

Section 1

'The Curriculum for Wales is the cornerstone of Wales efforts to shape an education system led by commonly defined, learner-centred purposes' (OECD iLibrary, 2022). The new curriculum is enclosed in Education in Wales: Our National Mission plan which sets out proposals that need to be taken into action in settings, aligned with the system of Education (OECD iLibrary, 2022, Welsh Government, 2019a and Welsh Government, no date). As stated by Welsh Government (2019a) the new curriculum will affect non-maintained settings and schools, these settings must be able to provide a comprehensive and stable curriculum that has been designed by them ensuring that all the six areas of learning are shown throughout children's learning experiences. Furthermore, the OECD iLibrary (2022) points out, that the new curriculum is built around four purposes that aim to help develop and encourage the holistic learning of all children making sure that the children's wellbeing and needs are at core providing them with the support to achieve their own goals and ambitions (Welsh Government, 2020).

There is no certain definition of the term 'play' as it is different for everyone (Else, 2014, p.4 and McInness et al, 2013 and Waters, 2015, pg. 9) and can sometimes be hard to define as the 'traditional definitions' are normally based on observations made on play by the practitioner (McInness et al, 2013). Play has been significant in early years education by being definitively embedded in many school curriculums (McInness et al, 2013). As stated by McInnes et al (2011) play is vital in the educational development of children in early years and is also a crucial part in children's holistic development (O'Leary, 2021). O'Leary (2021) suggests that, through play children can explore the world around them developing new understandings of both natural and social environments. Maria Montessori believed that through child-led play children would be more engaging and motivated to be curious and creative with their activities (American Montessori Society, no date). It is essential for play to be both child-initiated and adult-led as an effective pedagogy (McInness et al, 2011 and Siraj Blathchford et al, 2002) as it encourages both the children and practitioner to interact effectively supporting children to stretch their thinking as learners (O'Leary, 2021). According to

McInness et al (2013) and Siraj-Blathchford (2002) findings from the REPEY project suggest that activities that are led by the child will allow them to develop their knowledge and understanding especially when practitioners are taking part by engaging and interacting, providing children with the opportunity to develop their own activities, which can be done by asking questions. McInness et al (2013) states that, according to past studies children can independently differentiate what activities they believe are play and which ones are not. Children need to be offered the opportunity to play freely ensuring that encouragement is provided for them to problem solve, explore and experiment independently (Welsh Government, 2015a). Having said that, Drew (2021) explains that practitioners need to ensure that a rich environment (O'Leary, 2021) with valuable resources and materials can challenge children's learning, within the settings environment for child-led play and education to occur. Jean Piaget believed that children are intrigued and curious about their environment and the ability that they have to interact with it, in which he stated is when children's learning can take place (Aubrey and Riley, 2019, p. 42-43), however, this will only happen when children develop their own knowledge and understanding through meaningful experiences and schemas (Aubrey and Riley, 2019, p. 43).

The Foundation Phase is a policy conducted by the Welsh government in early years education which concentrates on children aged 3-7 years (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 1). It focuses on a play-based approach to teaching and learning where children can experiment and develop knowledge and understanding through play (Taylor et al, 2016). As pointed out by Waters (2015) the Foundation Phase set out a requirement that settings must have a balanced learning structure of child-initiated activities as well as adult led. According to Nursery World (2014) the government provided funding for research where numerous reports were conducted on the effectiveness of the curriculum and how it affected children's learning, the number of child observations taking place by the practitioners and child-initiated play both indoors and outdoors (Nursery World, 2014). The Stocktake report focused on how the Foundation Phase was being implemented in Wales and considered looking in depth at ways in which certain aspects could influence futures policies (Welsh Government 2013 - 2014, pg. 1). Welsh Government (2013 - 2014) states that, the pedagogy and practise applied

within the Foundation Phase curriculum has shown a positive influence on the performance practitioners have provided to children and their families showing an improvement in the quality of their provision. However, The Stocktake report also indicates that, this can only be done effectively if schools and non-funded settings allow a necessary change in their culture (Welsh Government, 2013- 2014, pg. 3). Welsh Government (2013 – 2014) states that, the Foundation Phase emphasized on a reasonable 1:8 staff to child ratio (Thomas and Lewis (2019) in reception and 1:15 staff to child ratio in year 1 and 2 (Welsh Government, 2013 – 2014, pg. 11). However, as presented in the Evaluation of the Foundation Phase: Final report there was evidence that suggested that over 45 % of settings researched were not meeting the 1:8 staff ratio in 3 – 5 class settings, while 90.5 % of settings were however meeting the 1:15 adult to child ratio in years one (Welsh Government, 2015b, pg. 31- 32). This is not in the spirit of the Foundation Phase and may negatively impact on delivering a play culture if the adult numbers are not in ratio.

The Evaluation of the Foundation Phase: final report also points out that, one of the aims of the foundation phase was for children to be provided with learning experiences in which they showed independency with their own play activities (Welsh Government, 2015b, pg. 57). Yet as stated by the Welsh government (2015b) nursery practitioners often said that they thought the children were too young to help plan their involvement with certain activities as they believed a certain curriculum should be followed.

Furthermore, as presented by the Welsh Government (2013 – 2014) Siraj- Blatchford (2006) expressed that the first two years of the Foundation Phase being implemented, research found that teaching and learning showed an increase in schools compared to non-funded settings as practitioners were more probable to nurture children's intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. Positive findings were shown in The Stocktake report as evidence showed a positive impact on children's educational experiences and opportunities for their learning as well as an improved educational environment was provided (Welsh Government, 2013 – 2014, pg. 12). However, according to Siraj-Blatchford (2006) towards the end of the research there was a decrease in the literacy and interaction of children and practitioners acknowledged it was due less planning for each child's individual needs as well as there was a difficulty

in understanding the meaning of 'play and experiential pedagogy' between each individual practitioner (Welsh Government, 2013 – 2014, pg. 12 and Waters, 2015, pg. 9). As presented by the Welsh government (2015b) practitioners pointed out that, they found the recommendations and documentation too extensive to read and interpret making it difficult for them to familiarise themselves with the new guidance. Practitioners also commented on the difficulty in understanding certain terminology as the guidance provided was very vague in particular areas, making it harder for them to implement certain pedagogical structures as they felt anxious with an uncertainty of whether they were implementing it correctly (Welsh Government, 2015b, pg. 40 and Waters, 2015, pg. 6). Waters (2015) argues that if practitioners and other members of staff are offered the correct support and time to review changes of new underpinning guidance's for practise this would be less likely to happen. Waters (2015) Foundation Phase Evaluation: Final report (2015) and The Stocktake report (2013 - 2014) indicate that training should be provided for practitioners and all adults who take part with the settings decision making to further their knowledge and understanding in new guidance's. However, Waters (2015) does state that new pedagogical guidance needs to be shown and not just implied as practitioners are more likely to be involved in why certain aspects of their practise will impact or affect children's learning and holistic development.

Waters (2015) makes it clear that with the new curriculum being undertaken in Wales followed from the Donaldson report (2015) the new changes within the system for all school and non-funded settings in Wales will need to be aware that correct leadership and management will still need to focus on ensuring that the pedagogy of the Foundation Phase is still upheld (Waters, 2015, pg. 17).

Section 2

It is important for children to always be positioned at the heart of all learning experiences where an up-to-date approach is set into place to support their learning and development through different observations and assessments (Unique child, no date). Iporter (2021) indicates that, celebrating children's uniqueness provides young children with the self-confidence and self-esteem to overcome any obstacles they may face in the future.

Babies and children all developmentally mature in their learning at their own pace in their own unique way (Early Years matters, 2022a and Thomson, 2015a) and all areas of their learning and holistic development are equally significant and inter-linked (Unique child, no date). As pointed out by Iporter (2021) both parents and practitioners must be aware that not all approaches will work the same for all children, this is where guidance's and methods will need to be improved so that the needs of all children are being met. Trevarthen et al (2018) states that, if children are met with affection, nurture, and respect they will be able to develop their emotional and social skills where they will want to form relationships with other children and adults. As all children are born with different emotional needs and if they are left unattended children will have a difficulty in showing their feelings and emotions as they get older (Trevarthen et al, 2018).

Thomson (2015b) points out that, for some children who attend a setting it can be an unexpected new experience which can be a puzzling process for them. This can happen due to a range of differences in the setting compared to their home environment (Thomson, 2015b), for example, rules and routines will be greatly different compared to home. On some occasions children's culture may also be an effect of this, as the background, beliefs, and values of their family in which they have also been brought up with, can impact the way they perceive new environments (Alsubaie, 2015, pg. 86). As presented by Alsubaie (2015) some practitioners may be used to supporting children who have similar views and background culture as them and may have a difficulty in providing the correct support and learning for children who

are from a different culture. This can negatively impact the learning development of children therefore training on how practitioners can develop their knowledge in providing the correct assistance for these children should be provided (Alsubaie, 2015, pg. 86-87). Sometimes staff can become worried in reaching government guidelines for children's learning which can affect how they plan and implement their practise (Thomson, 2015a) as stated by the Department of Education (2021) the curriculum is planned effectively for all children's milestones to develop and learn. Alsubaie (2015) suggests that methods of teaching should be able to play a significant role in supporting the growth of children's confidence and development in a classroom with multicultural children. This can be done through creating different activities both indoors and outdoors ensuring that all children can positively interact with one another allowing them to become aware of different cultures (Alsubaie, 2015, pg. 88). The environment children play in is a key role to extending and supporting their learning (Unique child, no date). John Dewy also believed that the views of the child will change depending on learning experiences and interests due to the involvement they have with the environment around them (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). According to Aubrey and Riley (2019) Vygotsky's suggests that children copy the way the adults portray themselves during play to make different opportunities for their learning, developing their imagination and recognising the role of the practitioner through the re-enactment of play. However, learning through play and through school should be looked at as equally important as one another as they both generate a zone of approximal development as stated by Vygotsky (Aubrey and Riley, 2019) in which he argued that children's social background and culture played a critical role in the way they saw and thought about the world around them developing through internalisation and communication (Aubrey and Riley, 2019, pg. 58-59).

The social constructivism theory emphasizes on how important both social environment and interactions are for children's development (Topciu, 2015) in helping to create an understanding of their environment (Beaumie, 2001). Beaumie (2001) suggests that, through social constructivism children can create an understanding and meaning of certain objects through an expressive learning environment. Another approach that also follows the social constructivist framework is the Reggio Emilia

approach (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). This approach believes that every child has a desire to interact with others, participate in their learning and create some form of connection with the environment around them (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). As presented by Gardner and Jones (2016) the Reggio Emilia Approach believes the child is the main focus towards their learning process and should be treated with value and respect. This approach focuses on learning environments with an open space that has a variety of choices and resources the children can easily access on a daily basis allowing them to develop their exploration skills and knowledge, letting them grow independently as learners (Gardner and Jones, 2016, pg. 607). These materials and resources are provided by practitioners. As stated by Gardner and Jones (2016) in a Reggio Emilia classroom both the teacher and student will listen to each other's views and opinions, and will both come to terms with certain decisions that will effectively impact the child's learning. However, it is important to note that not all children will effectively learn from this approach as they may feel more comfortable in a structured environment where activities to learning are set by the practitioners (Goodwin University, 2019). This is the way in which Reggio Emilia approaches their method towards the play curricula.

According to Tierney (2013) 'the fairness of assessment is less readily assumed and far more continuous in practise'. Different methods of assessment show a growing interest in the pedagogical potential that children have through formative assessment (Tierney, 2013). However, Tierney (2013) does state that, even though practitioners try to be as fair as possible during their assessments everybody interprets fairness differently. If practitioners need additional training on how to effectively assess children, it is the settings responsibility to ensure that support is given (Steiner Waldorf Education, no date). Early years matters (2022a) point out that, there are two main types of assessments in early years. There is a formative assessment which is done daily in settings by the practitioner's, this form of assessment helps to decide and determine what the child has learned and can do and how we can help to improve their future learning and development (Early Years Matters, 2022a). The second type of assessment is recognised as summative assessment and takes place when children are between 24 and 36 months. This type of assessment is pre-recorded, and the information can be used by practitioners and parents to identify the strengths as

well as the learning needs of children (Early Years Matters, 2022a). Settings must ensure that children are being observed regularly to guarantee that they are making progress in their learning (Steiner Waldorf Education, no date). Steiner Waldorf education (no date) makes a clear point that it is normally expected that practitioners will interact and contribute during the observation process to create a clearer understanding of the children's learning. When observing children, it is essential to monitor children's development regularly to ensure that their milestones are on track for their age (Centres for disease control and prevention, no date) as milestones can provide an explanation to certain behaviours the child may have (Learn the signs act early, no date). It is stated by Learn the signs act early (no date) that one of the best ways to track children's learning development is through tracking their milestones as they offer important cues in the health and well-being of children. As presented by the Welsh Government (2022) the Foundation Phase undertakes a statutory standard assessment for children in early years at the beginning of primary school. This is used so that practitioners can conclude children interests and development stage in line with the foundation phase framework (Welsh Government, 2022). The aim of the foundation phase framework in doing this is to ensure that children are achieving an expected outcome in their development by a certain age (Welsh Government, 2022) for example, as presented in chart 1 of the Welsh Government (2022) page 46.5% of children achieved the expected outcome two in their mathematical development compared to 45.6% of the children who achieved outcome one and below (Welsh Government, 2022). In contrast to the Foundation Phase framework the Reggio Emilia approach does not have statutory assessments as they mainly focus on children interests allowing their learning to be child-led with the support and guidance from practitioners to lead them in the right direction supporting their learning and creativity (Bartram Academy, 2022).

As presented throughout section two the environment in which children learn in will sculpture their knowledge and development. It is essential for settings to offer children an effective play-based curricula where they can learn through experiences as a way to discover themselves and their interests (Abington Friends School, 2021).

Section 3

What is the importance of an outdoor environment, and how will it provide for risk and challenge to be enabling environments?

There is no question on the importance of outdoor play and its benefits for children's learning and development in early years. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child reinforces the importance of this by stating that all children have the right to play and participate in a variety of play activities (UNICEF, 2019) that offers them with unique learning experiences and developing opportunities (Arlemalm-Hagser and Elliot, 2021). The Foundation Phase curriculum (2015) aims to achieve that all children should be provided with the opportunity to play outdoors, being encouraged by practitioners to problem solve, explore, and experiment in finding out answers to questions they may have. Froebel's theory and the Forest school approach both compliment the guidance of the Foundation Phase regarding the importance of outdoor learning (Foundation Phase Handbook, 2009).

The atmosphere in which children are surrounded by has a significant role in their learning and shapes the way in which they behave, learn, and treat the environment around them (Elsevier, 2013, pg. 846). When children can play outside, they get to explore their physical skills in different ways, for example, they are able to jump, climb and have fun with the world around them all while learning. Learning in the outdoors is seen as a tool for teaching and learning, as it presents the opportunities for children to understand that this can be applied in the real world (Waite, 2017).

Research makes clear statements that the children learn best through outdoor involvements and having an outdoor space that will provide them with different opportunities which they can gain a variety of cultural and environmental experiences (Elsevier, 2013 and Waite, 2017). All children should be offered the opportunity to play outside on a daily basis regardless of the weather as the outdoors provides them with the opportunity to run around and move without the restrictions of an indoor classroom (Early Years Matters, 2022b). By doing this children will become confident learners as

they will be offered more opportunities to problem solve, be creative and play with other children developing social and emotional skills (Early Years Matters, 2022b).

The Foundation Phase outdoor learning handbook (2009) is clear in suggesting that a well-planned and resourceful environment will be able to support child led play effectively through a variety of resources to support their learning both indoors and outdoors. The thought process that goes into the provision planning for the outdoors needs to be as effective as the planning for the indoors as they both help develop children's learning (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009).

Children are naturally curious about their environment and will want to explore and try to understand the world around them through challenges and risks as this is a way for them to extend their own abilities as learners (Gill, no date, pg. 4).

Risk taking is fundamental learning for all children as it allows them to develop new skills as well as behaviours, letting them test their limits in new activities within the environment (Little, 2010). As stated by the Foundation Phase outdoor learning handbook (2009) having the correct planning provision allows children to take the appropriate measures in risk and challenges within their play. Having the ability to assess risks and challenges while outweighing the negative outcomes that may occur in certain situations is a beneficial skill for all children to have throughout life (Little, 2010).

No matter, the background or culture of children it is important for them to take risks physically and emotionally and to challenge themselves as learners. It may be evident that risk and play is different for all children, with what one child believes to be a challenging activity may be easier for another, yet it is still important that all children can explore and experience their own limits as learners, developing their capability (Play matters, no date).

However, as practitioners we must never try to limit challenging and risky experiences for children during outdoor activities as we would be taking away valuable learning from them, which can future wise result with them being less safe during activities as they would have not learned how different movements can result in a negative outcome (Play matters, no date). The Foundation Phase outdoor learning handbook (2009) does also state that, it is important for the outdoor environment to have risks

that children can manage as a way to help them develop and learn to evaluate different situations, but it does not mean that all risk is safe and correct planning provision needs to be implemented (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009), for example, practitioners should ensure that they allow children to watch them demonstrate and explain certain safety aspects that need to be considered in the outdoor environment.

Will this be supported by the New Curriculum in Wales?

The New Curriculum in Wales has an increased suppleness capability where practitioners will be able to plan certain areas of the curriculum around each child's individual needs (Power, 2020) allowing them to plan even more effectively to support the learning and development of all learners. There are four main purposes which all settings will need to follow as they enable all learners to effectively develop in all areas. By having the new areas of learning and experience presented by the new curriculum children are able to explore, be creative and problem solve both indoors and outdoors with sufficient risk and challenges being offered to them. For example, as shown by the Welsh government (2019b) through science and technology children can explore the world around them by being curious learners searching for their own answers independently which can sometimes involve both risk and challenges.

It is evident the play and risk are essential for children's learning and development and will be able to be carried on through the new curriculum's implementation.

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