

ECEY6010

Section 2

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the assessment techniques used in both current and past curricula and how they improve learning outcomes to the individual child and the implementations to improve assessment practices.

Every child is unique and is one of the four principles underpinned by the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (Beckley, 2012, p16) a child who is constantly learning, who can be self-assured, capable, confident, and resilient. Individuality is derived from every aspect of the child, the child's abilities and challenges, loves, and hates, hobbies and activities (Beckley, 2012, p, 81).

Every child is different and has a different temperament and learning style based on Vygotsky theory of zone of proximal development, which emphasises how important it is to view every child as an individual, who has a unique way of learning, and the emphasis on the environment, culture and knowledge surrounding the child to be able to scaffold further in developing and learning (Beckley, 2012). This can be achieved by a proactive approach according to McMahon and Dyer (2019, p. 5) to reduce barriers through allocating a key worker to each child. As a result, the key worker can tailor the care and learning needs of the child.

Assessments and observations can be precise and planned, spaced out across time, or they can happen as they happen, spontaneous occurrences, when something noteworthy or new is noticed. Practitioners can gain a thorough understanding of every child by utilising a variety of observation techniques through learning stories. Practitioners ought to incorporate these observations into the setting's present and future planning (Welsh Government 2023a).

Understanding children's interests is aided by observations and utilising these interests to their fullest can aid in extending learning. Participation in these encounters, the child actively participates in the learning process and contributes their uniqueness to each new encounter through words, sounds, expression, sense of humour, own way of doing things and the new things learnt (Welsh Government 2022a).

The Foundation Phase Profile, or "the profile," was the previous form of assessing children and was an essential component of the Welsh Government's Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) that facilitated evaluation of children's learning and growth during the Foundation Phase through observations (Beckley, 2012, p. 194; Welsh Government 2022b). The principal was to offer a baseline evaluation for the first six weeks of reception class, that was consistent across the country and in line with phase-end results. However many schools decided to not use the profile beyond the Foundation Phase, and used alternative methods best suited (2022b). The profile helped practitioners to assess what stage of development each child was at in the four areas of learning and to help design and develop an appropriate, holistic curriculum for every child (Welsh Government, 2017a).

Overall, practitioners expressed satisfaction with the Foundation Phase Profile's quality, but the feeling that a curriculum should be devised around the unique child, observations and assessments methods should reflect this and not measured against benchmarks that are considered normal. The profile was frequently criticised for being excessively time consuming, overly checklist-oriented, and inadequately customised for each individual child and many setting opting to devise own assessment and observational methods to achieve outcomes (Welsh Government, 2022a).

The UNCRC states in Article 29 settings and schools must encourage to develop abilities, talents, and personalities to encourage respect for own and all other cultures. According to Alsubaie (2015) there may be multicultural children in a classroom which presents new difficulties to practitioners. A child needs to be able to communicate with people and other children, but this is not always easy or possible as there may be a language or a cultural barrier (Bornman *et al.*, 2010).

Practitioners have the additional duty of guiding children towards success in uncharted territory (Jenkin, 2017). When children are observed, a practitioner can plan what the best activities is suitable indoors and outdoors of the classroom and is best to unite the class. Diversity of traditions, values, beliefs and adjusting to a new unfamiliar cultural environment can contribute to a negative outcome, such as a low academic achievement. Children can sometimes achieve low academic achievement if a particular approach is unfamiliar to them, such as a Chinese child asking the teacher not to ask him questions during class as the direct questioning approach is unfamiliar in his culture (Thomas, 1995 (cited in Alsubaie, 2015)).

To guarantee that children received help, the profile was created in accordance with tests conducted by medical specialists and to encourage the early identification of any developmental delays, special educational needs (SEN), or additional learning needs (ALN) who require it. All parties involved in the learning and development of children will find value in the assessments gathered for the profile, which will facilitate transfers between settings and schools. However. the research carried out by Sigley and Wilkinson (2015) suggest that if a child is not confident in language it does not define the child to be poor in another subject such as mathematics. Waiting for a child to reach a certain target in one subject may have an impact on another subject, putting the child at a disadvantage. Therefore, it is important to focus on what a child can do rather than what they cannot do.

The New Curriculum for Wales champions the changes in assessment where the whole curriculum is a learning experience through real life experiences and play opportunities. The main difference to the Foundation Phase profile is it provides support to each individual child to progress at the appropriate pace to the child ensuring support and are challenged accordingly (Welsh Government, 2022c). Practitioners learn a lot about what intrigues, drives, and captivates children via observation during play. It aids in the comprehension of the children's engagement levels, emotional states, friendships, and abilities. It is an engaging and informative model that does not have a rigid structure and formality like the Foundation Phase Profile (Welsh Government, 2022b).

An observational assessment needs to be manageable and purposeful and is not overly-time consuming (Welsh Government, 2022a). The 'framework for evaluation, improvement, and accountability' specifies that assessments should not be conducted for the goal of accountability; rather, they should only be used to enhance teaching and learning. To better support children's learning and development should be the goal. A practitioner may choose a format that best suits the child, themselves, or the setting for example a learning story where the observations are noteworthy and shows an insight into the child's learning journey, highlighting key moments of growth, and identifying areas of improvements (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Children are more relaxed when oblivious to being observed, this is demonstrated in the study carried out by Lafgren and Lafgren (Parekh, 2017) where students felt uneasy and mistrusted as the teacher's own behaviour changed during set exams conditions from caring to suspicion and surveillance. Therefore, are national tests or any tests an accurate reflection of a pupil's ability if all involved are not able to be themselves, it can also have the reverse affect of what should happen according to Tierney (2013) as it may stop some children from further learning opportunities if the required results are not achieved.

Both assessment methods encourage involving parents in the children's education and believes it is an integral aspect of a successful pedagogy (Welsh Government, 2019). Vygotsky believed all new knowledge and skills are influenced by the child's culture and family environment; therefore, it is important to communicate with parents. McMahon and Dyer (2019, p. 31) believes this relationship is built up over time by practitioners being friendly and learning from parents what the child does at home, making parents feel valued and providing the reassurance that the child is receiving the best care.

In conclusion, assessments need to be structures, but observations are an excellent method in providing first hand insights into a child's development, behaviour, and learning styles, enabling practitioners to tailor interventions and support based on each individual child needs. Additionally, it fosters a holistic understanding of a child's strengths, challenges, and interests, promoting effective and personalised teaching strategies.