

## Section 1

In Wales, the curriculum for all schools was the Foundation Phase, a new curriculum is being introduced called the Curriculum for Wales, due to a new curriculum being introduced it has allowed the government it has allowed schools and the government to reflect and evaluate whether it has been implemented effectively. The Foundation Phase Framework places an immense emphasis on learning through play throughout the early years. Play based learning provides opportunities for children to experiential learn, take risks, and gain problem solving skills (Welsh Government, 2015). When implementing the foundation phase, they implemented 7 areas of learning, these include Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity Area of Learning, Language, Literacy and Communication Skills Area of Learning, Mathematical Development Area of Learning, Welsh Language Development Area of Learning, Knowledge, and Understanding of the World Area of Learning, Physical Development Area of Learning and Creative Development Area of Learning (Welsh Government, 2015). The implementation of the foundation phase was warningly welcomed from many practitioners working in schools and settings across Wales, however some has their reservations about the new curriculum. Many head teachers across the country were worried about funding whilst implementing the new curriculum, saying that it was one of their biggest struggles when trying to implement the foundation phase (Welsh Government, 2014). Improvements need to be made to the Foundation Phase learning areas. Within this recommendation, it is noted that the funding needs to go to both indoor and outdoor areas so the best learning experiences can take place within the environment (Welsh Government, 2015)

A major outline within the Final Report Evaluation document would be the need for improvement in staff training, and this is not only support staff and teaching assistants, but also about all practitioners. It was occurred that not all staff have had training on the Foundation Phase, and this is especially for staff members who are new to a setting and agency staff. From looking at the final report, recommendation 11 states that "there needs to be more follow-up of training in the Foundation Phase" (WIZERD, 2015). For support staff follow up training could be on what is play, as play means many different things to different people. If 10 people who work within an early year setting all have different views and opinions on what play is, there could be a miscommunication and the children within that setting are not really learning through play at all, so it is important that everyone has the same understanding of a specific topic to avoid miscommunication. However, from looking at the new curriculum it is not stated whether or not they will be ensuring staff training and ensuring staff all have the same understanding.

Within the independent stocktake of the foundation phase in Wales, one of the recommendations is that teaching assistants and support staff are given opportunities for professional development (Welsh Government, 2014). Additionally, in 2019 it was announced that new standards will be brought in for teaching and support staff in order to prepare them for the new curriculum (Welsh Government,

2019). Minister of Education Kirsty Williams stated that “classroom support staff are highly valued by schools, and these new standards will help strengthen their skills support those who wish to progress their teaching career” (Welsh Government, 2019). With this new initiative, it allows teaching assistants to further their own learning supporting those who wish to be Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA). However, there is still no specific qualifications needed to be a teaching assistant within Wales the only requirement is that you have math and English GCSE (Teaching Personnel, 2021). From looking at the independent stocktake, another recommendation made is that teaching assistants and support staff should be able to take part in sessions in improve their own literacy and numeracy skills if they feel they need it (Welsh Government 2014). In addition to this, one of the main jobs and responsibilities of a level 2 teaching assistant is working with a small group of children (Welsh, no date), this is causing a conflict due to the fact that the Welsh Government will have unqualified staff help to educate children when the (Welsh Government, 2015, page 2) states that the Foundation Phase “encourages children to be creative and imaginative, and makes learning more enjoyable and more effective”, but can a curriculum be that effective when there is unqualified staff leading small groups and activities who also play such a significant role in a child’s learning and development. It is also suggested by (Donaldson, 2015, page 93) that training for all staff in schools and non-maintained settings will need sufficient training on the new curriculum.

Another recommendation taken from the independent stocktake would be that having children under 5 be assessed through observational assessments, whereas children older should be assessed through standardised measurements (Welsh Government, 2014). A positive about assessing the children can be that they provide teachers with information of what they need to teach, reteach and what they do not need to teach again. Additionally, the recommendation from the independent stocktake has been listened to through the new curriculum for Wales as children from school years 2 to year 9 complete statutory personalised assessments in Numeracy Procedural, Numeracy Reasoning, English Reading. The assessments are personalised due to the fact that the more questions a child might get right the more questions they have and the more difficult they become, and it is the same if a child is struggling, so the more they have got wrong the less questions they have and the easier they get, the children sit these tests twice a year, at the start of the academic year and at the end this is so teachers can see the progress the children have made throughout the academic year (Welsh Government,2022).

Similarly, within the final evaluation report, it recommends that parents and cares of the children within Welsh settings need to be made fully aware and given more information about the statutory assessments which their children undertake from year 2 onwards (WIZERD,2015, page 4). Already, it can be seen that the government have took this recommendation into account due to the fact that anyone

can access the information about these personalised assessments and what they entail through the Welsh Government website. On the website it provides information about all 3 tests, it gives video examples of the tests and also leaves contact information if one were to have any queries. However, there are many different factors that can affect this information only being online, the UK is currently going through a cost-of-living crisis, making it even harder for families to heat their homes and/ or have an internet access, (Amar,2022) stated that "Six million UK households are struggling to pay their mobile, landline and broadband bills", although this quote states they are "struggling"(Amar,2022) people around the UK are still managing to, but sooner or later with the way the cost of living crisis is affecting people, they will no longer be able to access the internet at all, therefore the Welsh Government and Schools need to be considerate and include those who do not or will not have access to internet, meaning they would need paper copies of the information, but again using all that paper to print out letters is not very environmentally friendly.

Overall, the curriculum for Wales had looked thoroughly through the list of recommendations from both the independent stocktake and the final report. This will allow staff within the setting in Wales to provide the best practise they can for their students by meeting their needs from looking at the baseline assessments in which they take part in.

## Section 2

The unique child refers to every single child being their own individual because all children are different and are different from their peers. Every single child is unique and special in their own way, the unique child is not just a child who has additional learning needs, it is a term used for every child. According to (Early Years Matters, no date) a unique child refers to a child who is "constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured". Under the Equality Act 2010, it is the practitioner's duty to ensure all children are included, no child should feel that they are being excluded due to their characteristics, beliefs, or disability (McMahon and Dyer, 2018, page 30).

To ensure the unique child is continually developing and learning new things, they will take part in assessments either formally or informally. Practitioners assess children so that they can see if a child has gaps in their learning and development, see if a child is more able and talented and assessments are also used to see if a child is on track. Schools and settings use assessments as a way of knowing what a child knows and understands. Not only do teachers and practitioners assess children, but parents also assess their children based on what other children do, they start to compare them to older siblings and cousins, this can be quite dangerous and can affect the child if they are doing things at a slower pace, it can affect their confidence and self-esteem, comparing children to others means they can "end up feeling bad about themselves, which is a risk factor for a range of negative outcomes down the road, such as anxiety, depression" (Hershberg, 2018).

A common type of assessment often done in the early years, especially in nursery is observational assessments, it is one of the best ways to ensure the children are developing correctly as it allows you to watch and listen to them. observations are

essential whilst working with children and practitioners often find them self-doing it without even having a tick list, they may just pick up on the fact that the child is doing something new, by observing children, it allows practitioners to see a child's likes and dislikes, it allows them to see what equipment a child prefers and also provides the practitioners with realistic information about the unique child (Early Years Matters, no date A ). Although observational assessments can provide practitioners with instant feedback and results, often they become unreliable because you only need to see a child doing a certain activity once before it becomes completed and ticked off a list. Another example of how an observational assessment can affect the unique child is mainly because they can become nervous if they know they are being watched just like teachers doing when they know they are being observed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) or by ESTYN (Wile, no date). According to (Louis,2020) it is best to observe the unique child whilst they play as it can promote imagination and creativity and through play is when we see the unique child be their individual self, through play practitioners are able to observe the child's likes, dislikes, who they play with most and which areas they like to play in most creating a more detailed observation on the unique child.

Whilst reforming the new curriculum the Welsh Government asked Professor Graham Donaldson for his view on how Wales was doing when it came to assessing the unique child within the Foundation Phase. His findings led to there being 4 main purposes within the new curriculum and 6 fundamental areas of learning, Donaldson also suggested that learning should be done through progression steps which include achievement outcomes (Donaldson,2015). From looking at the Foundation Phase strands and the Progression steps, it is clear that a more informal approach is used within the progression steps using phrases like I can, using 'I can' will be more affective as it is more positive and allows the child to be praised when completing a progression step. Using a more positive language in the progression steps will help build the child self-esteem and they can be used as positive affirmations within the classroom. However, this is much different to the Foundation Phase Framework's approach which has phrases like 'children are able to'. The strands also include what is expected of the unique child when they are in a specific year group within the foundation phase, it uses the child's age to determine what stage they should be at. On the other hand, the progression steps have no mention of an age or year group etc it has Progression Step 1 – 5, each step getting harder as they go on. This is a way to view the unique child as an individual and it stops them being compared to other children within their class or setting.

Another form of assessment used in schools and settings Wellcom, it used to encourage the unique child's speech and language skills starting from the age of 6 months up until they are 6 years old, this assessment allows practitioners to recognise quickly who the children are who may have a delay or need more support within speech and language (GL Assessment, no date). This assessment is extremely beneficial as it offers early intervention for those who need it and once every child has been assessed it allows teachers and practitioners to plan enhanced and continuous provision effectively. (Orchard Primary School, 2019) state that "having reflected upon the findings of the action research it is believed that screening

the children early on in the school year and starting the interventions as soon as possible help the development of children language skills” early intervention with a child’s speech and language is preventing them from having to have a Speech and Language Therapist later on in their school years.

As part of the new curriculum for Wales it has all children from year 2 to year 9 sit 3 statutory tests for numeracy and literacy, the children do these tests twice a year, they are at the beginning of year, this allows the teachers to plan lessons and rescores in order to help the development throughout the year and they do them at the end of academic year to see what the children have learned and developed in. This way of assessing allows school staff to see gaps in learning and if they need to repeat a topic in the following academic year and allows teachers to see if the children are accessing the curriculum effectively. A disadvantage to standardised testing for children is the fact that it can knock their confidence, they feel pressured to do well in the test and it causes them to have anxiety and be extremely nervous (Nixon, no date). Another reason standardised testing is often seen as a disadvantage to the unique child is due to the fact that a child could be having a difficult day and if they are made to sit a test that could impact their score because they will not be able to give it their best effort when completing the test. After these standardised tests, it is often found that children are grouped based on their ability for example, additional learning needs and lower ability children on one table, more able and talented children on a separate table. Although this allows children to work at their stage, it can undermine someone’s confidence as it is found that when the unique child is placed in a specific group, majority of time they will not move from that group as they aren’t being challenged enough to go up and try the more challenging work. Although practitioners will argue that grouping by ability is the best way to work with children, it can undermine other children within the classroom question their ability as stated by (Khan,2021) “whether placed too high or too low, students can be quickly de-motivated when they feel outperforming or underperforming their peers” children will become withdrawn from work if they are placed wrong within the ability groups and they also become hurt by decisions, when children get older they know which groups are of higher ability and what groups are of lower ability, if a child gets moved down they will often feel disheartened by the decision.

It is crucial that practitioners “act on observations to ensure that every unique child is supported and challenged to develop effectively” (McMahon and Dyer, 2018, page 39), if practitioners do not act on their observations and findings it can lead to gaps in children’s development and learning. Ensuring that children are assessed appropriately can lead to them having a positive effective in their learning and development. Assessing children needs to be done where the needs of the unique child are also met.

### Section 3: The importance of outdoor play within children’s development and learning.

Playing outdoors is amusing and enjoyable however, outdoor play, plays a vital role in children’s early years development and learning, by allowing children to have

experiences outdoors offers a range of different opportunities for them to have for their learning and development. Many people believe that outdoor learning is just taking any activity outdoors, however more factors comply when organising an outdoor learning experience. Stated within the Foundation Phase it is important that outdoor learning needs to be done the same amount if not more than indoor learning, due to the amount of positive developmental factors it has to children's learning (Welsh Government, 2015, page 3). (Welsh Government, 2009) states that "the Foundation Phase and outdoors are inseparable" meaning that you cannot do one without the other.

Outdoor play is extremely beneficial to a child's creativity, children, especially young children are extremely creative, however being outdoors opens a brand-new way for children to explore their creativity as it allows them to gain a sense of freedom and learn about the world around them (Impact Arts, no date). Outdoor play enhances children's creativity, as it allows them to see the world around them differently, according to (Welsh Government, 2009) by allowing children to play outdoors they get opportunities to use their senses which they will not normally use inside a classroom "the outdoors is full of special stimuli such as weather, sounds, smells and textures which can enrich and enhance a child's learning environment" (Welsh Government, 2009, page 2).

Outdoor play also provides opportunities for children to use their gross motor skills which they do not normally use in a day-to-day classroom, it allows them to "embrace the freedom and space the outdoors gives them to shout, jump, run around, hop and skip" (NCT, 2017). Similarly, not only does the outdoors help develop gross motor skills it also helps develop fine motor skills, due to the many different activities that can be done enabling time for both fine and gross motor skills to be developed, activities can include counting games, asking a child to find and pick up 5 sticks or 3 pebbles not only enhances motor skills but their cognitive ability across the Mathematical Area of Learning and Development within the Foundation Phase (NAPA Team, 2021). Another activity which can include both fine and gross motor skills whilst being outdoors can be as simple as popping bubbles. Popping bubbles uses fine motor skills by using the index finger to poke a bubble and uses gross motor skills within the legs as a child may jump to catch them.

Alongside gross motor skills, outdoor play and learning allows children to enhance their physical development, one of the key areas in the Foundation Phase Framework. By children playing outdoors it keeps them fit and leads a healthy lifestyle. Allowing children to lead a healthy lifestyle from such an early age can help prevent illnesses in their adolescence years, being physically active from an early age can prevent them from being obese and other illnesses as stated by (Ni Direct, no date) "the freedom and space of being outdoors can encourage more expansive movement leading to good physical exercise and helping prevent obesity". The (Welsh Government, 2009) believe that outdoor play is essential to a child's development and learning due to the fact that the space creates an environment where they are able to carry out different movements that they would not normally be able to do inside a classroom. As part of the new curriculum for Wales, ensuring the use of outdoor provision for learning and development bring in one of the 4 main

purposes, through outdoor learning and play, the children are being encouraged to be Healthy, Confident Individuals.

Another benefit outdoor play has on children's learning and development is that it contributes to a child's mental health, recently an investigation by the University of Exeter has been released reporting that children who played outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic did not suffer with mental health issues and were much more positive during the first lockdown and they did not suffer with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression than those of the children who did not play outside, however many factors can affect why a child did or did not play outside during the pandemic, such as if they did or did not have a garden, which might have been the case for lower income families(Health Europa, 2022). (Health Europa, 2022) also says that the results between lower and high-income households were extremely noticeable.

The Welsh Government, place a huge emphasis on outdoor learning, due to the fact that they looked at curriculums from around the world to help shape their own. They took concept from other curriculums such as Forest Schools from Scandinavia, Te Whāriki from New Zealand, Reggio Emilia from Northern Italy, and High Scopes from the USA. All the curriculums have the child at the heart of the curriculum, they plan around the child assessing the child's needs. They place a huge emphasis on outdoor learning and the benefits that come with it, ensuring to provide a safe and stimulating environment for children to learn and grow in (Wainwright, 2021, page 567)

In conclusion, in order to implement a play-based curricula the outdoors needs to play a drastic role when planning and reforming a curriculum, due to the many beneficial factors it has on children's physical and mental health but also their cognitive development. Not only does it have beneficial factors the children become more involved within an activity because they are not sitting down at a desk completing a work sheet. Learning outdoors enhances children's imagination and creative ability therefore leaves them enjoying learning more.

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