

Early years curricula:Section 1:

The foundation phase is an approach in which promotes the development of children aged 3-7 through play-based learning and teaching. By critically analysing the rollout of the foundation phase in 2010, different approaches can be made to make a change in the rollout of the Curriculum of Wales.

The implementation of Play-based learning in the Foundation phase:

Following the rollout of the Foundation phase, an issue which became a significant challenge upon maintained schools and unmaintained settings was the view of how to implement the Foundation Phase in practice. Welsh Government (2014) stated this became an issue across Wales, due to the lack of theoretical and research knowledge in practitioners of the misconception of how young children learn. In a play-based learning approach, a struggle to adjust to a new, different learning environment practitioners viewed their classrooms as “a chaotic free-for-all play environment”. An effect caused by a lack of knowledge and training before implementing such a detrimental change to children’s learning environments. This led to settings, struggling to put the new Foundation Phase into practice, reverting ‘back to old ways’. Especially for practitioners in which work with older children, an environment which should be enhanced and created to benefit children in experimental learning was misinterpreted when referred to as ‘play’. Supporting this Welsh Government (2015) stated Teachers frequently criticised about the guidance's ambiguity, especially with regard to the terminology used in the documents, “A very specific example of this relates to the understanding, importance, and place of ‘play’”. Headteachers and Local Authority Early Years Advisers suggested the reasoning of a differentiation of implementations of the Foundation Phase across schools and settings within Wales was due to vagueness and confusion in key terms and pedagogical features of the Foundation Phase during training. In addition to this, previous teaching approaches are also often a complication as staff find it difficult to change their personal teaching approaches. Welsh Government (2014) stated Foundation phase staff “need to know that the Foundation Phase is here to stay”, when gaining an understanding of child development, practitioners should

feel confident in delivering the Foundation Phase. To aid the development of the correct implementation of the foundation phase more strict training will need to evolve. This suggests that, had practitioners of been briefed upon their understanding of the foundation phase before it was rolled out, their queries and confusion could have been discussed with the Welsh Government- allowing a more clear, understandable version of the pedagogy expectations to be put in place. Meanwhile, Welsh Government (2014) when training is being provided it should be focused on the value of effective early education by referring to theories and research/ theory and practice to ensure the role of the adult is clear and specific.

Professional Development:

Welsh Government (2014) stated in 'An independent stocktake of the foundation phase in Wales.' Ascertain that literacy and numeracy training is accessible to individuals who require it, and that Teaching Assistants (TAs) reap the benefits of ongoing professional development (CPD) procedures and assistance in schools that are maintained. This ensures all practitioners in the classroom environment are able to assist children to their fullest potential, with the chances to pursue their own Professional Development. Previously this could have been an issue, due to lack of staffing/ issues with classroom ratio, putting pressure on staff to feel they cannot achieve their professional development as there is no available cover. However, the evaluation of the Foundation phase (Welsh Government, 2015) has suggested advantages of the higher adult: child ratios were mentioned. Among these were allowing practitioners to explore their own professional development or take part in training without needing extra cover in the classroom, this will be beneficial for staff upon the complaints of the lack of understanding of the foundation phase, to be able to receive the correct training. According to Ofsted (2023) It has been demonstrated that continuing professional development for teachers increases teacher satisfaction and retention, which is crucial to the quality of education for children to receive. Linking to the confusing in which the foundation phase caused, they stated a high-quality education system is characterised by teaching practices that are grounded in a thorough and current comprehend of pertinent evidence, which is essential for pupils to achieve successful results, with training based on current topics. This demonstrates the importance of

professional development regarding the Foundation phase, children are unable to receive the education which allows them to reach their fullest potential, when the basic concept of foundation phase is not understood. Thorough training and development on the Foundation phase will benefit both teachers and children.

Welsh Government (2014) stated teaching was personalised and allowed teachers to aid individual needs of the children such as social, language and personal development within the foundation phase. Welsh Government (2015) stated noticeable differences were seen with an increase of present adults in the classroom provision, while headteachers and teachers stated when implementing the foundation phase curriculum and new pedagogy the improved ratios have been essential. In addition to this the increase in child to adult ratios allowed activities to be enriched while a greater impact was made on creative teaching, as well as the opportunity of creating an exciting and engaging continuous provision for the children. This was possible as the Foundation phase benefitted the learning environments within school, Welsh Government (2015) stated that The Welsh Government provided just under £36million of grants to support schools and settings in the development of the provision, to be able to implement the Foundation phase. However, when head teachers were questioned as to what challenges they have faced when implementing the foundation phase into their school, 60% stated the two main difficulties to their implementation were current funding and existing school infrastructure.

Section 2: The Unique child

The concept of the unique child acknowledges that children are capable learners from an early age and that each child develops differently according to the university of Warwick nursery (no date). Each child is individually unique, who can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured while continuously learning, states Worcestershire County Council, (No date). Inclusion in the early years is based upon the unique child. According to UNICEF (No date) Article 29 of the rights of the child states the education of the child shall be directed to the overall development of the child's personality, skills, and physical and mental capabilities, allowing them to reach their fullest potential. When assessing in Foundation phase the Unique child should always be considered, allowing every child the chance to

show progress. Underlying aspects of the background of a child should be considered when assessment is being undertaken, inclusion in assessment is key when involving the unique child. Ensuring every child is seen and assessed upon their individual, personal developments in which they have made.

Reception Baseline assessment:

The reception baseline assessment became mandatory in September 2021. According to GOV.UK (2023) the reception baseline assessment is a short task-based assessment. The assessment is necessary to be completed within 6 weeks of a child's reception year. The assessment is used to show progress made within the school-level progress when the child finishes primary school. Standards and testing agency (no date) states Reception baseline assessments, all children to gain one-to-one time with their teacher during their first 6 weeks of reception, while allowing teachers to gain an understanding of what level the child is working at, so they are able to be supported in a way which benefits their development. Although this form of assessment is beneficial as whole school data, it is not a clear way to solely base progression off. When children begin reception their age ranges from 4 years- 4 years 11 months, this meaning that younger children could possibly be at a disadvantage.

Stage not Age- Progression steps assessment:

Progression steps are a new way in which assessments are recorded to measure a child's progress. The Foundation phase profile is an age/stage related tracker. This measures children's progress in 'progression steps' rather than a specific year group target that they should be working towards. Each area of learning and experience is now assessed in this way. Welsh government (no date) state the guidance towards this framework of the assessment type meets the needs of all children, while recognising their identity, background, language, ability, and prior learning are all accounted for and will differ to each individual child and their personal circumstances. This type of assessment meets the needs of the 'Unique child', it is inclusive and allows all children the chance to learn and progress at their own stage, the 'stage not age' name perceives itself to state children are able to progress in steps of stages, rather than being targeted to work towards their standard 'age level'. For example, a 7-year-old could be at progression step 1 and a 5-year-old at

progression step 2, this then allows the teacher to assess their daily tasks to ensure they are working at a level in which they are capable of achieving at.

Welsh Government (2020) state the framework is focused upon a personalised approach to allow all children to progress in their learning. They state the new curriculum will focused on learner to be driven, competent, and open to learning new things throughout their life. While the classroom environment provision will secure equal education regardless of a child's ability or stage of development, they will be able to benefit from the curriculum from basic concepts. They consider how learners advance according to research, as well as practitioners' insights from their experience in the classroom. They also understand the knowledge and skills that students must possess in order to advance to the next progression step. Welsh Government (2022) focus of the unique child by stating schools will develop assessment arrangements which allow all learners to create progress in their academic year. They will identify where each individual learner is in their current learning and how they can be challenged to progress in their learning.

The new curriculum unlike the foundation phase targets children towards their unique, individual targets and progression. Whereas the foundation phase, (Welsh government, no date) stated an 'Expectation of development' which was categorised into age groups, regarding to baseline assessments. As well as this the Welsh Government (2015) Foundation phase framework, categorises children's ages/ year group with expectations of what level they should have progressed to by the end of the academic year. This does not support the unique child as it isn't considering children's background, previous learning, ability, ALN. It has categorised children to work towards expectations in which could be unachievable for many learners. This could dishearten parents and learners, leaving them question why they are not achieving such expectations, when to the new curriculum any progress, is progress. Each child develops differently and at different paces.

The education hub (2020a) stated Early childhood assessments must take into account the complexity of the learning and development of the children as well as the setting in which they interact with others, objects, and places. Assessing complicated learning in context is typically best done with fewer standardised approaches to assessment. Learning stories are

narratives derived from systematic observations that aim to offer a growing collection of images that illustrate a child's educational progress. These are observations that are remade as stories, examined, and utilised as the foundation for a planning. Teachers gather "critical incidents," or instances that appear remarkable to a child. This form of assessment is fit to meet the needs of the 'unique child'. It allows a child's educational progress to be shown in all aspects of development. The Education hub (2020b) also stated the importance of teachers in the early years is epistemically responsible assessment, why they chose to assess, how they do and what to do with the assessment information. This is beneficial in choosing how to assess children in the correct way to ensure all their needs are met and to ensure progression is being made. This is crucial as every child develops differently, so to just assess upon one assessment method is not making sure the unique child is being included for.

Section 3: Blog

Beyond 'just' the playground: Exploring the Invaluable

Benefits of Outdoor play



In the realm of child development, the importance of outdoor play cannot be overstated. Children embark on an adventure that extends beyond simple physical exercise as they make their way through the fascinating world outside. A child's development can be greatly

enhanced by outdoor play in a variety of ways, including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and holistic development.

The outdoors- A whole new world of play. Allow children to participate in new challenges, develop to their fullest potential while setting boundaries. Why should you implement outdoor play?

The physical benefits:

Outdoor play is a beneficial learning experience for children in the early years. Outdoor play offers a wide array of key advantages in educational experiences, it encourages physical activity in which promotes overall health and well-being, Wyver, S (2017, p.86) states research illustrates how play, and its environments can support a variety of mental and physical health benefits that are known to be closely linked to cognitive function. When children play outdoors, they are able to move freely, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between play and physical exercise when observing children outside. However, these are distinct structures that have differing effects on children's development. When children in the early years are given the opportunity to learn outdoors, their natural curiosity increases due to a change of environment, this enhances their learning outcomes. Early years alliance (2022) supports the benefits of outdoor play by suggesting, children who are encouraged to run, leap and climb will become physically fit and gain advantages with important developmental processes including muscle, bone, and stability building whilst influencing their future health, preventing them from obesity. As well as this Children who engage in unstructured physical activity during the daytime also sleep better at night allowing them to have fuller energy for the following day (Lockwood, K 2023).

The social and emotional benefits

Ouvry, M and Furtado, A (2020) state the outdoors creates an opportunity for children's role play to become more realistic, allowing them to have more space to use their imagination to sustain their role play beliefs. When children are realistic during role play, they social engage with peers and adults more frequently. Early years alliance (2022) corroborates by suggesting the increased space to play which the outdoors offers allows children to gain the opportunity to develop an understanding of others and their surroundings while practicing empathy in group activities. By engaging in group

play/activities children are more likely to partake in making friends which aids their development of social and emotional skills.

Outdoor play in Wales

The Welsh Government has made a clear and explicit commitment to supporting young children's outdoor play-based learning during their early years. In Wales, it is also explicitly expected that children will encounter some level of risk while they play, states Walters, J and Maynard, T (2014). Outdoor play in the early years is an expectation from Welsh Government. The Welsh government foundation phase Outdoor learning handbook states that outdoor play is an exemplary way to enrich and enhance a child's learning environment. An opportunity to create unique opportunities to children to move, to be creative and to take risks. When children are given the possibility to develop their personal, social, physical, and cultural skills in the outdoor, they are able to fulfil their learning and retainment to a better standard. Aside from school-based skills, children can develop a love for nature from outdoor play (Department for children, Education, Lifelong learning and skills, no date). While in a more recent publishment from the Welsh government (2023), they suggest having recognized the significance of outdoor learning as an instructional method with proven physical and cognitive advantages, the present study aimed to offer insights into the utilization of outdoor learning in schools throughout Wales. They state, amid the covid-19 pandemic, outdoor learning played a crucial part in promoting the health and well-being of children. This underscores the significance of outdoor learning, given its notable impact on children during a particularly challenging period in their lives.

Overall Benefits:

The learning experiences children gain from outdoor play are continuous, by fostering holistic development going beyond the 'average' classroom boundaries. Sensory development is an often-undiscussed benefit of outdoor play, the outdoor environment offers a plethora of sensory experiences, weather, sound, smell, touch, hearing. Sensory perceptions that a child may not have experienced indoors. Cooper, A (2015) states 'Natural outdoor play and learning environments' benefit children. It improves their self-regulation, allowing them to process learning more easily. Aids gross motor development, a skill which

can be used highly in the indoor classroom environment. As well as this, the exposure to the 'richness and novelty' of the outdoors fosters the development of the brain, continual, direct interaction with nature in familiar surroundings remains a crucial catalyst for the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of children.

Conclusion

After exploring the many benefits—which range from improved physical and mental health to social skill development and environmental awareness, it is clear that the outdoors provides the youngest learners with an engaging, all-encompassing learning environment. It serves as a catalyst for development, resiliency, and a lifetime love of learning in addition to being a place for play. The outdoors is a crucial environment for early years children to develop their physical, social, cognitive, and emotional skills, it is not a luxury but a necessity. When taking the classroom environment outside of its four walls, the outdoors may be transformed into a stimulating educational setting where friendships are created, creativity thrives, and curiosity is sparked. From problem solving in mathematic situations to making new friends at the mud kitchen, every little part is a step into future development. The outdoors- A whole new world of play.

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