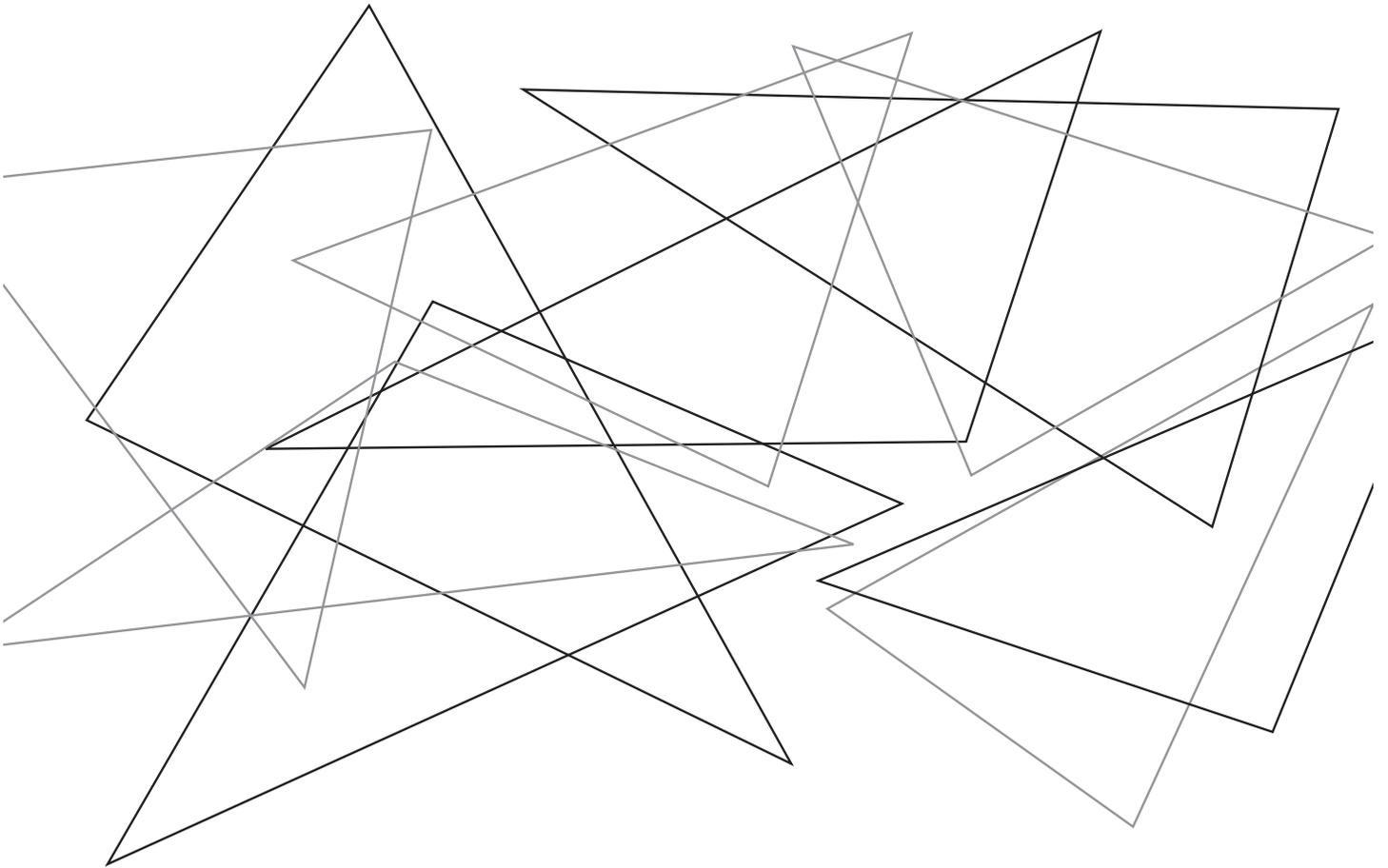


TEACHING EARLY YEARS



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM UK EARLY YEARS CURRICULA?

Claire Pescott

Reading this chapter will help you to understand the importance and relevance of utilising a curriculum framework and how this will impact on the quality of provision provided in Early Years settings. This chapter focuses on an overview of curriculum frameworks currently operating in the UK. Each of the four curricula will be presented: the Foundation Phase in Wales, the Early Years Foundation Stage in England, Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland and the Foundation Stage in Northern Ireland. Each curriculum will be explained briefly and a commonality between them considered. Utilising the Foundation Phase (Wales) as an example, an exploration of planning, the importance of learning through play and links to theory will demonstrate how learning, teaching and assessment are derived from frameworks and adapted to suit the needs of Early Years pupils. A case study will demonstrate the integral role of effective planning to support a child's developmental requirements. Using and interpreting a curriculum is crucial to the successful implementation of the teaching, learning and assessment processes within any country's educational system (Boyle and Charles, 2016). Understanding the implications of this and the intrinsic nature of the three components of learning, teaching and assessment is essential for all practitioners working within the Early Years.

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In this chapter you will:

- Examine and explore UK curricula
- Look at the Foundation Phase as an example of UK curricula
- Explore international perspectives in relation to UK curricula
- Appreciate a curriculum as a framework for planning, observation and assessment

Key words

curricula, curriculum, pedagogy, framework, assessment, planning, holistic, experiential, teaching, learning, differentiation, play

Theoretical perspectives

Pedagogy versus curriculum

There is often some confusion between the terms ‘pedagogy’ and ‘curriculum’ and they are sometimes incorrectly used interchangeably. In simplistic terms, ‘pedagogy’ refers to the art or the science of teaching (Allen and Whalley, 2010), the mechanics or process that underpins it. It can also be viewed as a cohesive entity of theory and practice that draws on philosophy, psychology and social science (Cameron, 2006). It is fundamentally the process itself of learning and teaching and the systems that are in place to facilitate this. A curriculum is essentially a framework, a guide to be utilised and implemented in a practical way. Practitioners would agree that it is essential to follow and implement a curriculum when teaching the Early Years; this ensures the necessary breadth and coverage of different areas of learning, and it considers progression, differentiation and assessment with, ideally, a cohesive, holistic approach. Curriculum models for Early Years reflect varying beliefs and values that underpin the pedagogy, with play being the common denominator between each of the four UK curricula being examined. The juxtaposition of the approach is apparent with practitioners having an ethical and professional responsibility to interpret the framework and make subsequent informed decisions as well as the children’s response to this, which is dependent on a multi-faceted dimension of diversity, e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, social class and additional or special needs (Wood, 2013).

Table 2.1 illustrates the policy frameworks in the UK (Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland) and their stance on play and curriculum content.

UK curricula

As portrayed in Table 2.1, there are parallels between the UK curricula in terms of areas of learning, implementation of assessment and the overarching emphasis of play being central to Early Years learning and teaching. The age ranges for each curriculum are wide-ranging, with the EYFS (England) (DfE, 2014) commencing at birth and the Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland) being longitudinal in nature (up to 18 years). Although Wales has a separate curriculum for Early Years (3–7 years), this will be changing imminently; *A Curriculum for Wales – A Curriculum for Life* will be piloted from 2018 and will adopt a cross key stages approach from 3 to 16 years. Each curriculum has areas of learning rather than distinct and separate subjects, and whilst they have different titles, similarities occur with an emphasis on personal development, and literacy and numeracy. In Wales, a Welsh Development component is additional to reflect the bilingual culture.

The philosophy of play is a distinctive feature of all UK curricula and consequently demonstrates the importance of this approach to children's development. The four UK frameworks have their own version of what constitutes 'educational play' but it can be seen as an approach in school settings across the country. In Scotland play is integral to the Early Years curriculum and teachers are advised to create an environment that provides rich play opportunities to meet the needs of young children (Education Scotland, 2016). Similarly, for Northern Ireland, a stipulation is made to ensure that play is the adopted approach for academic and social development. The Foundation Stage in England also emphasises the importance of the play environment but also acknowledges that each child is unique and practitioners need to get to know each individual child (Palaiologou, 2016). Likewise, a play-based approach and active learning is advocated in Wales and is fundamental to the Foundation Phase (Wood, 2013). The importance of this notion being understood by all stakeholders is also validated as an essential component of this curriculum as well as a mix of adult-led and child-initiated play (WAG, 2008b). However, it is important to note that the rhetoric and reality of play is an issue across all UK curricula and more formalised and didactic approaches are becoming common practice.

Assessment is a key difference between the UK curricula: in England, children have the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile completed by the end of Reception (though this is under review at time of writing), a phonics

Table 2.1 UK curricula

	Wales	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Government department	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)	Department for Education (DfE)	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)	Education Scotland
Policy name	Foundation Phase	Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	Foundation Stage	Curriculum for Excellence
Age range	3–7 years	Birth to 5 years	4–6 years	3–18 years
Areas of Learning	Seven areas of learning: Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity; Language, Literacy and Communication; Mathematical Development; Welsh Language Development; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development; Creative Development	Seven areas of learning: Prime areas: Communication and Language; Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development Specific areas: Literacy; Mathematics; Understanding the World; Expressive Arts and Design	Seven areas of learning: Religious Education; Language and Literacy; Mathematics and Numeracy; The Arts; The World Around Us; Personal Development and Mutual Understanding; Physical Development and Movement	Eight areas of learning: Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being; Languages; Mathematics; Religious and Moral Education; Sciences; Social Sciences; Technologies
Assessment	Teacher assessment of Foundation Phase outcomes at age 7 National Testing (Year 2)	Integrated Review at 2–2.5 years Assessment at the end of the EYFS – the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)	Ongoing teacher assessment and observation; The Pupil Profile the statutory means of reporting to parents	Ongoing teacher assessment
Philosophy of Play	Learning through play is integral. Play should be planned for in an enabling environment with structured tasks implemented to support stages of development	The emphasis of the curriculum is through play, it must be planned for and purposeful. A mix of child led and adult led activities advocated	The majority of the learning children experience should be through well-planned and challenging play	Active learning which facilitates children's thinking using real-life and imaginary situations and play scenarios. Reggio Emilia approach also drawn upon

screening test at the end of Year 1 and SATs in Year 2. In Scotland, general screening takes place in P1 (Reception) to assess children's ability on starting school. There are standardised assessments in reading, maths and spelling every year from P2 (Year 2). In Wales, children take national Reading and Numeracy tests at Year 2; this has caused much controversy as to whether this is conducive to a play-based curriculum (Thomas and Lewis, 2016). In Northern Ireland, the biggest difference occurs with children being assessed every year through teacher assessment and planned tasks and activities rather than formalised tests.

A focus on the curriculum framework in Wales: The Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase (Wales) is a play-based pedagogy; it is based on a holistic approach that encompasses a thematic, child-centred way of learning – theoretically children are taught at 'stage not age', however children are separated into year groups from Nursery to Year 2. There is an emphasis on outdoor learning and an experiential, hands-on exploratory methodology (WAG, 2008a). At the time of inception, the Foundation Phase framework was seen as a radical paradigm shift away from a more formal, didactic way of teaching to a curriculum that included both children's and adults' contribution to a shared learning experience (Waters, 2016). The Foundation Phase has seven Areas of Learning: Personal and Social Development; Well-being and Cultural Diversity; Language, Literacy and Communication Skills; Mathematical Development; Welsh Language Development; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development; Creative Development (WAG, 2008a). It is based on what the child can do, generated by their prerequisites and tailored to suit their individual needs; it is not a 'deficit' model (WAG, 2008a).

Linking the Foundation Phase to theory

As well as drawing inspiration from international curricula, the Foundation Phase has evolved from a sound theoretical standpoint; traditional and contemporary theorists have had an influence on its conception. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory postulates a prominence on aspects of learning that require real-life experiential learning and the assumption that the quality of a child's social and cultural relationships is deemed crucial to their development (Gray and MacBlain, 2016). An enabling environment that encourages collaboration, sharing and joint problem-solving is also

conducive to development. There is also a need for 'Focused Tasks' and specific teaching and learning activities facilitated by a qualified practitioner, the term that Vygotsky quantified as the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) – the area of potential growth that is just beyond, yet in reach of, the child's current capabilities (Andrews, 2012). This requires facilitation and careful planning as well as observations of the child's stage of development. Children in Early Years settings do not develop solitarily; they learn from each other, through speaking, playing and imitating – coined by Vygotsky as from the 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO). This is exemplified in practice when children extend their own and others' play by adding extra resources, discussing possible outcomes, supporting, helping and creating imaginary scenarios with each other.

Likewise, Piaget's constructivist theory proposed that children were active participants who construct their own learning and consequently adults should create environments that support, facilitate and generate this (Crowley, 2017). Furthermore, although his work predominantly concentrated on cognitive growth and four stages of cognitive development (from the sensorimotor stage to the formal operational stage), he ascertained that play and natural discovery were essential components in this which would facilitate the development into a higher platform of learning where rules and more complicated systems could be applied (Whitebread, 2012). This is demonstrated in the Foundation Phase where the Continuous and Enhanced Provision are emphasised in the curriculum to allow for open-ended activities and more sustained periods of uninterrupted play and experiential learning.

Piaget (as well as other theorists such as Froebel, Steiner and Montessori) used the term 'schema' or 'schematic play' to encapsulate the cognitive and mental representation a child develops as they experience new concepts; it is repeatable actions that lead to logical systematic classifications and categories (Athey, 2007). Likewise, Bruce (2011) ascertains that schemas allow another perspective and an alternative view for practitioners to meet the child's individual learning needs. There are different types of schematic play that can be observed in Early Years settings: Transporting, Trajectory, Rotation, Connecting, Enclosing, Positioning, Enveloping and Orientation. An example of a 'Transporting schema' is a child who continually moves items from one place to another, e.g. carries blocks from the construction area into the role play area or carries sand into the water tray. However, as Thomas and Lewis (2016) highlight, there is very little reference made to schemas in Foundation Phase documentation and there appears to be minimal training available for Foundation Phase practitioners on this aspect of theory. In light of this many practitioners are not making the crucial links between schemas,

enabling environments and the importance it has for holistic learning and development and, as exemplified by the ‘Transporting schema’, will often prevent and actively discourage children from doing this.

Influences of International Curricula – Reggio Emilia/Te Whāriki

The premise of play being integral to learning in Early Years is concurrent with all four curricula of the UK. Rhetoric, policy and pedagogy in this country do not appear in isolation; influences have been drawn upon from other international perspectives and this continues to evolve. Two approaches will now be briefly considered: the Reggio Emilia approach (Italy) and Te Whāriki (New Zealand), which both demonstrate elements that have been adopted by UK curricula.

The Reggio Emilia approach

This concept was founded by Loris Malaguzzi in 1963 following the assumption that a more innovative approach to learning was required post World War II to promote ethical and independent learners. This approach has accomplished international acknowledgment and the ethos and democratic pedagogy that are centred on child–adult engagement are respected in conjunction with the curriculum provision and the emphasis on creative arts (Wood, 2013). The emphasis of this approach is synonymous with a multi-modal pedagogy and its ‘One Hundred Languages of Children’ tantamount to a stimulus to consider how children can be heard and how they can express themselves (Edwards et al., 2011). The empowerment of children is fostered in a creative way and learning is encouraged and facilitated through drawing, drama, music, painting and dance as well as play. The child is very much at the centre of this curriculum philosophy, with assessment and evaluation based on their needs. Children’s work is primarily documented through photographs/videos, with the teacher adopting the role of researcher and their artwork (untouched by practitioners) is displayed with prominence in the settings (Luff, 2012). The environment is typified by a spacious and natural backdrop, with easy access to natural and recycled resources, often with mirrors to reflect light and promote a natural inquisition into perspective and form (Thornton and Brunton, 2007).

Parallels can be drawn with UK curricula, especially in regard to advocating a more holistic and thematic approach, viewing the child as central to the curriculum and the strong emphasis on the learner’s individual needs. An enabling environment, the endorsement of learning through purposeful

play and easy access to resources so that children can take a 'lead' in their own learning echo the Reggio approach. Also, the collaborative partnership emphasised by UK Early Years curricula between adults and children and the facilitation of experiential learning rather than an imparting of knowledge can be identified as a similarity (Soler and Miller, 2003).

In contrast, Wood (2013) emphasises that the Reggio model of delivery is steeped in the belief and overarching principles that are intrinsically bound by the communities and families that are involved. Likewise, Thomas and Lewis (2016) suggest that although practitioners in the UK may wish to advocate this philosophy, their attitudes and facilitation of creativity and play tend to have more dominance and control than the *Atelierista* (specialist art practitioner) in the Reggio approach. This is typified in UK settings particularly when the creative work of children is seen as formulaic or bound by rules of colour and shape, rather than a true representation of the child's self or work. Displays of children's painting can be extremely generic and are evidently not based on observation or a symbolic thought but rather the guidance, colours and instruction given by the practitioner.

The 'Te Whāriki' approach

The New Zealand perspective is metaphorically linked to the conceptualisation of the 'woven mat' or *whāriki* which is drawn from the principles (such as family/community and relationships), goals, learning outcomes and strands (e.g. belonging, well-being, communication) that are intrinsically connected (Wood, 2013). Concurrently, the importance of Māori tradition and cultural heritage is emphasised and adapted within different settings to reflect the multicultural society. Like the Reggio model, this approach places a heavy emphasis on building positive relationships with parents and the wider community. Practitioners working within the Early Years in New Zealand are required to have a comprehensive understanding of play and how it can be facilitated (Thomas and Lewis, 2016). Curriculum planning centres on the child, and learning wherever possible is based on their interests so that skills, knowledge and understanding can be embedded to reflect their holistic development (Andrews, 2012).

Echoes of this can be exemplified in UK curricula, where the acknowledgement of parents as the child's first educators is emphasised and the importance of play is advocated as well as a shift towards a more holistic/inclusive way of learning and teaching. This thematic approach to learning and cross-curricular planning is also evident in UK Early Years settings and comparisons can be drawn to the interweaving of the Te Whāriki principles and strands. Likewise, the increasing emphasis on the

child's emotional well-being and cultural identity can be seen as an influence from this international curriculum (Soler and Miller, 2003).

However, the New Zealand approach to assessment is a significant difference from UK curricula. The Te Whāriki model measures achievement and attainment through 'learning stories' and not the summative learning goals, outcomes or performance indicators which are being adhered to in the UK. It could be argued that despite the shift in Early Years educational practices in the UK there is an inevitable modification in the practitioner's pedagogic response to one of planning to ensure they address curriculum requirements rather than supporting play from a child-led focus (Brooker, 2011). Invariably this has a significant implication for the pedagogy of play meeting imposed targets and measurable outcomes. Practitioners in New Zealand have far more autonomy in the teaching pedagogy they implement and the creative approach that they can 'weave' into their delivery. Arguably, UK curricula, due to the accountability in the assessment process, cannot advocate quite such a free approach to learning and some formal and discreet teaching of skills is standard practice. Despite the implementation issues discussed, the Te Whāriki curriculum and the Reggio model have developed international kudos and UK practitioners continue to aspire to the fundamental principles and elements of good practice that are advocated.

The role of the adult

Importance of planning – the what and why of planning

Effective learning and teaching does not occur accidentally, it has to be planned and prepared for in a robust way, whilst still retaining flexibility and responsiveness to children's needs (Wood, 2013). Every eventuality cannot be premeditated and children never cease to surprise practitioners in their responses and interpretations. It is of paramount importance therefore that the 'child's voice' is heard and incorporated into the planning process as there can be a mismatch between what teachers think they are providing and what the children think they have received (Brock, 2013). Moyles (2011) advocates that it is the role of the teacher to interpret the curriculum and skills that will enable progression and formulate these into learning activities for pupils in a creative and cross-curricular way. Wherever possible, planning by practitioners

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should incorporate a cross-curricular approach to ensure that as many areas as possible are utilised without making tenuous links; learning does not occur in a compartmentalised, isolated way and the planning should reflect this. If play-based learning is planned for effectively, this can occur organically and provide maximum learning opportunities for children. This is endorsed and advocated by the Welsh Government, who indicate that play is so critically important to all children in their holistic development that society should seek every opportunity to support it and foster an environment that creates this (WAG, 2008b).

There are three types of plans:

Long-term plans – these generally demonstrate what will be taught over the whole year, with skills and routes of progression considered. This would concur with Continuous Provision. At this stage, all Areas of Learning need to be considered to ensure that there is not too much of an emphasis on one area and an overview of provision is considered. By setting up the learning environment to provide maximum learning opportunities and provision that is always available, such as sand and water, construction, dressing up/role play, painting, reading corner, writing/mark-making, clay/dough, outdoor area and ICT. The pupils can play independently following their own schema. This is vitally important to their individual development and allows the opportunity to practise, modify and problem solve in areas that are of interest.

Medium-term plans – these are typically for a term or half a term; they bridge the gap between the broad outline of the long-term plan and the day to-day detail of the short-term plan. Generally, a specific topic/theme is identified; this may incorporate a ‘wow’ factor to introduce it, such as a trip, a visitor, an ICT stimulus or some such exciting start that will engage and inspire the children at the outset. Ideally, pupils will be encouraged to be involved with this planning to ensure that their interests and lines of enquiry are considered. This type of planning is concurrent with Enhanced Provision. Some examples of themes/topics used in Early Years settings are ‘Dinosaurs’, ‘People Who Help Us’, ‘Transport’, ‘Mini Beasts’, ‘Seaside’, ‘Growing’, ‘Seasons’ and ‘Ourselves’. Mind mapping is useful for practitioners at this stage to pool ideas, expertise and resources.

Short-term plans – these types of plans can be daily or weekly and incorporate the goals and objectives that have been set out in the medium-term planning as well as being driven by observing and assessing the children and continually adapting to suit their needs; it needs to be a working document with reflection at its heart. These types of plans require specific learning objectives, differentiation identified (how activities will be adapted for the varying levels of development), success criteria (how the objectives will be reached), resources required and the adult responsible; this type of planning links to Focused Tasks. This is primarily adult-led, whereby practitioners teach specific skills/concepts or knowledge to individuals or small groups of children. The learning is more directly measurable in this context, and the next steps can be identified.

Using the curriculum framework as a guide

Practitioners are required to employ the curriculum framework (in Wales, the Foundation Phase) to ensure that their planning is conducive to, and linked to, this document. Planning needs to encompass the seven Areas of Learning; although all areas need to be addressed to promote a broad and balanced curriculum. Personal and Social Development needs to be at the crux of all activities as children's well-being is now recognised as an essential component of effective learning (WAG, 2008a). Bryce-Clegg (2015) summarises this sentiment and highlights that children who feel positive, involved and engaged will ultimately learn more efficiently, and high-quality outcomes can be derived from settings that nurture well-being.

This Foundation Phase Framework (as revised 2015) can be found online (see Welsh Government, 2015).

Practitioners are required to utilise the *Range*, that gives an overview of the breadth of learning that needs to be addressed and decide what opportunities the pupils need to ensure this coverage (factors including socio-economic, EAL, SEN and the cohort of children also need to be considered at this stage). This Briggs and Hansen (2012) deem as 'personalising' or adapting to 'local needs' and ensuring that the curriculum is flexible and addresses the needs of pupils who attend the setting. In conjunction with this, the *Skills* stipulated also need to be addressed – so in simplistic terms the *Range* is the what and the *Skills* is the how. This, then, essentially gives the practitioner the autonomy to develop their plans in a creative and innovative way that draws upon their own strengths, motivation and interest as well as considering the collective and individual needs of their learners

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(Moyles, 2011). Drawing upon this curriculum framework, practitioners then plan, in accordance with their setting's own approach, to ensure that the *Range* and *Skills* are met and are progressive across year groups. Planning should also evidence differentiation (catering for different abilities), opportunities for scheduled observations, key questions, pertinent lines of enquiry, open-ended questions and key terminology (Thomas and Lewis, 2016).

How is each stage of planning interlinked?

The three stages of planning (long-term, medium-term and short-term) do not operate in isolation; it is imperative for a curriculum framework to be effective so that learning and teaching are utilised concurrently – in simplistic terms that one leads on from the other (Envy and Walters, 2013). In relation to the Foundation Phase, the Focused Teaching element should not stand in isolation; the teaching that occurs at this stage needs to be reflected in the continuous and enhanced provision so that the children have the opportunity to consolidate and master skills. An example of how these three types of provision work together is illustrated in Table 2.2. The balance of Continuous and Enhanced Provision is currently ubiquitous debate amongst Early Years practitioners as they try to resist the powerful influence of over-intervention and regulations generated by inspection that create a detrimental influence over children's independent learning (Featherstone, 2014).

Table 2.2 An example of how the three areas of provision/planning are interlinked

Construction:	<p>Areas of Learning from Foundation Phase Framework (2015):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematical Development • Physical Development • Language, Literacy and Communication Skills • Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity
Continuous Provision: <i>Long-term planning</i>	<p>Construction area:</p> <p>Wooden blocks, hollow blocks, unit blocks (multilink), foam blocks, recycled blocks (e.g. telephone directories, milk cartons, cardboard boxes)</p> <p>Use of shadows and labels to aid with tidying up</p> <p>Ensure easy access to all resources</p>
Enhanced Provision: <i>Medium-term planning</i>	<p>To support and extend learning:</p> <p>Tape measure, measuring stick, string</p> <p>Hard hats, appropriate dressing up clothes</p> <p>Books and learning stories</p> <p>Pictures of a variety of buildings</p> <p>Prompt cards, labelling</p> <p>Large sheets of paper, sticky notes, pens, pencils</p> <p>Small world figures, people, cars, wild animals, dinosaurs, trains</p>

Focused Teaching

Short-term planning

Work in small, differentiated groups

Mathematical Development:

Compare blocks and objects made according to size, length and height. Use standard or non standard types of measurements (differentiation)

Use positional vocabulary – over, under, beneath, above, below, inside, outside, behind, in front of Counting, one to one correspondence (touch counting)

Physical Development:

Develop fine motor skills

Hand–eye coordination

Balancing and placing

Language Literacy and Communication Skills:

Writing for a range of different purposes, e.g. signs, labels, instructions and explanation lists

Describing what they are doing, giving instructions to others, listening to suggestions made by others

Use a range of reading strategies to read signs, labels

Use oral narration or writing/pictures to describe the journey of a small word figure, dinosaur or wild animal

Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity:

Negotiate

Take turns/share

Appreciate the work of others in comparison to own

Concentrate, persevere, take risks, explore possibilities

NB these are generic skills that could be covered and are not derived directly from the Foundation Phase Framework (2015)

Role of the adult

- Observing children using the provision, to ascertain which items are being used, note roles adopted by the children, learning dispositions, key vocabulary heard, level of involvement, stage of development, how the area can be further enhanced
- Help and aid children only when requested to by the child (unless Focused Teaching)
- Ask open-ended questions (if the opportunity arises)
- Encourage collaboration and sharing
- Model tidying up
- Positive behaviour management
- Celebrate success

Case study

Case study: Sam

Sam is 3 years and 9 months; he attends a Nursery class five mornings a week. The short-term planning adopted in this practice changed the topic on a weekly basis. In week 1 the water tray had jugs and pipes

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with connectors in. Sam spent a sustained period of time filling and pouring from the jugs and watching the water flow down the pipes. This play was observed daily over the course of the week, the same play being repeated again and again. The next week the focus of the planning had changed and the resources in the water tray were replaced with different materials (pebbles, small stones, shells and coloured water). Sam returned to the water tray and spent some time playing with the new resources. It was observed that he was not as engrossed in the activity as in week 1. At the commencement of week 3 the planning was modified again and the resources were replaced with fishing nets and pretend fish. It was observed that Sam did not play in the water tray that week.

Theory into practice

In the case study, whilst the practitioner's intentions were to stimulate interest and create new and exciting learning opportunities by changing the provision on a weekly basis, Sam's behaviour suggests that in week 1 he was utilising a 'Trajectory' schema (putting water in and out of containers) and this was interrupted in week 2. Sam was no longer able to repeat the actions that he so fervently adopted in week 1. By week 3 he had lost interest as the schema and learning behaviour he had adopted were not supported. Practitioners could have overcome this by ensuring that the Continuous Provision remained the same and that other resources were used as Enhanced Provision to ensure that children's individual schemas were recognised and encouraged. Likewise, his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) could have been addressed and pertinent questions asked, and further objects that support 'Trajectory' play introduced (e.g. saucepans, funnels, cylinders).

This notion is further corroborated by Moyles (1989), who suggests that the learning process that occurs when children are playing is like a spiral and is cyclical and recursive in nature. The process commences with exploratory play (free play) that the child has chosen, the second stage brings a degree of mastery as they continue to experiment, repeat and process concepts. This continues with structured or directed play (this is usually adult led or a focused task). Finally, this leads to an enriched free play as knowledge and abilities are acquired and consolidated. This spiral continues on and on as children go through these cycles many times with varied play experiences.

The emphasis in this model is on ‘free play’ and the time allowed to rehearse and consolidate learning at the child’s own pace and at their developmental stage. Moyles (1989) advocates that first-hand explorations need to have occurred before adults should consider using material in a directed situation. Learning in a cyclical way is also conducive with Bruner’s (1960) constructivist theory of the spiral curriculum, where concepts and ideas are structured so they are explored at a simplistic level initially, and revisited on numerous occasions to allow and facilitate more complex levels. This will allow children to develop skills to solve problems independently without always being guided by a teacher/practitioner. Both these concepts highlight imperative considerations for the role of the adult in children’s learning and play, and the importance of Continuous and Enhanced Provision which forms the basis of the curriculum framework, whilst the focused teaching constitutes a smaller aspect.

In a recent evaluation, Siraj (2015) exemplified that a shift in emphasis of the workforce culture is urgently required, particularly in relation to the role of the adult in supporting learning and providing appropriate learning environments that foster play rather than viewing it as a contingency for when the child has finished their ‘work’. This, in combination with her previous report (Siraj, 2014), strongly recommends a significant input into the professional development of those working in the Foundation Phase, as she indicates that the curriculum is being diluted in favour of a more didactic way of teaching and learning that has an emphasis on teaching skills and knowledge rather than learning through play. It is paramount that the child’s conceptualisations are allowed the time, rehearsal in play and resources necessary to develop and that Early Years practitioners understand that learning does not always involve them directly.

Importance of observation and assessment

It is essential that the planning cycle in Early Years incorporates planned observations, assessment and reflection (Envy and Walters, 2013).

As depicted in Figure 2.1, each area of the cycle does not occur in isolation, assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process. By gathering information about a child’s progress over a period of time, teachers build a comprehensive picture of the learning in order to plan future work (Wood, 2013). In all UK curricula, observing children is seen as a vital component of assessment, to allow practitioners to understand patterns of behaviour and notice developmental milestones; it can take the form of participant observation (entering the child’s play world) or non-participant observation (detached from the event); both have a place in Early Years settings (Andrews, 2012). This type of formative (on-going) assessment can take different forms: tracking, sociogram, free description, time sample, event sample, checklist (WAG, 2008c). Whereas a summative

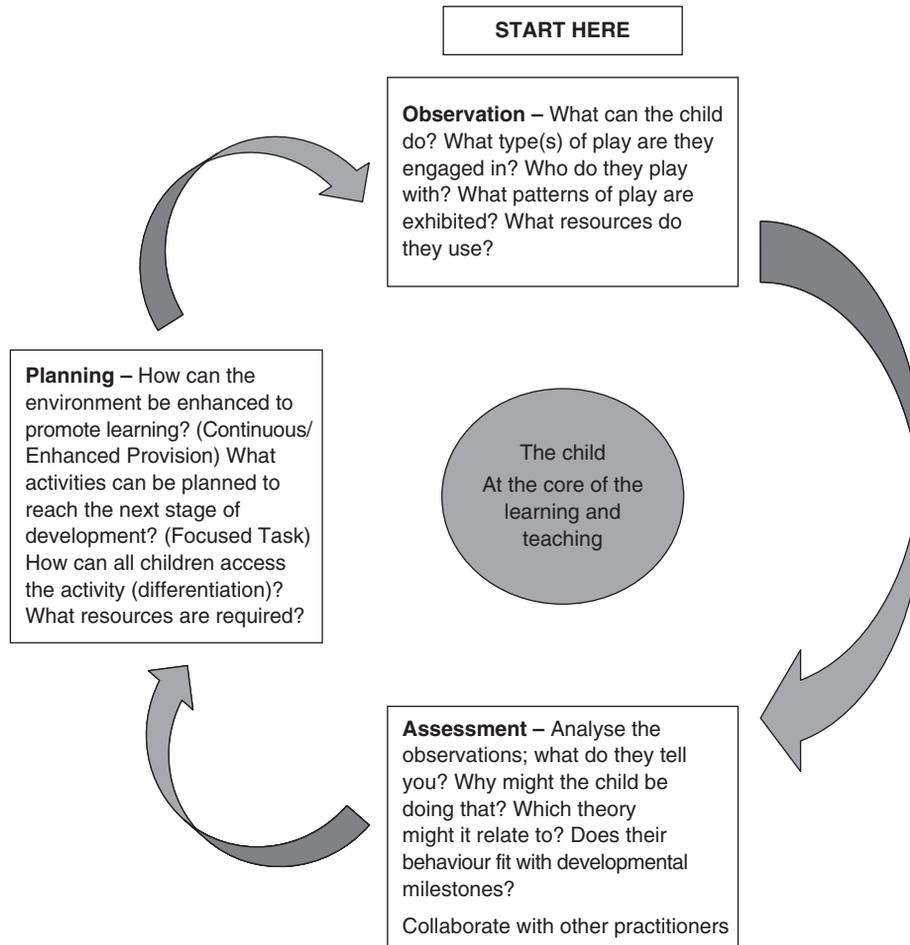


Figure 2.1 The planning cycle

assessment is usually typified by a formal report or test, this is also exemplified in UK curricula (generally at the end of the age phase) and illustrated in Table 2.1. Many Early Years' practitioners are opposed to this type of assessment as it can create a strain between an evidence-based curriculum and a focus on child-centred and child-led practice (Envy and Walters, 2013). This is exemplified in Wales, where much controversy surrounds the implementation of national testing at the age of 7 and is contrary to the practice of the Reggio and Te Whāriki approaches already examined, both of which place emphasis on the process of children's learning and development rather than on the end product such as a test (Thomas and Lewis, 2016). Assessment and the implications for effective practice are a significant factor for Early Years practitioners to consider; they should not be viewed

as an ‘add on’ but should form part of the planning process as a whole. A very brief overview has been provided of the assessment process but further reading will be required to understand the complexity of this procedure.

Transitions and home–school links

It is imperative that a whole school approach is adopted for a smooth transition from an Early Years provision to Key Stage 2 (Foundation Phase, Wales) or Key Stage 1 (EYFS, England and Northern Ireland), otherwise attainment levels, behaviour and the well-being of the children will be affected. The shift from an experiential learning approach advocated in the Foundation Phase to a more traditional and content-based pedagogy at Key Stage 2 can be problematic. Morris et al. (2011) demonstrate that this can be overcome where primary schools strive to adopt a single philosophy of learning that underpins the two phases of learning and therefore facilitates an easier transition for staff to manage. Furthermore, practitioners across the phases need to work together and understand the implications of the curriculum demands; this can be achieved by allowing staff to experience both curricula (Rose, 2009). Cross-phase communication is essential to the process of aligning the two learning phases and effective monitoring of pupils’ progress, and learning and teaching approaches need to be harmonised at the point of transition (Bryce-Clegg, 2015). Communication with parents and carers is also vital to ensure that they understand the difference between different curricula and what can be expected for and of their children at different school stages.

Questions for your practice

1. Why might some practitioners be opposed to a play-based curriculum? What implications does this have on the delivery of UK curricula based on this pedagogy?
2. How can you ensure assessment (both formative and summative) is included at the planning stage and why is this integral to effective learning and teaching?
3. Why is it so important that an enabling environment is established in Early Years settings and what impact does this have on pupils’ learning experiences and their holistic development?

Summary

This chapter has highlighted the prerequisite for Early Years settings to implement a curriculum framework to ensure a consistency of approach that considers all areas of development and demonstrates cohesiveness amongst practitioners. The four UK curricula espouse a play-based curriculum for young children. Although each country has its own perspective and pedagogic basis, commonality between them is evidenced. It is essential for practitioners to have a secure knowledge of child development, appreciate the influence of theorists and consider international perspectives to their own practice. Practitioners need to work in a collegial way, ensuring that the child is at the centre of the learning. Whilst free play is important, careful planning (long-term, medium-term and short-term) is necessary to ensure that a wealth of learning opportunities are provided for young children and all areas of learning need to be considered so that a broad and balanced curriculum is in place. In addition, an enabling environment that is stimulating, challenging and planned for appropriately will ensure that young children are given the opportunity to rehearse and practise skills that will aid the transition to the next stage of development. The Foundation Phase (Wales) has been utilised as an example of how a curriculum framework operates in practice. Demonstrating how this curriculum functions in practice can be applied to other UK curricula as fundamentally the core principles are reciprocated in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland: adopting a thematic approach, the embodiment of holistic teaching and the implementation of the planning cycle (including observation and assessment). Curriculum frameworks are influenced by political and global agendas, they are continually changing and evolving, and do not stand in isolation from each other.

Recommendations for further reading

Bryce-Clegg, A. (2013) *Continuous Provision in the Early Years (Practitioner's Guide)*. London: Featherstone. In this accessible book creative and practical ideas that can be utilised to significantly enhance the enabling environment of the setting are demonstrated through photographs and real practice.

Nutbrown, C. (2011) *Threads of Thinking: Schemas and Young Children's Learning*, 4th edn. London: Sage. This is an essential read for practitioners

working within Early Years – it explains the notions of schemas and why they are so important to developmental learning.

Thomas, A. and Lewis, A. (2016) *An Introduction to the Foundation Phase Early Years Curriculum in Wales*. London: Bloomsbury. There are many books on the EYFS but this book concentrates on the Foundation Phase in Wales. As well as drawing upon the pedagogy of this curriculum from its inception, it also guides practitioners on many aspects of practice that are applicable to any UK curriculum – methods of assessment, planning for purposeful play and reflective practice, for example.

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