

Section 1

The Foundation Phase was introduced by the Welsh Government as a new 'play' based curriculum for three- to seven-year-olds, to ensure the children of Wales can be the best they can be. (Thomas and Lewis, 2016). They believed in moving away from formal learning as it had been found to be detrimental effect on their learning and development. (Welsh Government, 2008). Through the Foundation Phase children are provided with opportunities to gain, first hand experiences through play and explore the world around them. By following this curriculum children are learning for themselves and no longer being taught Welsh Assembly Government, (2018).

A research article supporting the implementation of the foundation phase through effective professional development showed high quality effective practice is vital for children's outcomes and there is a specific need for an understanding about practice and pedagogies for a real difference in children's outcomes to happen. This article highlighted the importance of professional learning, sustained shared thinking and knowledge for all those involved in implementing the Foundation Phase if it was going to benefit the children. Kingston & Siraj, (2017).

The Foundation phase has been successful in many areas Welsh Government, (2015a) According to Thomas and Lewis, (2016) schools who were effective in using pedagogies have shown greater levels of attendance as well as children involvement and wellbeing during learning. However there has been lots of research and evidence in recent years which shows that it could have been implemented better. In 2016 the Welsh Government initiated the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to stake stock of its policies. To strengthen the future of education in Wales they advised to invest in and support professional learning of teachers and to develop a more effective assessment framework. Through better recruitment, professional development and career progression for teachers and leaders as well as the same opportunities for support staff who are underpaid and do not have access to the vital training for the curriculum (OECD, 2014).

The stocktake recommendations of the Foundation phase – Welsh Government, (2014a) highlighted 9 recommendations regarding training and confirmed training was only undertaken by headteachers and should have been compulsory for all leaders. For effective implementation, all staff working within the foundation phase should have had access to training. However, this was not possible due to lack of funding provided in the first place. The report confirmed that headteachers attended training and due to staff implications not everyone could attend.

Therefore, not everyone started with the ethos of the Foundation Phase principles it was just filtered through which was ineffective to make an impact and a vital change on the curriculum. The stocktake proposed compulsory training for all leaders but the final evaluation states that mostly headteachers undertook the training therefore leaders were unaware of the Foundation Phase principles to begin with. The headteachers are also the ones who have least contact with children it would have been more useful for all other staff to have had the training first.

The stocktake mentions increasing ratios of 1 member of staff to 10 children however according to research by the Welsh Government, (2014) most teachers, headteachers and foundation phase leaders interviewed said the adult to child ratios were essential to implementation and only 50% had managed the 1:8 ratio previously advised. If children are to get rich positive first-hand experiences with staff available to enrich and scaffold their learning whilst observing and assessing how is this possible. The cue of an adult present has been proved important in learning. (McInnes, et al. 2011).

The stocktake also highlights the lack of Play pedagogy shown by practitioners which the Foundation Phase is based upon. Play is fundamental to children's learning and the evaluation of the foundation phase Welsh Government (2019) confirms this was still an issue. Practitioners do not fully understand the benefits of play and subsequently to not understand their role of the adult to facilitate it. McInnes, et al (2011) highlights the differences in practice of practitioners understanding of play and how it influences pedagogy it shows not enough training was provided for successful implementation of the Foundation phase and this is something that should be at the forefront of training agendas for it to work in the future for Wales.

For the New Curriculum for Wales to work there are lots of lessons to be learnt from Implementing the Foundation phase. One positive for this is that all those who have recently completed their teaching training will have received essential training on the new curriculum as

this was put at the forefront of the Welsh Governments plans to ensure the new curriculum is implemented better and lessons are learnt from the previous curriculum (Powney, 2017). The newly qualified teachers will know of the pedagogy of play and the theory behind the research to drive forward the New Curriculum. The new curriculum guidance has been written by many experts from Wales, OECD and established Te Wharaki in New Zealand. (Wales online, 2021).

The Welsh Government, (no date) has set out an Implementation Plan after international experience has shown the challenge to curriculum reform is implementation. This plan is guidance for all to work towards the same goals. It has identified Professional Learning of the major factors in successful implementation and as a mistake learnt from the Foundation Phase. Professional Learning has been made one of four enabling objectives. It aims to provide a professional learning programme for all practitioners across all leadership roles which will ensure a better understanding for the new curriculum from everyone working within it not just the headteachers who usually spend the least time with children.

Donaldson, (2015) found the current curriculum to be outdated and overloaded and complicated in parts and many teachers will need to update their own skills to implement the new curriculum. It adds to the evidence that all those working with children need to develop their professional learning and play pedagogy. The report suggests schools and settings must identify one member of staff who leads and supports this however this seems like the same mistake in the foundation phase implementation when mostly headteachers received training instead of the whole school to have the biggest impact and change.

Mclachlan, et al. (2010) suggests that a curriculum can be seen as confusing to people however it comes from research and push towards change. When the New Curriculum for Wales begins to be rolled out to schools for it to be effective it is important that everyone implementing the new curriculum knows the importance of training, and commitment that is needed to benefit it will have on children for the future.

The Foundation phase was a play-based curriculum however lots of evidence shows that the play pedagogy was misinterpreted (Welsh Government, 2015b). Short courses were provided for practitioners, but evidence has shown not sufficient to make an impact. Even in the pilot scheme practitioners lacked knowledge and nothing was changed it was also found that only half of the headteachers completed all 8 training modules. This would have been a suitable time to make

improvement and recommendations that all modules need to be completed successfully implement a change. According to Waldron, Rhys, and Taylor (2015) staff from the national curriculum found a play-based pedagogy challenging this was also agreed by Thomas and Lewis, (2016) who found that staff had made changes to their practice and learning but not their ideas and beliefs.

Play is fundamental to children's learning and McInnes et al, (2011) stated that practitioners did not understand their roles consequently the failure of this affected the children learning. This was the result of the initial guidance for the Foundation Phase, which was found to be confusing in its terms of free play, active learning, and structure play (Siraj Blatchford 2005). This was a concern for both (Waters, 2016) (Siraj and Kingston, 2014) who had concerns how consistent the pedagogies were used in practice and estimated only a fifth of schools following the Foundation Phase were achieving effective implementation.

The Foundation Phase guidance of child-initiated play, adult directed and sustained shared thinking based on Reggio Emilia and Te Whariki practice. Welsh Government, (2014) found training was not clear, and practitioners found it confusing structuring the environment and value play. Practitioners also found it hard to adapt to a play-based pedagogy. (Estyn, 2011).

An equally important aspect has been stated by Thomas and Lewis, (2016) that the wellbeing of children is at the heart of the Foundation phase. According to Howard and McInnes, (2012) play promotes development and wellbeing, when a child perceives an as play wellbeing was greater. Therefore, it is important that practitioners know what they are planning for and get it right.

It is evident in the action plan (Welsh Government, 2016) that all practitioners need undertake professional learning and to continually develop their skills to effectively ensure that the New Curriculum for Wales is more successful. It is also vital that everyone working with children understands the play pedagogy and its place in helping children to learn and grow so the same mistakes are not repeated.

Section 2

The Unique child is at the forefront of curriculum education and learning in Wales. It is now celebrated that children are individual and develop differently in diverse ways. Children have their own likes, dislikes and learning styles. The Foundation Phase and New Curriculum for Wales is appropriate to their stage of learning rather than solely on the outcomes children have achieved. Children can move on to next stages of learning when they are developmentally ready and always at their own pace. (Welsh Government, 2015a)

It is important to have the values of the unique child as each child come from various backgrounds, families, and cultures. It provides the opportunity for each child to have their own personality, to have their own voice which ensures they feel valued and listened to.

The unique child develops children who can think for themselves (Child, 2010). The curriculum in Wales builds on this by building confidence and self-esteem. It allows children to lead their own learning, providing social interaction with what is around them motivating children.

When it comes to assessment the Foundation phase is an improvement on the formal learning used before children were ready. It now allows learning through experiences rather than children being told what to learn. Thomas and Lewis, (2016) states that it importantly focuses on individual needs rather than a one size fits all approach. The Foundation phase recognises that children develop skills at various times and being allowed to develop at their own pace has a more positive outcome for children. By doing this we are allowing children to develop a growth mindset. Children learn positively that mistakes are part of learning they are not comparing themselves to others and where they should be or feeling just not good enough.

However, the Foundation Phase Profile has some room for improvement. Through its 'skill ladders' it has been said that it will provide useful information to support early learning and early identification of potential developmental delay or additional learning needs. It has flaws when it comes to child with Additional Learning Needs as only six skills are looked at and an area that

shows as low. A child will need time to settle, and behaviour and emotion is different every day. It is very detrimental on a child who is learning at a slower rate to others. Evaluation of the Assessment has been said to show the majority if practitioners observing and assessing children were additional and not the trained teachers who know what they are looking for and know their children better. (Welsh Government, 2014b). The FPP states that information gathered on children which may highlight a child with an ALN is good to discuss with parents and carers about what they are not meeting. Finding out your child has an ALN must be devastating and therefore feel it would be better if you could explain to parents what their child can do instead if what they cannot compared to others. (Welsh Government, no date)>

There are also children with English as an additional language (EAL) Assessments are made in the language of the school and not in those of the children. Culture diversity is difficult to assess. These children may not understand what is being asked of them. Children of different languages and cultures interpret things differently and so the observation and assessment of these children may not show what they are truly capable of or understand. Vygotsky tell us that learning is a social process and there are influences of culture on child development. Learning occurs in interactions It would therefore benefit both children with ALN and EAL to have more time to settle and more observations over a longer period to get a better picture of their abilities.

The profile does not allow children time to develop and master transferable skills and still looks like its ticking boxes rather than discovering the individual child's needs and abilities. Described in its Foundation Phase Pedagogy Welsh Government, (2015c) it states that children should be given opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding but this does not seem to happen before they are assessed. Welsh Government (2014) says that it is more than likely assessments are undertaken during focused based activities rather than in continuous provision which is more likely to be child's choice interests and something they enjoy doing. Interestingly it has been found by Chilvers, (2012) that it is this lack of transferable skills that 15-year-olds struggle with when taking PISA tests later in life. Along with other skills ability to adapt in collaborative teamwork and creative thinking All of these skills can be developed in the earlier years through children making their own choices and learning through play.

Another concern is that practitioners feel the need to plan the provision around the assessment not around the individual child. This goes against the principles of the Foundation Phase in the moment planning.

The successful futures report stated that assessments seemed confusing to practitioners, and many are yet to receive sufficient training (Donaldson, 2015). Practitioners need to have a good understanding of children and what they are learning to gather evidence and make a better assessment of a child's development. One way of supporting children's assessment and evidencing it is to use Learning Stories. The Learning stories are a narrative-based assessment created in New Zealand part of the Te Whariki curriculum. It recognises children as competent learners and documents a child's strengths. It importantly highlights what they can do instead of identifying what they cannot. This builds on children's self-esteem and confidence teaching them positive ways to learn about themselves and their own ideas. Not being compared to a tick list and hundreds of other children setting them up to believe they are not good enough.

In New Zealand story approach to assess children. It is a record of a child's life in the classroom. Learning stories serve as a pedagogical tool to assess children's strengths and help practitioners plan for their development (Carr & Lee, 2019). This would be valuable for children with Additional learning needs and English as additional language as it would be individual to the child and not what developmental milestones they have not achieved. Parents of both ALN and EAL, in my experience worry about their children when with good support from settings and schools can improve with time and develop in their own time with success.

Thomas and Lewis, (2016) state observations are at the heart of the Foundation Phase and The Learning stories uses a photo, observation, and add a comment to plan for a child's next step in learning. This will show the unique child as it is something they have chosen to learn as well as something they are interested in. The learning story also provides opportunity for parents to read and add a comment which follows the working with parents' ethos.

There may be barriers into bringing in this method to schools. The usual issues of training needed before hand to show the purpose of learning stories as well as it can be time consuming for practitioners. However, if the photo is taken at the time showing the great story the practitioner can find another suitable time to write it up. Using the Learning stories every child will have something to be proud of and will feel included in their learning.

Section 3

Outdoor provision is a vital part within the Early Years Foundation Phase. In the Framework for learning guidance, it states that the environment for children's provision should emphasise outdoor learning (Welsh Government, 2015a). The importance of children having access to the outdoor environment has been said to be beneficial to children within the early years as far back as by Froebel in 1852. (Weinstein, 2022). He believed in regular access for children to the outdoors as being paramount to the positive wellbeing and development of all children.

It has been found with research that sadly not all children have regular access to the outdoor environment within the Foundation phase and more effort is needed in providing these experiences for children and increasing staff training so that they are aware of the benefits (Estyn, 2011; Welsh Government, 2015b).

Covid has had a negative impact on children accessing the outdoors, which additionally has impacted children's mental health and wellbeing. This is because of government advice, to 'stay home and stay safe'. Some children were kept home from settings by worried parents, lived in flats, kept indoors with the only option of go for a walk in the short distance to and from home. NSPCC (2022) reports that data has shown the pandemic has impacted family relationships, financial situations as well as physical and mental health of children and their families. Additionally, Jones Russel (2022) states that the pandemic has increased parental stress which is likely to be passed on children.

We know through our training and Bronfenbrenner 's ecological system, that the people around the child influence their wellbeing (Jones and Roundy, 2022). According to the World Health Organisation, (date unknown) Covid affected 1.6 billion children in more than 190 countries. The covid-19 measures had a profound effect on children's health and wellbeing and may impact them for their lifetime.

A study by the Welsh Government ('The Delphi Study') was conducted to see what impact covid had on children so far. Although evidence is based on early days, the study found that 63.46% of

practitioners believed covid had a negative impact on physical development (Welsh Government, 2021). The pandemic also impacted many other areas; including speech and language, social, emotional, and cognitive development. According to Taylor (2021), Covid has impacted the schooling and well-being of most children in the UK and education attainment is strongly linked to social and emotional development. Outdoor provision provides opportunities for children to develop in all these areas, so it is therefore important we as practitioners welcome the new Curriculum with open arms and increase our value for outdoor provision more than ever to help children of today get the best skills for the future.

The study highlighted more information is needed to promote play in the outdoors. The impact of Covid was also confirmed by Morton, (2022). Published by the first 1000 days movement group the report found that children born in the pandemic continue to have delays in many areas.

From the beginning of the pandemic the Welsh Government have provided more funding after identifying wellbeing of children will be impacted with the restrictions of outdoors during covid. They also predict a demand for mental health support with children with health and education concerns (Welsh Government, 2020). This means the implementation of the new Curriculum must be successful to support these concerns and give children the best start after Covid. Sarah Mosley, director of Mind, also confirmed that when children return to school practitioners must ensure the curriculum provides children the skills to have better health and wellbeing.

White (2008) states that children thrive outside, developing body and mind. The outside offers young children experiences vital to wellbeing health and all areas of child development. White also believes that children who miss these experiences are significantly deprived.

Being outside enables situations for children to challenge themselves learning about risk assessments and becoming aware of their own boundaries and limits. These skills they develop are vital for the future, and covid is shown to have delayed children developing these skills. Promoting wellbeing is an essential part of the Early Years Foundation Phase. Experiences with the outside can support children's mental health. Exploring natural materials and contact with living and growing things has been proven essential for wellbeing and emotional development. According to Mainstone-Cotton (2017), a report was compiled pre-Covid by UNICEF. This report highlighted that Britain scored the lowest in wellbeing from 29 countries. This is worrying as Covid has impacted children's home lives, parents have reported being anxious which would

have affected their own wellbeing and then passed on to the children. A survey of 905 nursery workers in the UK (October –December 2020) found that 42% had noticed signs that children's emotional wellbeing had been affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, parents also reported in the study that there was an increase in behavioural and emotional difficulties with their children after the January 2021 lockdown. This shows that access to the outdoors does effect children as it was confirmed on average that behavioural, emotional and attention difficulties decreased and improved when restrictions were lifted (NSPCC, 2022).

As Wales moves forward with the 'New Curriculum for Wales' it is important that everyone implementing it understands the reasons why we do the things we do. A curriculum can be confusing but comes from research and requires a change (McLachlan, et al. 2010). As Early Years Practitioners, we are more than aware that we have one of the most challenging jobs in the world, caring for and educating the adults of the future. We know the importance of children's experiences and making them positive to go on and have excellent outcomes. Our job descriptions are getting bigger, with a low pay that does not reflect our presence in the Early Years however it can be rewarding if everyone understands the responsibility of supporting children and families. The new Curriculum has come about after years of research and taken the best ideas from all around the world. Providing children regular access to the outdoors is vital for their health, wellbeing, and development. Following the curriculum, we can support children to have the best outcomes for the future.

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