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cyfnod sylfaen 3–7 foundation phase



Play/Active Learning

Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds



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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Play/Active Learning

Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds

Audience Headteachers, teachers, practitioners, governing bodies of maintained schools and practitioners and management committees in the non-maintained sector in Wales; local education authorities; teacher unions and school representative bodies; church diocesan authorities; national bodies in Wales with an interest in education.

Overview This guidance document supports the *Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales*. It provides an overview of the importance of structured educational play/active learning.

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Background



The proposals in the Welsh Assembly Government's document *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3–7 years* included developing a curriculum that linked and strengthened the principles and practice in ACCAC's document *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age* (2000) with the programmes of study and focus statements in the Key Stage 1 national curriculum, to create a rich curriculum under seven Areas of Learning for children in the Foundation Phase. The Foundation Phase curriculum advocates that positive links between the home and the providers of care and education are fostered and promoted.

The Welsh Assembly Government's approach to education and lifelong learning is set in the broader context of our vision for children and young people overall.

We have seven core aims for children and young people developed from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These will underpin all of the activities of DCELLS.

We aim to ensure that all children and young people:

- have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development
- have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills
- enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised
- have a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing
- are not disadvantaged by any type of poverty.

This guidance supports the *Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales*. More specifically, as a stand-alone document, it provides an overview of the importance of structured educational play/active learning, and the different stages of development and skills that young children may acquire.

Play/active learning should be an essential part of the children's curriculum. This approach should be an entitlement for all 3 to 7-year-olds in the Foundation Phase.

Introduction

Play is an essential ingredient in the curriculum which should be fun and stimulating.

It is important that the value of play in young children's learning is acknowledged and explained. It is vital that there are clear aims for young children's learning within play as it is all too easy for 'play' to be misconstrued as trivial and purposeless. For play to be effective in the Foundation Phase, it is essential that careful planning is undertaken. When we talk about play we are referring to children's active involvement in their learning. This guidance focuses primarily on structured educational play.

Play is an essential ingredient in the curriculum which should be fun and stimulating. Well-planned play helps children to think and make sense of the world around them. It develops and extends their linguistic and communication skills, enables them to be creative, to investigate and explore different materials, and provides them with opportunities to experiment and predict outcomes.

There should be opportunities for children to follow their own interests and ideas through free play. Children's learning is most effective when it arises from first-hand experiences, whether spontaneous or structured, and when they are given time to play without interruptions and to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

The sentiments of the Rumbold Report (1990) on play still stand firm today. It stated that: 'Play that is well planned and pleasurable helps children to think, to increase their understanding and to improve their language competence. It allows children to be creative, to explore and investigate materials, to experiment and to draw and test their conclusions... Such experience is important in catching and sustaining children's interests and motivating their learning as individuals and in co-operation with others.'

Many educational theorists and psychologists have studied children's play and its importance in child development. Researchers and psychologists have written about the value of play and devised different stages of play and development that the children move through.



They all conclude that play is essential to children's development. Recent research and documents continue to support the findings of the educational theorists and psychologists of the past.

The *Starting with Quality* (DES, 1990) document states that in approaches to learning:

89. Young children learn effectively in a number of ways, including exploring, observing and listening. Playing and talking are, for young children, two principal means of bringing together a range of these activities. We believe that effective curriculum implementation requires careful attention to be given to providing fully for these.

90. Play underlies a great deal of young children's learning. For its potential value to be realised a number of conditions need to be fulfilled:

- a. sensitive, knowledgeable and informed adult involvement and intervention
- b. careful planning and organisation of play settings in order to provide for and extend learning
- c. enough time for children to develop their play
- d. careful observation of children's activities to facilitate assessment and planning for progression and continuity.

The value of play/active learning within the curriculum

A great deal has been written about 'play' which can often be mistaken for the opposite of work. This is not the case with structured educational play within the Foundation Phase. Young children learn through a variety of ways, but the most effective is through first-hand experiences.

The value of play/active learning cannot be emphasised strongly enough. When children are involved in their learning they take ownership. The purpose of play/active learning is that it:



- motivates
- stimulates
- supports
- develops skills
- develops concepts
- develops language/communication skills
- develops concentration
- develops positive attitudes
- demonstrates awareness/use of recent learning and skills
- consolidates learning.

Active educational play supports children's learning across all Areas of Learning.

The curriculum and environment should be planned and structured to enable children to be active learners. Children should have opportunities to explore their learning environment and to learn new skills as well as repeating, practising and refining skills they have already acquired. It is important that children have plenty of occasions to experiment with resources, to try to solve problems as well as selecting their own materials for an activity.

Play should be valued by all practitioners and structured with clear aims for children's learning. It should be structured in such a way that children have opportunities to be involved in the focus, planning and setting up of play areas both indoors and outdoors, as this will give them ownership of their learning.

Active educational play supports children's learning across all Areas of Learning. This approach has great developmental value for young children as their learning is not developed in separate compartments. Children need opportunities to interact with their peers, the practitioners that support them and their environment.

It is important that children are not introduced to formal methods of learning too soon as this can have a detrimental effect on their future learning and development.



This case study explains how a group of children at a playgroup were involved in changing a small enclosed courtyard into an outdoor learning area.



Developing an outdoor area

We have a small enclosed courtyard area with a protective soft surface. We wanted to develop this area into an outdoor learning area (i.e. a classroom outdoors). It was decided that we would use the children's ideas as the main focus for developing this area. To ensure this project is successful it was understood that it would be long term and that the children's input was essential.

Our first activity was to look with the children at the outdoor facilities we already had. The children took photographs of the garden, flowers, gazebo, the stone path, slide and trampoline to remind them of how the courtyard looked at the start of the project.

We then asked the children what they would like to see and do in the courtyard. Their suggestions included birds, an aeroplane, a play house, raspberries and lots of flowers. The children's ideas were recorded in a book and included quotes and photographs (taken by the children) to remind us, and them, of their ideas.

The children were taken outside a number of times in both dry and wet weather to encourage them to think about activities and how they might work. After much discussion and excitement it was decided that we would divide the courtyard into different learning areas and that we would develop one area at a time.

Our first area to be developed was the shed, which was changed from storage to a role-play area (for example, a café, house, etc.). The small outdoor equipment previously stored in the shed (for example, beanbags, balls, quoits, etc.) are now stored in large, black bins that are labelled accordingly. The children can now access and return the equipment themselves by reading the picture/word label.

The children wanted to take books outside to look at/read, but had nowhere to sit so we have created a quiet outdoor reading area by erecting some trellis decorated with plants and putting in a bench and some tree trunk seats. This has proved very popular with the children.

The development of the outdoor learning area is ongoing and, in time, other areas will be developed.

Extracts of text from this case study have been included in DCELLS' guidance document *Observing Children*.



The children were very excited at the thought that a present had been left for them.

Day and night – The shiny sack

The section of text included here describes how a recently formed class of Year 1 and Year 2 children were given an opportunity, through enjoyable and informal play activities, to interact with each other in the hope that the class would begin to work well together.

The activity began indoors. The sack was already placed on the teacher's chair when we came in for registration. The children were very excited at the thought that a present had been left for them. I played along, pretending not to know what was inside! This immediately sparked off a conversation about what we thought might be inside. Could we guess by looking at the outside of the bag? What clues did this give us about the contents of the sack? The children were allowed to feel the bag and try to guess the objects inside. The children were using a range of vocabulary to describe the shiny surface of the bag, realising that they could see themselves in its surface. This caused us to think back to our work on reflections which we had covered recently, and allowed me as the teacher to assess who could remember some of the scientific vocabulary related to convex and concave reflections.

After we had spent some time thinking and guessing, I asked the children what they would like to do with the bag. More than one child at this point asked if we could take the bag outside to open it. Luckily it was a beautiful, sunny day. I spread out a large piece of silver paper in the playground. All the children sat around it and immediately realised that they could see themselves in the paper. The sun was almost too bright and we could see reflections of light on one another's faces too!

As the children were already familiar with circle time routines, we all agreed to pass the bag around and allow each child to pull something out of it for us all to investigate. Inside the sack were varying lengths of different shiny fabrics, shiny wands, plastic tiaras, a cutlass, a silver car, a shiny hairbrush, a shiny box containing lengths of silvery beads, silvery braids, silver bells, and a mirror. Also in the bag were some word cards: shiny, glistening, shine, glowing, sparkly, shimmer and silver.

The children all took turns to pull out an object or some fabric from the bag and we all investigated each item in turn.

The children all took turns to pull out an object or some fabric from the bag and we all investigated each item in turn. Many questions followed. Could we see our reflections in it? Was our reflection upside down? Was our reflection concave? Was our reflection wobbly? Could we see through it? (Some of the older children were able to use the correct vocabulary.) Most of the fabric was draped over heads, wrapped around shoulders, waved in the air. Shiny hats and tiaras were tried on. Wands were waved. "Look what I've got!" "I've found some treasure!" The silver box became a treasure chest. "I'm a princess!" "I'm a pirate!"

The word cards were eventually found and we all made attempts to read the words and to place them next to an object it described. Year 2 children led this part of the activity. The children were then allowed free choice to play with the items.

Amber dressed up in a sparkly cloak and strutted around the playground. Ruby said in a very posh voice "You look fabulous darling!" A conversation followed between the two girls that led them to go around all the others admiring their cloaks in the same posh voices. Amber is a very quiet girl who was new to the school at this time. Dressing in a tiara, silver cloak and shiny pink gloves and holding a wand encouraged her to develop a pretend personality to cover her shyness, and she enjoyed herself in this fun activity.

I had been careful to include items that would interest boys too, such as the cutlass and a sword, and also a length of fabric that depicted bats and spiders' webs. Joseph said that his cape was "sparkling on you, it's magic!" He then pretended to be a knight with the sword, while two other boys put a spell on him with the wands. Joseph responded with "This magic cape stops your spells. This is my armour and I'm protected!" This was wonderfully imaginative role play. The boys' use of language to create quite a complex story was great. The boys continued in their game, having great fun as they went around the playground putting spells on one another.

At the end of the day all the staff involved agreed that having the increased personal space had helped the children to investigate freely.



Developmental stages in play

Children develop at different rates and some will move through the different stages more quickly/slowly than others.

Practitioners working with children will need to be aware of progression and stages of development so that they can plan appropriate experiences and activities.

Children develop at different rates and some will move through the different stages more quickly/slowly than others. It is also important to be aware that children reach plateaux and will move back and forth along the learning continuum. A great deal will depend on the children's previous experiences.

As children learn through exploration and investigation within their environment, they acquire skills and concepts that impact on their future learning and understanding. The different stages of play development are:

- solitary** children play alone; little interaction with other children, often absorbed in their own activities
- spectator** children observe their peers; usually they just watch and don't join in
- parallel** the child plays alongside other children; initially it will appear that children are playing together but on closer observation it is evident that they are playing separately
- partnership/associative** children play together, interaction between children is developing and they enjoy playing with the same activities and equipment
- cooperative/group** children play in group situations and share outcomes from their play; often the play will be intricate and detailed.

Although children may progress through these stages they will sometimes choose to return to an earlier stage; for example, even though children may be playing cooperatively there will still be occasions when they will need or choose to be involved in solitary play.

Solitary

How to recognise if children are operating in this stage of play...

In this stage of play development children play contentedly alone. They are involved in their own play and will move from activity to activity regardless of any other children. Often in this stage they enjoy imitating everyday activities such as feeding and putting dolls to bed, driving a vehicle or washing up.

This case study describes how Callum was involved in solitary play involving a range of toys and equipment.

Playing with the garage

Callum had recently started at a new setting. One morning, on arriving, he chose to play with the farm and immediately became involved with the animals. After playing for a while Callum left the farm activity and went outdoors to play. He decided to have a ride in the pedal car. After a while Callum noticed the garage, cars, lorries and other vehicles and started playing with them. Throughout these sessions, although Callum played by himself and had minimal interaction with the other children in the group, he was having fun.



Spectator

How to recognise if children are operating in this stage of play...

Children who are spectators in play are those who observe others but who do not join in. They like to watch other children playing. Often they can be observed standing/sitting on the fringes of where other children are playing. Although they can appear to be alone or lacking in confidence, they can often be concentrating while observing the play so that they develop an understanding of what to do.

This case study describes how Thomas, who is in the nursery, watched a group of other children building fire engines out of commercial construction kits.

When the other children had moved on to other activities Thomas started to play with the construction kits himself.

Building a fire engine



Copying the sequence he had observed the other children using, Thomas built his own fire engine. He then decided that it needed hosepipes and so explored the classroom and outdoors for suitable materials. These included pipe cleaners, straws, wool, string, long grass and twigs. Thomas decided to use straws. Ladders were added to the fire engine and prolonged, enthusiastic, imaginative play followed.

This case study describes how Soffia watched a group of children taking part in a number activity and her subsequent reaction.

The story of 10

Soffia had recently arrived into Year 2 from a different school. She was reluctant to settle to anything purposeful but filled her time watching the other children.

In her third week Soffia decided to join a group of children who were putting 10 cows into two fields. "How many different ways can you do it?" I had challenged.

The children were clearly enjoying trying to find out how many different ways they could put the 10 toy cows into the two different fields. Liam suggested putting one cow in one field and all the other cows into the other field. Bethan remembered that five and five made 10 and so wanted to put five cows into each field. Liam then suggested that they should move one cow at a time out of the one field and into the other. Maya decided to be the scribe of the group and started to write down the different combinations they had already tried.

Soffia watched for a minute before fetching a piece of paper and writing 'The story of 10'.

Parallel

How to recognise if children are operating in this stage of play...

In this stage a child can at first appear to be playing with another child. In fact, on closer observation the child is actually playing alone and not interacting with the other child. Parallel play leads on from solitary play. Children can be using the same equipment/sitting or standing next to each other but both are working independently of each other; there is no interaction, either positive or negative, between them in their play.

This case study describes how two girls, one in reception and one in Year 1, sat alongside each other, sharing resources but working independently of each other; while one made a boat, the other made a bed for a teddy bear.

The boat and the bear

A table of varying resources such as yoghurt pots, modelling clay, paper, string, colouring pencils and different-size boxes was set up and it was explained to the children that it could be used for whatever they wished.

Hannah, who particularly likes making things, went up to the table and immediately started to make a boat. She was soon joined by Lara, who gathered some equipment and started to create a bed for her bear. Both girls continued with their tasks for some time.

Hannah had made a sail out of paper and a straw and then tried using different materials to attach the sail to the boat. She spotted the modelling clay and chose to attach the straw to the yoghurt pot boat with the modelling clay. Meanwhile, Lara had made the bed for her bear and was now concentrating on attaching a strap to the bed so that she could pull it around with her. The trouble was that it kept slipping off. But she continued experimenting and attaching it in different ways. Eventually she succeeded and was able to move her bear around the room to find a good place for him to sleep.

Both of these independent activities were entirely child led and completely absorbed each child.

Partnership/associative

How to recognise if children are operating in this stage of play...

Children operating at the parallel stage will begin to become aware of other children. They will often begin to communicate through talking to each other or by becoming aware of each other's games/play and by communicating to each other what they are doing. Gradually one child will become involved in the other child's play. This is known as partnership or associative play.

Caterpillar made of tyres

This photograph is of a reception child assisting a nursery child. Based on a theme of minibeasts, the children had constructed a caterpillar out of tyres. They then decided themselves to walk along the caterpillar, the older children helping the younger children. They also counted the tyres as they went along the caterpillar and used different colour blocks as its legs.



children. They also counted the tyres as they went along the caterpillar and used different colour blocks as its legs.

Cooperative/group

How to recognise if children are operating in this stage of play...

In this stage children begin to 'play' together; they begin to share their play. Children become more sociable and take on roles in their play and take account of the role of other children. They begin to be aware of the needs and wishes of their peers and gradually the play can become complex. Rules are sometimes devised and some cooperative play will be revisited over several days.

In this case study a group of four boys who are in nursery develop their own game including a set of rules, which are explained to others as they join in the game.

Spheres in a bucket

The children have been given many opportunities to handle a variety of equipment to develop skills of throwing, catching, striking and rolling and have used balls, beanbags, quoits, etc., to aim at a target in order to develop coordination.

John, Gareth, Isaac and Omar were playing in the den with a construction kit that included spheres. The boys tipped the bucket of construction materials onto the carpet. John picked up a sphere and threw it back into the bucket. The sphere landed in the bucket and John cheered. At this point Gareth, Isaac and Omar followed suit and began to pick up the spheres and aim them towards the bucket.

The game continued for a minute until there was some disagreement about how close they were allowed to stand to the bucket (some of them were standing closer to the bucket than others). Under the leadership of Isaac, the group agreed to get a cushion each to sit on and they placed these cushions in a line about two metres from the bucket.

They then continued the game, collecting spheres and aiming them towards the bucket until Gareth was hit by a sphere. Isaac, the leader of the group, said: "Everybody throw the spheres together and stop when I say." This was agreed to by the group;

The game continued with the children's aim becoming increasingly more accurate.

when Isaac said "Go", they all threw their spheres, and when Isaac said "Stop", they all collected the spheres from the bucket and floor and sat on their cushions ready to begin again.

The game continued with the children's aim becoming increasingly more accurate. When John and Omar left the game other children joined in and the rules were explained by Isaac: "You've got to sit on a cushion and throw your spheres when we do. When I say 'Stop' you've got to get the spheres off the floor."

One new child to the group created another disagreement by collecting more than his fair share of spheres and leaving very few for the other three children. They discussed sharing the spheres equally between them but were unable to agree on a strategy to physically do this, at which point I intervened.

We talked about how to share equally and the group helped me to distribute the spheres, each taking one sphere in turn, then a second, then a third, then a fourth until each child had four spheres and there were two spheres remaining. I asked the children "Are there enough spheres left for you to have another one?" to which they all replied "No". "What should we do with these two spheres then?" I asked. Gareth said we should put them away because "it's not fair if we have more spheres and they don't". This then became the third rule of the game and each child collected four spheres each time ready to throw in the next round. The game continued with no further disagreements and with obvious enthusiasm.

In addition to developing coordination and throwing skills (and gaining an awareness of distance and accuracy), the children were also working collaboratively, playing cooperatively, showing an awareness of safety, and developing an understanding of rules and fair play.



In this case study a group of Year 2 children work cooperatively to set up a bank. The activity is completely child led and the role play includes an interesting example of role reversal.

The bank

Some new role-play equipment had been delivered to the school. Staff quickly unpacked and set up the equipment before the children arrived.

A group of children immediately noticed the bank section which had a number panel on the outside. They independently decided to make cash cards to use in the bank.

They collected their resources, moved chairs around a table and set about making their cash cards. Every adult who came close to them was asked to show their cash cards which were scrutinised, while letters, numbers and flamboyant signatures were added by the children to their own cash cards.

One girl had noticed the number of pockets in some of the adults' purses/wallets and initiated the making of wallets to store cash cards and money (coins). A flurry of activity followed, involving sticky tape, card and plenty of cutting and joining, and within a short while all six children in the group had wallets with pockets and a number of different cash cards.

Aleysha asked if the cash cards could be shiny "like teachers' signs", and so I took them all off to use the laminator.

After lunch the game continued and now involved Aleysha as the bank cashier behind the screen while the others queued up to punch numbers on the board and ask for cash which Aleysha was giving out in coins. The 'customers' then returned to the back of the queue for another turn.

This play had been initiated by Dylan and the group. Adult support had only been given when the children had asked every adult who walked past them to show them their cash cards. The level of support had varied considerably but the children had understood the concept of a secret number (PIN) and getting money.

Having quickly made a cash card I joined the queue and waited my turn. Once at the front I was told to put my PIN into the machine and "Not let anyone look". I then asked for £50.

Very quickly, Aleysha ran out of coins. "Please could I have £5 notes?" I asked, receiving one of those looks! A 'closed' sign appeared and I was told to come back later. Aleysha gathered her troops and off they went in search of paper and pens. They made £5 and £10 notes.

Later the bank was reopened and I was given £50 carefully counted out in £5 notes (great teacher satisfaction in mathematical development in play).

The group were totally engaged in their role play and worked and played together for four days modifying bank notes and the routine for their roles. A number of new rules were added and the game became quite sophisticated.



Different types of play/active learning areas and activities

Through participating in imaginative activities, children are given opportunities to act out roles and experiences that are important to them.

There are many different types of play and active learning activities that need to be planned for in terms of resources, space and time, and organised within the setting/school (indoors and outdoors). Practitioners should ensure that set tasks, problems and activities are exciting, challenging and differentiated for the children.

The following are some of the areas and activities that should be included in the Foundation Phase curriculum. Although they have been listed under separate headings play types are often not used in isolation of each other; for example, small world play can be imaginary and include construction.

Imaginary/pretend

Through participating in imaginative activities, children are given opportunities to act out roles and experiences that are important to them. Children become engrossed and motivated when taking on a role such as becoming a member of a family, someone from the community or even a fantasy character.

They will often use different objects to represent something else, for example, large plastic or cardboard boxes as vehicles or cubes and plastic building blocks for food in a café. The use of resources in this way is often referred to as symbolic play.

Some of the skills that children are able to develop, apply and practise through being involved in imaginative/pretend play activities include opportunities to:

- communicate ideas, feelings and emotions
- develop appropriate social skills
- develop confidence
- practise vocabulary and extend learning through new related words
- practise their reading and writing skills
- solve problems and develop mathematical concepts
- develop cooperative skills with their peers
- develop their gross motor and fine manipulative skills through moving and using equipment.

Examples of imaginative play areas include a:

- home corner
- café
- hairdresser
- hospital/animal surgery
- airport/magic carpet
- different shops
- forest camping centre
- rainforest
- seaside cave
- pirate ship/space ship
- night-time/dark zone.

The following case study is an example of a child-led activity involving symbolic play.

A stage area

In addition to acting out roles and experiences that were important to them, the children were able to communicate their ideas, feelings and emotions, practise and develop cooperative skills with their peers, and increase their confidence.

The stage area came about from my observation of several reception children dressed up and using cardboard tubes as microphones, and from discussion I overheard between the children about the X Factor programme they had been watching.

We set it up using some painted wooden palettes, inexpensive curtains, fairy lights, and a variety of 'instruments' and home-made microphones. Also, some suitably glamorous dressing-up clothes, etc., were provided.

The children absolutely loved this and it was very encouraging to watch children who are normally very quiet being prepared to 'perform' with great confidence. Other children spontaneously gathered chairs in rows for the audience and held up cards with numbers on to 'judge' the performance. Eventually we had two chairs for Sharon and Simon set up.

This was a great confidence-building activity for many children and surprisingly there were no arguments about the quality of the performances.

This case study describes how taking turns on a bike turned into a large-scale, Year 2 group role-play activity.

The accident on the zebra crossing

Resources belong to the children and now they have reached the level of confidence of being able to help themselves to whatever they need.

Outdoors the bikes were whizzing back and forth with a certain amount of sharing and turn taking.

Megan was observant enough to notice that her friend Sadie was being edged to the back of the line and not having a fair turn on the bike. Megan pulled and heaved a heavy box of road safety resources and opened it outside. Sadie joined Megan and together they put out the Belisha beacons. Then they used playground chalks to make zebra crossings.

Megan and Sadie went into the hall and delved into the dressing-up box. Two 'ladies' now crossed the road using the zebra crossing: "You have to stop as we are crossing the road." Thus the girls became involved in the game.

When I returned later it had evolved into a large group activity, acting out a bike accident on the zebra crossing. A range of appropriate props from the role-play sack were being used such as the mobile 'phone to dial 999 to summon the police. The medical equipment was being used by the paramedics to treat the two ladies who had been involved in the accident and they were then taken to hospital (in another classroom, where some playground benches had been rearranged). Meanwhile, the driver had been taken to jail, where he had to fill out countless forms (emergent writing).

Children will often take on many roles when acting out different situations and stories.

Small world

Small world activities provide opportunities for children to act out stories and situations that are both familiar and unfamiliar to them. Children can act out experiences through using small world resources as well as developing their creative ideas. Children will often take on many roles when acting out different situations and stories.

Some of the skills children are able to develop, apply and practise through being involved in small world play activities include opportunities to:

- solve problems by working out different solutions, such as a different route to get around an accident, to pick up a friend at the station, or the quickest way for the spaceship to get to the next planet
- communicate their ideas and retell stories and experiences in their own unique way
- develop cooperative skills with their peers
- develop and extend appropriate vocabulary, including vocabulary relating to position
- develop their understanding of spatial awareness
- develop their knowledge about roles that people have in their community as well as specific buildings
- develop manipulative skills and hand–eye coordination.

Examples of small world play include working with:

- a variety of small figures including a selection of family members, roles that people undertake in the community such as doctors, nurses and farmers, and fantasy characters
- animal figures such as zoo, jungle, farm and domestic pets
- cars and other vehicles; for example, fire engines, trains and tractors
- different scenes on mats such as a town, village, space and garage
- models of buildings, both self-made and commercially produced, such as houses, farms, castles, and space stations
- small wooden blocks, masking tape and straws.

A small group of nursery and reception children were playing with some toy farm animals on a mat representing a farm layout.

The cows in the field

In their game, the children were trying to put the correct amount of animals in each field on the mat, according to the number displayed in the field.

When I asked them to put three cows in a ploughed field Sam replied: "There isn't any food for the cows in the ploughed field, they should be in a green field. But it would be all right to put pigs in the ploughed field because they like mud." All the children involved could understand the reasoning and began moving other animals around into more suitable places, but still took into account the number in the field.



In this activity the children were able to develop and extend appropriate vocabulary relating to position, and their understanding of spatial awareness. In addition, Sam communicated his ideas in his own unique way and the children developed their cooperative skills with their peers.

Construction

Children should be given opportunities to work with different types of wood, tools and recyclable materials.

Through participating in construction play children develop an understanding of materials and their properties. Activities should involve building with blocks, making things as well as taking objects apart to find out how they are constructed. Children should be given opportunities to work with different types of wood, tools and recyclable materials. Activities should also involve children designing and then making their own creations using a variety of media.

Some of the skills children are able to develop, apply and practise through being involved in construction play activities include opportunities to:

- take care of equipment and follow safety procedures
- share resources and work cooperatively with others
- value their work and the work of others
- develop their vocabulary, in addition to communicating their ideas in a variety of ways including ICT
- develop their manipulative skills and hand–eye coordination
- develop their understanding of area and spatial awareness
- investigate the way different objects operate
- learn to select, handle and use equipment appropriately
- develop their understanding of the properties of different materials
- solve problems and suggest different solutions.

Examples of construction play include children working with:

- a selection of blocks of different sizes and shapes
- a selection of recyclable materials
- different media and a selection of tools, including mirrors and magnets
- commercial construction kits
- mechanical resources, both operational and broken
- a selection of wood and woodwork tools
- ICT programs
- small world resources to use with their constructions.

In this case study a small group of children design and then make their own creation using a variety of media.

They solved problems such as how to make a window open and how to produce a stone or brick effect on cardboard.

Building a castle

A small group of Year 2 children were trying to build a castle using one large hexagonal box and a large lid. Each child was calling out their ideas about what sort of castle it would be and trying to describe its specific characteristics. The interest in building the castle was such that everyone contributed and everyone listened to one another.

The children decided to draw their ideas of how the castle should look before deciding how to make it. They collected together large sheets of paper and chunky felt-tipped pens to draw their version of the castle. The discussion that this activity promoted was invaluable. The children were so involved in the activity that I as a teacher was able to observe and evaluate their interaction rather than be the one who initiated or directed it. The resulting pictures were wildly different. There was a castle with a fierce dragon on a dark, thundery night, and conversely there was a castle where a wedding party was being held that had a huge array of balloons, flags and fireworks.

It was going to be difficult to decide which castle should be made. I intervened at this stage and suggested that each child could decorate one panel of the box in the style of their castle drawing.

They negotiated together what sort of door the castle should have. They solved problems such as how to make a window open and how to produce a stone or brick effect on cardboard. They used a range of resources, tools and techniques including paints, pastels, junk materials, scissors, masking tape, glue and string to name but a few. As a teacher I only contributed to their project when and if they needed me. For much of the time they worked collaboratively, neither asking for nor needing my intervention.

When completed the castle was magnificent. Many of the children in the class played with the castle over the next few weeks and I've already got my next big box!

Play with natural materials

Initially, experiences with natural materials are tactile.

Although this is not a specific area of play, it is essential to mention the importance of providing opportunities for children to work with natural materials in the Foundation Phase. The most common natural materials that are usually available to children are sand (dry and wet), water and clay. Some alternatives can include shells and rocks as well as food materials like rice and pasta and work with wood.

Initially, experiences with natural materials are tactile. Children should have opportunities to feel, investigate and explore the properties of these materials before undertaking more structured activities. This is essential so that children will be able to draw on their knowledge to solve problems. As children's learning and knowledge increases, activities should be differentiated and progressive.



Some of the skills children are able to develop, apply and practise through being involved with natural materials include opportunities to:

- develop manipulative skills
- experience and handle a range of tools and equipment; for example, informed use of hammers and saws
- develop an understanding of the properties of natural materials and how they change; for example, when water or heat are added
- develop their descriptive vocabulary, along with correct terminology for the materials and tools that they are handling
- select materials and tools for an activity
- develop knowledge of the different environments that exist in the world
- develop mathematical concepts of shape, space, volume and capacity
- talk about and discuss their work.

Examples of activities involving natural materials include:

- using a selection of plastic bottles, jugs and containers for filling and emptying
- using a selection of resources such as buckets, spades, spoons, pots, sieves to investigate properties of the materials
- using sticks, rakes, etc., to create desired effects
- using small world resources to act out stories and ideas; for example, an underwater world, or a village created in the sand tray
- materials for decoration, such as shells, pebbles, counters and pasta
- rolling pins, cutters, scissors and other kitchen utensils to manipulate and work with dough and clay
- using different types of wood and tools to create their own models, etc.

Health and safety: some children may have allergies that can be triggered off when handling materials.

This case study describes how Charlie made a model of a macaw sitting in a tree in a rainforest following a class discussion in nursery about birds from around the world.

The macaw in the rainforest

Charlie went to the resources table where he found coloured dough, feathers, lollipop sticks, different-size twigs, beads, rice, and pipe cleaners. After a few minutes I joined him, noting that he had flattened his ball of coloured dough and used all the lollipop sticks, standing them upright in the dough.

Charlie explained: "It's a rainforest. There's lots of trees in a rainforest. I need more trees." I asked if there was anything else in the dishes he could use as trees. Charlie replied "They're too bendy," pointing to the pipe cleaners, "trees aren't bendy, they're stuck hard."

Charlie then asked to use the pencils on the table next to him to make more trees. When he felt the rainforest had enough trees in it he picked up a feather and used a piece of coloured dough to attach it to a lollipop stick, and said "That's the macaw, he's sitting on the tree looking for dinner. What does he like for dinner?"

I asked Charlie how we could find out what the macaw likes to eat. He collected the books we had used in the introduction and I read the relevant passage to him.

Charlie decided to make a worm. He picked up a pink pipe cleaner and squashed it into the coloured dough at the base of the lollipop sticks. "And a beetle, a brown one. Yukk. I don't eat beetles." Charlie picked up a brown pipe cleaner, curled it up into a small ball and used a piece of coloured dough again to attach it to a lollipop stick. "He's crawling up the tree and he'll get pecked off."

Charlie then picked up two handfuls of rice from the dish and slowly sprinkled the rice over the rainforest while shouting "It's raining. Lots of rain." We then spent the next five minutes collecting the rice to make it rain again.

Aside from the genuine enjoyment Charlie experienced during the activity, he also developed manipulative, modelling and observational skills. He expressed his thoughts by talking about and discussing his work, and through using creative materials to make an innovative representation of his ideas. He achieved this through exploring, thinking, problem solving and communicating.



Creative responses by children should reflect their individuality, preferences and ideas.

Creative

Creative play relates to the development of children's individual ways of representing their ideas, feelings and emotions imaginatively through various forms of self-expression. These include drawing, painting, mark-making, model making, movement, role play, music, poetry, dance, drama and writing.

Children's creativity should be nurtured in a rich environment, indoors and outdoors, that stimulates imaginative thinking and offers exciting opportunities to experiment with new experiences and resources. Creative responses by children should reflect their individuality, preferences and ideas.

As children engage in creative play activities that allow them to handle new materials, make pictures and models, play different roles, create sounds, music and movement, either alone or in small groups, the following skills develop:

- manipulative
- observational
- modelling
- exploring
- experimenting
- investigating
- listening
- responding
- discussing
- thinking
- reflecting
- problem solving
- persevering
- communicating
- collaborating
- concentrating
- evaluating (their own work and the work of others).

This case study describes how exploring sound in the outdoors provided children with the freedom and space to investigate in a way which would not have been possible indoors.



Outdoor music

This activity began with the children exploring percussion instruments indoors. In groups of about 10 they spent some time exploring and experimenting with the instruments. The children then chose their favourite and 'composed' some music with their group. This was then recorded on tape so that it could be played back and evaluated.

The children were then given the opportunity to explore sound in the outdoors. They had already been shown how rice jumps up and down on a drum skin and how sound waves travel through water. Now that the children were exploring sound outside they could feel sound waves in the objects they hit. Also it meant they could make as much noise as they wished.

The children discovered that each material created a different sound. The children could feel the vibrations in the objects. Some of the objects had air inside so they acted like a drum.

"I can hear the sound travelling up the pipe."
"I'm having fun making a drum set!"

The children thought it was great to make as much noise as they could. Some children made quiet noises in the outdoors, too.



Once back indoors the children were encouraged to make their own musical instruments using junk materials. The 'instruments' are still hanging in the outdoor area and are used whenever the children use the outdoor space.

More detailed guidance can be found in DCELLS guidance document on Creative Development.

Physical

As the children become more skilled in handling smaller objects they will require more challenging activities.

Physical play relates to the development of children's body control and coordination of large movements, fine manipulative skills, spatial awareness and balance. It is also concerned with children's knowledge and understanding of a healthy lifestyle upon which physical well-being depends.

Appropriate space is essential for physical movement, both indoors and outdoors, in order that children can use their bodies actively to gain spatial awareness and experiment with movement without restrictions. Children need access to large and small equipment (for both gross motor and fine manipulative development) that they can get out and put away themselves, for use independently or with a practitioner.

Children's control and coordination of their gross motor skills develops through movement that involves the use of muscles in the body, legs and arms. As they develop most children will acquire the following skills:

- walking
- running
- stopping
- jumping
- climbing
- pushing and pulling wheeled toys
- pedalling a bike
- rolling a ball
- throwing/catching a beanbag/ball
- balancing.

Skill at manipulating a range of malleable materials and small items of equipment depends on the development of small muscles. Fine motor control is needed, for example, to build a tower of blocks, complete a jigsaw puzzle or tie shoelaces. As the children become more skilled in handling smaller objects they will require more challenging activities.



Physical skills are also linked with perceptual development, visual skills, cognitive skills and understanding of specific vocabulary related to spatial relationships. These are enhanced through a visually stimulating environment as well as opportunities to explore and talk about a wide range of resources and materials.

More detailed guidance can be found in DCELLS guidance document on Physical Development.

Coloured shapes



The photograph shows three children developing their self-confidence, balance and creative play when coloured shapes were moved to the outside area.

The children devised a game, jumping from one shape to another. The fact that they were playing together and not alongside each other was remarkable, plus the fact that nobody realised how high the children could jump.

The game covered so many areas of the curriculum, such as mathematics, personal and social skills, language, communication and physical skills.



Role of the practitioner in children's play

The learning environment indoors and outdoors needs to be organised to provide a wide range of differentiated play experiences daily.

Educational practitioners need to understand the importance of play in a child's development and plan an appropriate curriculum. Practitioners working with young children need to encourage, motivate and develop positive attitudes.

Practitioners need to be aware of when it is appropriate to intervene sensitively to extend the children's learning and challenge their problem-solving and thinking skills, and when to allow the children to come to satisfactory conclusions on their own.

It is also important that practitioners should support/'scaffold' children's learning when they are struggling with an activity or when they will not succeed without practitioner intervention. Once the children have succeeded with the activity the practitioner can then withdraw their support.

Practitioners need to plan for the different play/active learning activities for children. They also need to consider what role practitioners will play in these activities, as well as what questioning skills and interaction will take place. The learning environment indoors and outdoors needs to be organised to provide a wide range of differentiated play experiences daily.

Practitioners need to plan time for observing, monitoring and assessing children along with evaluating the structured play activities.

Organisation of the learning environment

Practitioners need to plan the learning environment very carefully to ensure that the children are having a range of play/active learning activities that allow them to be spontaneous, as well as participating in structured directed activities. The learning environment should be inviting, stimulating, flexible, language rich and used as a powerful resource to motivate learners.

It should be enhanced by interactive displays of children's work where possible. Displays and the learning environment should change where appropriate. A range of differentiated play activities should be organised both indoors and outdoors. Children should have ownership and feel confident, moving easily from the indoor to the outdoor learning environments.

This case study illustrates how one school enables children to move freely between the indoors and outdoors while at the same time restricting the numbers outside.

Play sticks

Our vision for the Foundation Phase involves utilising the environment as a resource for learning and developing the seven Areas of Learning. We feel it is important in nursery for the children to be able to move between the indoors and outdoors with a fair amount of freedom. However, restricting the numbers outside is paramount for safety reasons. The solution? Play sticks.

When a child goes outside they take with them a play stick from the vase located by the classroom door, which they leave in the plant pot outside while they engage in the outdoor activities. When finished, the child moves back inside and returns the play stick to the vase. Therefore, if there is a play stick in the vase the child is free to take it and go outside; if there is no play stick in the vase then the child must remain inside and wait until a stick is available. Children are monitored by staff and are encouraged to move in and out if necessary in order that they receive a balance of activities as well as to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to access the outdoors.

Children carry out this process independently and confidently. This activity encourages the child to have more control over their learning and more responsibility for the choices they make, as well as experience of taking turns, thinking of others and cooperation.



To support children's development the learning environment should:

- be rich in print, in English and/or Welsh where appropriate
- provide a variety of challenging opportunities
- value and celebrate everyone's contribution
- offer opportunities for:
 - being independent
 - talking, discussing and communicating
 - listening
 - turn taking
 - being still and quiet
 - being boisterous and energetic
 - reading
 - mark-making and writing
 - exploring
 - investigating
 - predicting
 - being imaginative and creative
 - observing
 - using ICT.

Resources should provide for equal opportunities and meet individual needs. Resources and activities should be developmentally appropriate, enable consolidation of existing learning and acquisition of new skills, knowledge and understanding through enquiry and investigation.

A range and variety of resources should be used and selected to support children's learning indoors and outdoors. The way resources are organised should ensure that there are a wide range of opportunities for children to make choices, select and return resources after use, and engage in experiences that interest them.

A useful resource for the learning environment can include visitors from the local communities, from various cultures and from areas of particular interest to the children. These visits can provide first-hand experiences for the children and provide ideal speaking and listening and role-play/imaginative play activities. They can extend children's knowledge and understanding, for example, on various roles people have in the community and important traditions of different cultures.

Space should be carefully planned to accommodate:

- indoor and outdoor learning experiences
- opportunities for individual and small-group work
- independent learning
- group sessions with a practitioner.

There should be adequate surfaces for:

- storing work in progress
- displaying work
- setting out interactive displays.



Planning play in the Foundation Phase

Structured play should not be a rigid set of rules that are imposed on children.

When planning play, it is important to ensure that account is taken of the different ways children play and learn. Throughout the Foundation Phase there should be opportunities for children to learn through:

- exploration
- using their senses to understand and learn about their environment/world
- activities that allow them to explore their emotions and feelings
- experiences that allow children to discover things for themselves.

Alongside these activities there should be structured experiences that have specific planned outcomes to extend the children's learning and development.

Structured play should not be a rigid set of rules that are imposed on children. It should be planned to allow children opportunities to choose and extend the activity according to their interests and knowledge.

If play is structured/restricted in such a way that children are given no opportunity to select materials, friends or to develop their own ideas, they will stop playing.

When planning play activities, practitioners should consider the following:

- the needs of the children
- the seven Areas of Learning and the relationships between them
- the setting/school
- the group/class
- the children and their input into the planning process
- the learning environments – indoors and outdoors
- the local community.

This case study illustrates how children were involved in the planning of an activity, how it developed and how a visit to a local castle made play become a reality.

Castles, knights and princesses

In our playgroup we try to involve children in the planning and implementation process by concentrating on experiences that are relevant to them and which they may have already had; for example, Post Office, pet shop and restaurant. Where possible, we take the children to the real thing either before or at some time during the activity so that the children can compare their version with the real thing. What's missing? How could we have that? What could we use? We make a list of their suggestions and requests and with them work out how these can be implemented.

The children were very interested in castles, knights and princesses. This interest had been developed from games they were playing and books we had looked at, and so we made our own castle from a large cardboard box that we decorated with sponge paint bricks, flowers and grass. The children decided it should be a Welsh castle and so we had a Welsh flag on our flag pole and put two toy dragons on the battlements to guard it. When it was finished the children played with it for the rest of the day.

The following day we asked the children what else the castle could have. They suggested a pond, ducks on the pond, a bridge over the water, a throne, knights' and princess' clothes and horses. We set about finding the materials we needed. Horses were made from cardboard boxes, the bridge was the platform from the slide, the pond an old tarpaulin and clothes were found in the dressing-up box. The children drew ducks and cut them out and then we laminated them for the children to lay on the water. After playing for a while the children decided they needed crowns, so they made them using card and jewels. A throne was made by adding a high back and arms (made out of card) to a nursery chair.

When we had been at the castle I had bought some quills and the children eagerly used them to write on their scrolls.

The children had so much fun playing with the castle that we decided to take them to a local castle for a treasure hunt. We expected the hunt to last about 30 minutes but the children were so engrossed we were there for two hours. None of the children wanted to leave when the time came and they all said they would return with their parents.

On subsequent days, the castle (in role-play corner) came alive. The children wanted to re-enact their treasure hunt. Between us we found the props we needed around the setting, placed them in a bag, and away the children went reliving the experience piece by piece, correcting each other if they got the order wrong, and sharing the objects so that they could all carry them.

Later in the day, we made some scrolls. When we had been at the castle I had bought some quills and the children eagerly used them to write on their scrolls. When they had finished their drawings/writing each scroll was tied up with red ribbon and we made seals out of red-coloured dough.

The children continued to play with the castle for several more days. We have found that they play better with props that they have made themselves; we think that this is because they feel they have ownership of them.



Planning for progression

As children will move along the learning continuum at different rates, when planning activities it is important to observe children's skills, consider individual needs and take into account the range of skills.

Relevant and engaging learning experiences will enable children to make steady progress appropriate to their stage of development. Children's involvement in planning and decision making will enhance the learning experiences for them.

Progression in children's skills can be supported by opportunities for:

- play
- experimentation
- talking/communication/discussion
- prediction/estimation
- problem solving
- practice and consolidation
- review
- application
- evaluation.

Planning for the inclusion of physical play in the weekly theme of 'Living things'

Our theme this half-term is 'Timmy and Tilly's explorations'. The following chart illustrates how we have planned for the inclusion of physical play within the weekly theme of 'Living things'. It also illustrates how a follow-up activity of creating a minibeast was planned.

Area of Learning: Physical Development

Learning objective	Vocabulary	Learning and teaching activities	Assessment
<p>To begin to develop an awareness of how their bodies move</p> <p>To move in response to a stimuli</p>	<p>Slowly</p> <p>Quickly</p> <p>Low</p> <p>High</p> <p>Move</p> <p>Minibeast</p> <p>Crawl</p> <p>Jump</p> <p>Spider</p> <p>Worm</p> <p>Fly</p>	<p>Supported free choice activity – all groups</p> <p>What are Timmy and Tilly exploring this week?</p> <p>What sound does the word 'movement' begin with?</p> <p>Show the children pictures of minibeasts and ask them how they think they move.</p> <p>Support the children by asking if they can move like a minibeast.</p> <p>How would you feel if you were an insect in the Eco-garden with lots of space to move around?</p>	<p>Can the children discuss how minibeasts move?</p> <p>Did the children understand how minibeasts move?</p>
<p>To create a minibeast from clay</p>	<p>Clay</p> <p>Minibeast</p> <p>Legs</p> <p>Wings</p> <p>Roll</p> <p>Pinch mould</p>	<p>All groups</p> <p>What are Timmy and Tilly exploring this week?</p> <p>What sound does the word 'clay' begin with?</p> <p>What minibeast would you like to make?</p> <p>Can you create a minibeast from clay?</p> <p>What does your minibeast look like?</p> <p>How many legs/wings do you need for your minibeast?</p>	<p>Could the children create a clay minibeast?</p>

Planning for Physical Development

One school plans on a weekly basis, for each Area of Learning. They identify the skill(s) to be developed, and activities to support the children in this development. The following chart illustrates how they planned for Physical Development in the nursery during a week in the spring term.

Area of Learning	Skill	Activities
Physical Development	To develop fine motor skills through using a range of tools in planned activities.	Make puppets using a variety of mark-making tools, scissors, sticky tape and lollipop sticks. 'Write' book names and own names for 'favourite story' group book.
	To develop and gain awareness of space, height and distance and to encourage cooperative play.	Build and use bridges for role play – 'Three Billy Goats Gruff' focused task.
	To become aware of potential hazards and to learn how to handle apparatus safely.	Building area – plastic bricks, cardboard boxes, bike and trailer, pull-along trailer, etc. To lift, carry and use outdoor equipment safely.



Useful information and contacts

A Corner to Learn by N Griffiths (Nelson Thornes Ltd, 1998)
ISBN: 9780748730872

Developing Outdoor Play (video) available from
Early Years Development and Childcare Service,
Buckinghamshire County Council, The Friary, Rickfords Hill,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 2RT.

Experiencing Reggio Emilia edited by L Abbott and C Nutbrown
(Open University Press, 2007) ISBN: 9780335207039

I Cento Linguaggi dei Bambini/The Hundred Languages of Children
catalogue of the exhibit (Reggio Children, 1996)
ISBN: 8887960089
(Reggio Children S.r.l., Via Guido da Castello, 12, Via Bligny, 1, 42100
Reggio Emilia, Italia.)

Meeting the Early Learning Goals through Role Play
by M Aldridge (David Fulton Publishers Ltd, 2003)
ISBN: 9781843120360

Planning for Play and Learning in Early Years Settings from Wales
Pre-school Playgroup Association, 27 Clive Place, Penarth CF64 1AW

Planning Play and the Early Years by P Tassoni and K Hucker
(Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2005) ISBN: 9780435401191

Play (Second Edition) by C Garvey (Fontana Press, 1991)
ISBN: 9780006862246

Play in the Primary Curriculum edited by N Hall and L Abbott
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) ISBN: 9780340538050

Play – The Key to Young Children’s Learning (BAECE)
ISBN: 0904187160
From the British Association for Early Childhood Education (BAECE),
136 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA.

Role Play by J Harries (Step Forward Publishing Ltd, 2003)
ISBN: 9781902438957

Spontaneous Play in Early Childhood from Birth to Six Years
by M D Sheridan (Routledge, 1993) ISBN: 041509884X

Starting with Quality report (HMSO, 1997) ISBN: 9780112707219

Structuring Play in the Early Years at School by K Manning and
A Sharp (Ward Lock Educational in association with Drake Educational
Associates, 1977) ISBN: 9780706236026

The Excellence of Play (Second Edition) edited by J R Moyles
(Open University Press, 2007) ISBN: 9780335217571

The Little Book of Role Play by S Featherstone
(Featherstone Education Ltd, 2001) ISBN: 9781902233628

Foundation Phase glossary

Active learning

This term relates to children being active and involved in their learning. Children learn best through first-hand experiences. It is crucial that children have active experiences indoors and outdoors that build up the skills, knowledge and understanding that will support their future learning.

The purpose of play/active learning is that it motivates, stimulates and supports children in their development of skills, concepts, language acquisition/communication skills and concentration. It also provides opportunities for children to develop positive attitudes and to demonstrate awareness/use of recent learning, skills and competencies, and to consolidate learning.

Assessment profile

The assessment profile provides guidance on key child developmental stages and skills that children develop and acquire from approximately 18 months through to 84 months.

Child initiated/centred

The Foundation Phase curriculum should focus more on children's interests, development and learning rather than the curriculum and pre-determined outcomes. It is important to note that the planned curriculum has to have structure and clear learning objectives but enough flexibility to enable the children to follow their interests and their needs.

Careful observations of the planned curriculum and how children respond to it should provide evidence of whether the children are focused on their learning and not playing aimlessly. An understanding of child development is crucial to ensure that the children are extended in their learning.

Cognitive development

Cognitive development is the development of the mind. It focuses on children's thinking and understanding, imagination and creativity (including problem solving/reasoning/concentration and memory).

Communication/language development

Language is made up of different forms and skills which include speaking and listening, reading, writing, thinking and observation. The tone of a voice is a powerful form of communicating meaning. Some children may use alternate systems to the voice such as signing.

Non-verbal communication also takes on different forms such as facial expressions (smiling), gestures/body movements (shoulders slouching and eye contact).

Cooperative/group play

Children start to play together, they share their play. Children become more sociable, take on roles in the play and take account of the roles of other children. They begin to be aware of the needs and wishes of their peers, so that gradually the play becomes more complex. Rules are sometime devised and some cooperative play will be revisited over several days.

Cultural diversity

The Foundation Phase supports the cultural identity of all children, celebrates different cultures and helps children recognise and gain positive awareness of their own and other cultures. Positive attitudes should be developed to enable children to become increasingly aware of and appreciative of the value of the diversity of cultures and languages that exist in Wales.

Curriculum

Seven Areas of Learning have been identified to describe an appropriate curriculum for 3 to 7-year-olds that supports the development of children and their skills. They complement each other and work together to provide a curriculum that is holistic. Each Area of Learning includes the statutory education content (skills and range) that needs to be followed.

Curriculum Cymreig

The Foundation Phase contributes to the Curriculum Cymreig by developing children's understanding of the cultural identity unique to Wales across all Areas of Learning through an integrated approach. Children should appreciate the different languages, images, objects, sounds and tastes that are integral to Wales today, and gain a sense of belonging to Wales, and understand the Welsh heritage, literature and arts as well as the language.

Differentiation

The curriculum should be flexible to match children's abilities, skills and developmental needs.

Emotional well-being

Emotional development focuses on the development of children's self-esteem, their feelings and their awareness of the feelings of others.

Fine manipulative skills

The development of children's fine manipulation/motor skills begins within the centre of their bodies and moves out. Through appropriate development, children will eventually be able to undertake fine and intricate movements. Fine manipulation skills include using finger movements and hand-eye coordination.

Gross motor skills

The development of gross motor skills starts with the young baby controlling head movements and then, moving down the body, controlling other parts of the body. Gross motor development includes using whole body movements, coordination and balance.

Holistic curriculum

The holistic curriculum is one where Areas of Learning are interlinked and learning and teaching support many aspects of the children's development rather than focusing on one specific stage or need. The curriculum is viewed and delivered as a whole.

Imagination

Imagination is having the skills and ability to form images, ideas and concepts that either exist but are not present, or that do not exist at all.

Independence

Independence refers to having the ability and skill to be less dependent on others. Skills of managing and coping should be progressively developed throughout the Foundation Phase.

Learning styles

There are different learning styles or preferred ways of interacting. The learning styles are: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. When learning styles are taken into account learning can be enhanced.

Some children learn best if they have a visual stimulus, others an auditory one or a kinaesthetic (practical) task. Research into brain development has shown that individual learning styles are affected by the environment, the type of learning activity and whether the child is working independently or in a group.

Memory

The memory is the part of the brain where information is collected, saved and later retrieved. Initially information has to be taken in and understood; it is then saved and recalled when needed. All of these processes are needed for learning to take place

Outcomes

The Foundation Phase Outcomes incorporate baseline assessment scales and descriptions and the national curriculum level descriptions. They have been developed to support the end of phase statutory teacher assessment. There are six Outcomes per Area of Learning and for information purposes Outcomes 4–6 broadly cross-reference to the current descriptions for Levels 1–3.

Outdoor learning

There is a strong emphasis on outdoor learning in the Foundation Phase. The outdoor learning environment should be an extension of the indoor learning environment. Structured experiential activities should be planned for throughout the day, and children should as far as possible (taking account of health and safety issues) be able to move freely between the indoors and outdoors.

Parallel play

Children may appear to be playing together, but closer observation reveals the children are actually playing alone and not interacting with each other. Children can be using the same equipment, or sitting or standing next to each other, but both are working independently of each other, with no interaction (either positive or negative) between them in their play.

Partnership/associative play

Children operating in the partnership/associative stage of play will begin to become aware of other children. They start to communicate with each other and are more aware of the play/games that other children are involved in. They begin to explain to each other what they are doing. Gradually one child will become involved in the other child's play.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to the relationships between learning and teaching. It embraces the concept of the practitioner as a facilitator of learning, responding to the needs of individuals, willing to learn alongside the children, using appropriate methods to manage the process of learning and continually reflecting on and improving practice.

Personal development

Personal development focuses on the children's awareness of themselves and the development of their self-help skills.

Physical development

Physical development focuses on increasing the skills and performance of the body. Physical and cognitive development are closely linked, especially during the early years. Physical development can be divided into gross motor skills and fine manipulative skills.

Practitioners

This generic term refers to the adults that work with children in the Foundation Phase. It includes teachers and classroom assistants in the maintained sector, and staff that work in the funded education settings in the non-maintained sector.

Practitioner/adult guided

Practitioners need to plan an appropriate curriculum that engages children in their learning. They need to encourage, motivate and develop attitudes. Practitioners need to be aware of when it is appropriate to intervene sensitively to extend children's learning, when to challenge their problem-solving and thinking skills, and when to allow the children to come to satisfactory conclusions on their own. Practitioners should support/'scaffold' children's learning, observing, monitoring and assessing children's progress to ensure that they are moving on to the next stages of their development and that their skills are being extended.

Problem solving

Problem solving focuses on developing the ability to assess a problem/situation then gathering information to find a solution/answer. As children's skills increase they will be able to draw on previous experiences when attempting new activities and solving problems.

Self-esteem

This refers to the way children feel about themselves. Positive feelings indicate a high self-esteem, while negative feelings about themselves are an indication of low self-esteem.

Skills framework

The non-statutory *Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales* outlines progression in developing thinking, communication, number and information and communication technology (ICT).

Social development

Social development focuses on children's social interactions and relationships with their peers, practitioners and adults.

Solitary play

Children play contentedly alone. They are involved in their own play and will move from activity to activity regardless of any other children. Often in this stage of play children enjoy imitating everyday activities.

Spectator play

Children observe other children but do not join in. They like to watch other children playing. Often they can be observed standing/sitting on the fringes of where other children are playing. Although they can appear to be alone or lacking in confidence, they can often be concentrating while observing the play in order to develop an understanding of what to do.

Statutory assessment

Within the Foundation Phase there are two statutory assessments that have to be implemented: the baseline assessment and the end of phase statutory teacher assessment.

Structured educational play

Structured play experiences have specific planned outcomes to extend children's learning, skills and development. Structured play should be planned with flexibility so as to allow children opportunities to choose and extend an activity according to their interests and knowledge.

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