

Section 1

According to the Department for Education (2021), early childhood education is important in shaping children's learning, experiences, and development during their early years. Two curricula, Te Whāriki, developed in New Zealand, and the Early Childhood Play Learning and Care Pathways (ECPLC) in Wales, provide different perspectives influenced by their distinct cultural and educational contexts (Ministry of Education, 2024; Academic Heights, 2024). Both curricula emphasise a play-based approach that encourages children to explore and experiment in the world around them. This essay examines how Te Whāriki and the ECPLC Pathways effectively support children's learning through play and inclusion. However, their different cultural foundations and structural approaches offer unique strengths and challenges that influence how each framework is implemented and experienced in early childhood education.

According to Preidyte (2024a), Te Whāriki, first introduced in 1996, adopts a holistic and socio-cultural approach to early childhood development and education. Serene (2020b) states that Te Whāriki draws on Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, highlighting the role of relationships and environments in shaping children's development. Furthermore, Te Whāriki also highlights the importance of cultural identity and the empowerment of children as competent and confident learners (Ministry of Education, 2017). Serene (2020c) adds that the centre of Te Whāriki is the Māori language, values and culture, which forms the framework's foundation. However, whilst the framework states it is inclusive of Māori and Pākehā (meaning non-Māori or New Zealand European), implementation is not consistent (Education Review Office, 2018a; Magic Garden, 2022a). This can happen for many reasons, including different interpretations of the curriculum, confusion in assessment procedures, and a need for ongoing professional development (Serene, 2020a).

In comparison, the ECPLC Pathways in Wales adopt an approach based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, General Comment 1 states that education must be child-centred and empowering, further adding in Article 12 that children can express their views and take part in school life (UNICEF,2022). According to TeachKloud (2025) and McLeod (2025), Piaget believed that children are seen as active participants in their learning. Porter (2024) adds that the ECPLC pathways focus on the holistic development and well-being through high-quality, inclusive, play-based learning. Furthermore, the framework aligns with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion whilst also aligning with the National Minimum Standards (Welsh Government,2023a; Welsh Government, 2023b). However, on the other hand, even though the ECPLC values autonomy in children's learning, Birth to Five Matters (2021) points out that the ECPLC framework being more structured could lead to reduced spontaneity or child-initiated learning.

Veazey (2020a) states that 'Te Whāriki' translates to 'the woven mat,' symbolising the 'weaving' of principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes to support children's early years development. Furthermore, Blennz (2025) states that practitioners are to 'weave' these principles of Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community, and Relationships and the five strands of well-being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration into the curriculum. According to Treetops Early Learning Centre (2025), Te Whāriki adopts a flexible approach. However, Blaiklock (2010) and Murata (2014) add that there is criticism around how practitioners interpret Te Whāriki, with learning stories varying and flexibility allowing for justification for not aiming to meet outcomes. Therefore, Veazey (2020b) points out that it is not about the children reaching expected milestones but rather about motivating them and understanding what they are trying to achieve, to reach their own goals.

Unlike Te Whāriki, ECPLC Pathways offer a more structured progression of developmental steps, supporting practitioners in assessing and planning effectively (Early Years Wales,2023). The structure aligns with the broader goals of the Curriculum for Wales because it emphasises the importance of developing children, such as ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed

citizens, and healthy, confident individuals, aligning with the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales and setting the foundations (National Day Nurseries Association, no date). Additionally, the ECPLC Pathways provide a clear guide on how children grow and learn. The framework explains expectations as children progress in emotional, language, physical, and play development (Welsh Government, 2023c). These pathways can support staff in understanding where a child is in their development and plan what to do next. Although Grenier (2020) says that some practitioners may feel pressured to focus on outcomes, which could limit exploratory play opportunities. However, in light of this, National Day Nurseries Association (2025) states the importance of enabling adults in creating engaging, developmentally appropriate experiences, environments, and pedagogy, while promoting play as a fundamental right for every child. Moreover, this aligns with Article 31 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989).

In both curricula, practitioners play an important role as supporters, observers, and co-learners (Amin, 2022). Preidyte (2024b) states that Te Whāriki asks Kaiako (teachers) to design responsive, culturally grounded experiences in partnership with families and communities. Additionally, this approach supports deeper learning but requires high skill, reflection, and cultural awareness. Professional learning for practitioners and support is important, especially in honouring the Treaty of Waitangi and weaving bicultural practice into everyday routines (Hansen, 2024; Gordon-Burns and Campbell, 2014).

The bicultural curriculum values holistic development and cultural responsiveness (Ministry of Education, 2018). To implement this, Kaiako should engage in continuous professional development. This includes personal study, reflective practice, workshops, and collaboration with other practitioners. This helps adopt the best practices and enhance teaching skills to meet children's needs (Ministry of Education, 2003). An important aspect of professional development is understanding and integrating Māori culture, language and values (Rameka, 2018). The Education and Training Bill (2019) states that Kaiako are expected to honour the Treaty of Waitangi and embed the cultural practices into daily work (Parliamentary Counsel Office, 2019). This

needs a genuine commitment to cultural competence and engagement with Māori perspectives (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011).

However, it may be that not all Kaiako, or practitioners, have access to quality professional development opportunities (Whakangungu Ngaio) barriers such as insufficient funding for travel from rural areas, full professional development groups, or the chance to be released from their job to attend professional development workshops (Cherrington and Wansbrough, 2007). Magic Garden (2022b) states that the motivation to engage in cultural learning and the knowledge among Kaiako vary, influencing how practice is implemented. Additionally, Education Review Office (2018b) finds that although professional development uptake was high, the impact is unknown. Moreover, these contributory factors may impact the consistency of bicultural practices, which may create challenges to implementing culturally responsive teaching, further adding that there are expectations for practitioners to 'dig deeper' into Te Whāriki for professional knowledge and pedagogical practice.

Similarly, the ECPLC Pathways highlight practitioner capability, encouraging professional reflective practice and collaboration across settings. The structured framework can also support those with less formal training or experience (Welsh Government, 2023d). Care Council for Wales (2016) adds that early years practitioners are important to delivering high-quality childcare, with professional development playing a key role in staff competency. However, Welsh Government (2024) have found that a shortfall in funding has contributed to a limited number of practitioners engaging in relevant training. Additionally, ESTYN (2024) have reported evidence that non-maintained childcare providers have accessed high-quality professional learning than those based in schools. Furthermore, there was limited support for developing effective early years pedagogy. Jennings, Jeon and Roberts (2020) state that, without the appropriate resources or training of practitioners, the quality of work is not sustainable and therefore harms children's development. Moreover, Early Years Wales (2022) aims to support and promote professional development opportunities in Wales. Although there may be barriers to accessing professional development, there are various strategies to help practitioners, such as utilising current resources, reflective practice,

exploring innovative approaches to training and development through podcasts, webinars or workshops (Welsh Government, 2020a; Nursery Management Show, 2024).

In conclusion, Te Whāriki and the ECPLC Pathways provide beneficial frameworks supporting children's learning, development, and inclusion through a play-based approach. Cultural beliefs and approaches to structure in the curriculum can create unique advantages and challenges in practice. Whilst Te Whāriki draws on culture, relationships, and flexibility, which allows for rich, personalised learning, it can lead to inconsistencies in implementation. The ECPLC's structured framework offers clear guidance and planning information. However, it may limit creativity and spontaneity. Finally, the effectiveness of either curriculum depends on practitioners' knowledge, reflective practices, professional development and the ability to be responsive to children's needs, demonstrating that both frameworks can promote positive early learning environments when implemented effectively.

Section 2

The Unique Child

According to Grenier (2025), a commitment to the unique child is about understanding how children develop and progress at different rates and in various ways. Mudiad Meithrin (2023) adds that the Curriculum for Wales recognises the need to celebrate children's uniqueness. The Curriculum for Wales was introduced in 2022 and has changed how education is planned, delivered, and assessed in Wales. It replaces the older national curriculum with a more flexible, inclusive, and child-centred framework (Audit Wales, 2022). Welsh Government (2022d) adds that Curriculum for Wales believes that every learner is unique and that schools should support each child according to their own pace, background, and learning needs. Furthermore, Lewis (no date a) adds that the key principles of assessment are along a continuum central to the Curriculum for Wales. Additionally, the Curriculum and Assessment Wales Act (2021) and Welsh Government (2020b) state that there must be ways to assess progression, ensuring all children learn effectively.

Lewis (no date b) says the Curriculum for Wales recognises all children as individuals. Understanding that children learn best when seen as individuals, learning at their own pace, and in their way (Welsh Government, 2022b). Clement and Sarwar (2023) suggest that the Curriculum for Wales is influenced by Froebel's thoughts about the importance of the whole child and holistic development. With this in mind, the 'unique child' refers to all children as individuals, not just those with additional learning needs (Worcestershire County Council, 2023). Birth to 5 Matters (2021) adds that this includes children with different cultural backgrounds, life experiences and preferred learning styles. Furthermore, the curriculum for Wales encourages practitioners to respond to the 'unique child' through responsive pedagogy and ongoing assessment (Welsh Government 2023e; Welsh Government, 2022a).

A defining characteristic of the Curriculum for Wales is how it rethinks assessment to support learning (Welsh Government, 2022e). According to Suitable Education (2019), the National Curriculum focuses on standardised testing and scores rather than on children. In contrast, the Curriculum for Wales recommends formative assessments or

assessment for learning (AFL), which supports practitioners to plan appropriate steps for individual children (Welsh Government, 2022c). This is effective in helping the 'unique child.'

Welsh Government (2021) adds that the Curriculum for Wales uses progression steps as development markers rather than targets and acknowledges that individuals may reach milestones at different times. Moreover, progression is viewed as the child's journey. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which states that children can achieve more with the right support and supports personalised learning through tailored interventions and feedback (McLeod,2025b).

In addition, the Curriculum for Wales encourages the use of 'pupil voice'. For example, children can share interests, reflect on their learning or work with friends to peer assess. This way, the children can set personal goals and contribute to their own direction for learning, which encourages pupil autonomy (Flutter,2024). This aligns with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF,2016).

The Curriculum for Wales adopts a child-led perspective, with formative assessment playing a key role in supporting children's progress. Instead of using summative assessments, this assessment for learning is implemented into everyday teaching and learning. Practitioners will use observational skills, questioning, and feedback to learn about the children's needs and adapt their approach accordingly (Welsh Government, no date; Gregory,2023). National Foundation for Education Research (2023) claims that assessment measures outcomes and informs practitioners about next steps. Practitioners can then provide feedback encouraging children to take responsibility for their learning (Early Years Consultant,2023).

Welsh Government (2022f) outlines three key reasons for assessment: supporting individuals on their learning journey, identifying the following steps, and understanding group progression. This aligns with the Curriculum for Wales' four purposes statements. To further support this, Fletcher-Wood (2018) adds that schools can design assessments to suit their children's needs and context, ensuring that formative

assessment is meaningful, inclusive and implemented in everyday learning experiences. Formative assessment in Wales can support a more profound understanding, child engagement and learner autonomy (Piland,2024; Knowles and Blandford,2017). Moreover, assessment for learning also focuses on how children are developing, rather than just measuring what they have achieved, thus aiming to ‘close the gap’ between the current area and what they would like to reach and achieve (Cambridge Assessment International Education,2011). This supports the Curriculum for Wales’ objective to produce ambitious, capable learners who can take responsibility for their progress.

The assessment for learning works well in the Curriculum for Wales because it links closely with the four purposes. According to Open a Nursery (2023), practitioners can use ongoing observations, questioning, and meaningful conversations to understand how children engage in learning. Additionally, meaningful feedback can help children recognise their strengths and plan the next steps. This can encourage the child to think and evaluate their learning, promoting resilience and a growth mindset (Mana Education, 2024). In addition, focusing on progression rather than outcomes allows the practitioner to meet the needs of the unique child more effectively whilst adapting the teaching to meet the needs of the individual, thus ensuring all children are supported to their individual needs (Open A Nursery,2023b).

However, while formative assessment is an important component of the Curriculum for Wales, it aims to support the development of the ‘unique child’. However, this may be brushed aside when practitioners are pressured to achieve outcomes or grades (The Exciting Teacher,2025). Furthermore, for formative assessment to work and support every unique child, it must be consistently implemented and embedded into everyday teaching and learning. PowerSchool (2023) argues that formative assessment has great strength in finding the important information required to check a child’s understanding. Moreover, this can support and feed into meeting standards for summative assessments when done correctly. Therefore, The Schools, Students and Teachers Network (2018) recommends embedding formative assessment practices through

continuous professional development and training to empower staff and children to collaborate effectively and meet the individual's unique needs.

Then, flexibility in the formative assessment within the Curriculum for Wales is to be considered. The flexibility has led to varied interpretation and implementation approaches, with practitioners still seeking guidance; the professional development offered is of variable quality (Evans,2023). Furthermore, without a shared approach to formative assessment, it may be that some children receive high-quality, timely feedback and support, whilst others might not. According to Schildamp *et al.* (2020), practitioners may struggle with formative assessment, with attempts to implement not used to their full potential. With this in mind, it can be argued further that staff's flexibility, professional experience, training, school expectations, and interpretation could be responsible. Yan *et al.* (2021) found that where policies supported formative assessment and provided relevant professional development for practitioners, they were more confident and willing to implement, particularly when the school and government supported it. Therefore, consistency throughout settings and professional development in formative assessment is recommended (Estyn,2022). With this in place, the enabling adult can support the unique child effectively and be confident in their practice and implementation.

It is well-known that teacher workload can impact implementing formative assessment (Griffin, 2024). Formative assessment requires practitioners to observe, reflect and be responsive to children during learning. Formatively assessing the unique child meaningfully can become difficult without giving enough time to the child or sitting with them while engaging in play, learning and having conversations (Learning Journals,2021). This would not meet the child's unique needs, especially where some children may require a more targeted approach. Furthermore, some children may not understand the feedback from formative assessment or how to use it to develop their learning (Feil,2021). This could be due to a language barrier, an impairment or a learning difficulty. So, the potential for the learner to develop the skills could be lost. Additionally, practitioners could believe that children understand because they are answering yes or no in all the right places. Therefore, supporting the unique child

means helping individuals develop by providing opportunities to progress, exploring through enhanced provisions and further assessing through observation to see if the children are using the learnt skills in other areas (Rosa,2021). Moreover, what might work for one child might not work for another. For example, a child may not respond to a conversation or feedback but may go off and draw a detailed picture of what they have been learning, showing expression, and understanding (Deguara and Nutbrown,2017). Considering this, practitioners must think outside the box to tailor assessment to suit the unique child's needs.

In conclusion, the Curriculum for Wales places the unique child at the centre of their learning journey. The Curriculum for Wales is designed to allow each child to develop in their own way and at their own pace, encouraging personalised learning through formative assessment and responsive practitioners. Influenced by theorists such as Froebel and Vygotsky, and in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the curriculum for Wales values pupil voice, autonomy, and holistic development. However, effective implementation pivots on consistent practitioner training and adequate time and support. While challenges exist, such as workload, inconsistent approaches, and varying professional development quality and implementation, continuous commitment to reflective practice and inclusive assessment is important. When done well, formative assessment empowers practitioners to understand, support, and celebrate children's individuality. This meets the goal of nurturing ambitious, capable learners confident in their unique learning journey.

Section 3- Blog

Outdoor Learning – What is all the fuss about?

Robb (2023) claims that outdoor learning allows for hands-on experiences in nature that promote exploration, skill-building, and personal growth. Direct engagement with the outdoor environment supports lasting learning and benefits individuals, society, and the planet. According to

Janelle (2024), Froebel emphasised the value of nature and outdoor play, believing that direct contact with the natural world is essential for children's physical,



emotional, and intellectual development. Furthermore, Twinkl (no date) states that many of Froebel's ideas still influence education today. For example, the Curriculum for Wales supports and encourages outdoor learning. The curriculum for Wales recognises and understands the benefits of learning outside and includes it as a pedagogical approach to provide children of all ages with authentic indoor and outdoor learning opportunities, emphasising the value of hands-on opportunities (Williams, 2022; Edwards, 2022; Senedd Cymru, no date). Moreover, Welsh Government (2023f) adds that building a connection with nature helps children develop empathy for the environment and understand their impact on it. Exploring the outdoors can also introduce sustainability and foster a sense of place, from local surroundings within Wales and the wider world.

How do practitioners support outdoor learning?



Ellis *et al.* (2024) suggest that practitioners support outdoor learning in Wales by creating engaging, well-planned outdoor environments, integrating outdoor experiences into the curriculum, and promoting a culture of outdoor learning within their setting. This includes providing opportunities for children to engage in free play, explore their interests, and develop skills through various outdoor activities. For

example, these could be planting flowers, mud play or using natural materials to create a picture (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2020).

According to the Welsh Government (2023e), adults play an important role in supporting learning and development. The enabling adults should demonstrate a happy, motivated attitude to learning, using the children's curiosity to create valuable teaching moments and encouraging confidence and risk-taking. Enabling adults create effective learning environments. In addition to this, Vygotsky's (1978) theory discusses the importance of children's interaction with the environment and their peers. Furthermore, learning is developed through social interaction and scaffolding from a more knowledgeable other person (Little Scholars, 2023). Morgan (2023) states that promoting exploration and healthy risk-taking in the outdoors is another important aspect of the practitioner's role. This is not to expose children to danger but rather to encourage and support children in safely testing their limits in a controlled environment. Such experiences can remarkably increase physical development, confidence, and problem-solving skills.



What about Forest school?

Higgins (2021) suggests that Forest School was designed to remove children from the traditional classroom settings where they are expected to sit at desks and complete work. For some children, a classroom-based teaching approach can hinder engagement. By placing children in rich outdoor environments, they can take responsibility for their own exploration and be motivated to learn through trial and error. Furthermore, this supports STEM by integrating the outdoors with hands-on experiences. This fosters independence, encourages creative thinking, promotes healthy risk-taking, and provides valuable real-life experiences that may be absent from conventional education (Adventure Education Solutions, 2018). Knight et al. (2023) state that Forest School is a socially constructed approach to outdoor education influenced by Vygotsky's social constructivist experiential learning theory. Elite Forest School (2022) states that since it arrived in the UK in 1993, Forest School has consistently grown in strength, promoting holistic, child-centred learning in the natural outdoor environment. Worsley (2024) adds that children engage in various outdoor activities, such as observing and learning about plants and the natural world, climbing, building, and imaginative play (Berg, 2025), skill development, building shelters, using tools, and lighting campfires (Outdoor Owls, 2024). Maria Montessori strongly supported the outdoors as it offers rich and endless opportunities while reducing anxiety and promoting positive mental health and well-being (Montessori Partnership, 2021).

Barriers to Outdoor Learning

Education Scotland (2024) states that outdoor learning can benefit individuals of all ages and abilities, providing opportunities for physical activity, engagement with nature, and enhanced learning experiences. However, some children may find outdoor learning challenging. This can be for many



reasons, such as the natural world being a rich source of sensory stimuli, which can be overwhelming for some individuals, particularly those with sensory sensitivities or not used to such an environment (Hirstwood,2023). Additionally, Edwards (2023) states that some children may dislike or fear becoming dirty or dislike touching things that can make them dirty. Furthermore, planning and implementing outdoor learning activities can come with obstacles, thus requiring careful planning for safety, weather, and accessibility.

These barriers can be overcome when practitioners utilise visual timetables, noise-cancelling headphones, and quiet zones to reduce stress and support positive, inclusive learning experiences indoors or outdoors (Rappaport,2024). Importantly, effective planning and preparation, such as risk assessments, an increased adult-to-child ratio, activity accessibility, and positive staff attitudes, can help eliminate these barriers to outdoor learning, ensuring inclusivity (Early Years Alliance,2023; Love Outdoor Learning,2025; Kelly, Sharpe, and Fotou,2022).

Well, you can keep your wellies on!



Outdoor learning provides an important educational approach that supports children's holistic development by fostering physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth. Moreover, it can positively impact children's and practitioners' mental health and well-being (HFL Education, 2024). Thrive

Childcare and Education (2025) agrees that exploring nature can encourage curiosity, creativity, and resilience, supporting children to develop empathy and a deeper connection to the environment and the natural world. Whilst some educational theories are integrated into modern curricula, Asher (2024) says outdoor learning offers hands-on experiences that complement traditional classroom teaching and promote lifelong skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and healthy risk-taking. Barriers such as sensory differences, weather, and safety concerns can create challenges. However, these can be mitigated through thoughtful planning, inclusive strategies, and supportive practitioner roles (Seeberger, 2024). By creating engaging and accessible outdoor environments, educators enable all children to benefit from authentic learning experiences that enhance well-being and nurture a sense of place within their local surroundings and beyond (Brodie, 2024). Ron (2024) adds that outdoor learning enriches individual growth and fosters responsible environmental stewardship, preparing children to thrive personally and contribute positively to society and the planet.

Thank you for Reading

Further Reading

Embracing the Great Outdoors: The Transformative Power of Nature-Based Learning
Embracing the Great Outdoors: The Transformative Power of Nature-Based Learning |
Pepper Pot (Ron, 2024)

The Outdoor Classroom (The Outdoor Classroom, 2025)

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