsh educational system has legally reframed parents from passive onlookers into a vital and equal partners. From the collaborative design of the Individual Development Plan(IDP) to the direct guidance of the schools ALNCo's and independent organisations such as Snap Cymru(1993) , structured frameworks exist to be able to ensure every families voice is heard. Whilst securing the right provisions can still give a sense of overwhelming feelings , the law is there to protect every parents right , to champion each child's potential and also guarantee that you as a parents position is placed at any time needed for decision making.

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