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cyfnod sylfaen 3–7 foundation phase



Observing Children



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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Observing Children

- 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 document provides guidance on the importance of observation. Opportunities to observe children should be an integral part of the daily routine of practitioners working within the Foundation Phase. Observation should form part of the setting/school's overall procedures and not stand alone.
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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 assessment within the Foundation Phase. This document provides guidance on the importance of observation and should be used to support judgements on children's development and skills. Opportunities to observe children should be an integral part of the daily routine of practitioners working within the Foundation Phase. Observation should form part of the setting's/school's overall assessment procedures and not stand alone.

Introduction

Observing children is equally informative whether the observation takes place indoors or outdoors.

It is essential that practitioners working with children have an understanding of child development and the needs of children. By observing children carefully to note their progress, involvement and enjoyment, as well as focusing on the attainment of predetermined outcomes, practitioners should be able to plan a more appropriate curriculum that supports children's development according to individual needs.

By observing children while they are involved in activities, practitioners will find out how the children's skills are developing and what they are able to do. Practitioners will also be able to gather information on what the children know and understand, as well as their personal preferences.

It is important to note that not all observations will have a predetermined aim or rationale (in fact, many result from observing). Children may be observed on a daily basis as they undertake their activities. Observing children is equally informative whether the observation takes place indoors or outdoors.

It is not necessary to record all that is observed, but it is important to use the relevant information and judgements concerning children's development and significant achievements in future planning. Data and information gathered when observing children is an important tool in developing a complete picture of the children.

Observation and assessment enables practitioners to:

- know the individual child and highlight his/her strengths, interests and needs
- identify the plan for the child's progress
- highlight children's development, strengths and abilities across all Areas of Learning
- provide a graduated response and specific help to children whose progress is not adequate and who may be on the continuum of special educational needs (SEN Code of Practice for Wales)
- inform children of their achievements and next steps for their learning
- inform staff, parents/carers of children's achievements and next steps for their learning

- identify, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum provided
- inform transition during the Foundation Phase and between the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2.

This case study describes how two boys were able to consolidate and build on their existing skills through activities that grew out of an observed initial interest that they had in a shopping basket.

Shopping

Two boys, one in nursery and one in Year 1, showed an interest in shopping after finding a blue shopping basket in the toy box. With their help, a shop was set up in one area of the classroom and I became a shopkeeper. Both boys have additional needs and need practitioners to lead play activities. They spent quite a number of sessions in the shop and created interest among their classmates. Both boys have difficulties with speech and language and this activity enabled them to develop and practice their requesting skills in a way that interested, and was meaningful to them.

Both are at the 'two information word' level and were able to ask me for different items from the shop, for example "I want eggs please". It was delightful to observe their developing language and role-play skills, and all three of us had fun during these sessions.

As a follow-up activity, I took the boys to a local supermarket to buy vegetables for cooking and they were able to use real money in a real situation. Individual targets achieved by both boys included using two words to request goods, taking turns, waiting, using money, naming goods and working together.

Purpose of observing children

Through observing and listening practitioners are able to gather evidence before and after children have been taught a skill and over a period of time. This enables practitioners to assess how much progress the children have made and whether they need further opportunities to consolidate their learning.

By using a variety of teaching methods practitioners will be able to determine the learning preferences/styles of individual children. The practitioners will also receive information on how successful certain activities and opportunities have been.

The main purpose of observing children is to determine where they are on the learning continuum in order to move them along, and to identify any difficulties, misinterpretations or misunderstandings.



What should be observed?

It is important that practitioners listen to children as well as watch them when observing, as they can learn a great deal about children's learning and understanding through listening to their speech.

Observation should play a key role in the everyday practice of practitioners working with children. When observing children, practitioners should collate information on their development and achievements and discuss these with colleagues, in order to inform future planning and assessment of the children's achievements.

It is important that practitioners listen to children as well as watch them when observing, as they can learn a great deal about children's learning and understanding through listening to their speech. Observations of children should be undertaken across all seven Areas of Learning, which are:

- 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.

Information on children's developmental progress and achievements/attainments should be obtained through discussions with them as well as observing different situations and contexts within the setting/school, such as:

- children playing alone
- children playing alongside children and practitioners
- children playing and interacting with their peers in pairs and small groups
- children's interactions with practitioners
- children's interactions with their parents/carers and visitors
- children's interactions with the environment (indoors and outdoors) and resources both natural and commercially produced
- within the different types of play, both structured and free/spontaneous; for example:
 - imaginary/pretend
 - small world
 - construction
 - creative
 - physical

- at different times of the day
- on different days of the week.

Observing children completing tasks that have been planned and those that the children have chosen themselves will give practitioners and parents/carers a detailed picture of:

- the development of children's skills
- what the children understand
- the children's involvement in their learning
- personal choices the children have made
- children's interests and concentration levels
- the children's relationships with their peers and adults
- the children's behaviour patterns (and other areas needing closer attention such as hearing, sight, and concentration span).

While observing children, practitioners can also ask themselves questions that will lead to an evaluation of the provision, the future training needs of practitioners and the different learning and teaching approaches used. Key questions could include the following.

- Are the activities too easy or too difficult?
- How are the children using the resources?
- Is there anything missing that the children need?
- Is sufficient time/space provided for the experience and consolidation?
- Are the children fully involved in the activity – if not, why not?
- How independent are the children in their learning?
- Are the children able to work/play alongside/in cooperation with other children?
- Do the children need practitioners' intervention?
- Has there been opportunity for sustained thinking?
- What needs to be done to move the learning on?
- Is there a balance of activities over time (indoor/outdoor, individual/group, etc.)?

This case study illustrates how a teacher observed a group of nursery children being independent in their learning by working alongside/in cooperation with one another and by adapting the use of their resources.

The lost ball

A child was playing with a wooden bat and small ball when the ball rolled over to the other side of the railings. She attempted to reach through the railings but her arm was not long enough. Another child offered the use of his leg, which was longer than her arm but still not long enough. Another child thought the chain from the gate could be thrown over it. This was tried without success. The chain was long enough but not rigid enough. An assortment of objects including a pencil was used in vain. Eventually the child picked up her wooden bat, discovered that it fitted through the railings and was long enough to retrieve the ball. She was clearly delighted at the outcome.



This case study illustrates how a Year 2 child was helped to take part in a variety of activities and to interact more with peers.



A child at solitary play

Lewis had difficulty playing with and relating to his peers. When he played with others he often came into conflict with them and would often leave them to play on his own.

Lewis particularly enjoyed small world play. We have a resource that comprises a variety of blocks and components which when put together make a circular town.

The blocks can also be stacked to make buildings. Lewis spent time carefully putting the town together and then made one building as tall as possible. He made sure that the building/blocks were stable and would always want praise and acknowledgement when the 'task' was completed.

"Look, look what I've done."

"Look how tall this is, don't knock it down."

Lewis then asked if he could take a photo and this was printed off for him.

Having observed Lewis returning to this activity quite often, we realised that we needed to encourage him to take part in a variety of other activities and to provide him with opportunities to play with the other children. This has proved very successful. Lewis is now able to play contentedly with his peers and no longer needs the security of returning to small world play.

Methods for observing

When engrossed in their work children are absorbed in the activity and may appear to be unaware of what is happening around them.

There are many different ways of observing children that practitioners can undertake to support their judgements:

- planned observation for a specific length of time and over a period of time
- planned observation that assesses developmental progress (specific focus on outcomes or process of learning)
- planned observation on targeted children
- spontaneous observation of something that occurs during the setting/school routine.

Before undertaking a planned observation, thought should be given to which method of observation will best provide the specific information/assessment that is needed. This information could relate to, for example, children's behaviour, and emotional as well as intellectual development.

Planned observations should have a specific focus and practitioners should be aware of what to look out for, who to look at and when and where the planned observation is going to take place.

How should practitioners observe?

If observations are undertaken frequently and as part of the children's session/day then the children will become accustomed to practitioners observing and will continue with their play/activities, resulting in less disruption for the practitioners. When engrossed in their work children are absorbed in the activity and may appear to be unaware of what is happening around them.

Practitioners can observe children by taking an active role in the activity the children are involved in. During this time practitioners can gather information on what the children are able to do and which skills they need to develop to move their learning along.

The quality of questioning is vital in helping children to become independent thinkers and learners, and to extend their learning.

Practitioners can also observe by standing or sitting near the targeted child/children and observing what the child/children is/are doing, the choices they are making and whether they are working individually or cooperatively. Practitioners can also observe the child's/children's interactions with the learning environment.

A number of researchers have developed methods for observing and assessing children and then using the data to support future planning for the individual child, group or class. (See the section on Useful information and contacts for some details on assessment programmes available for observing children).

When observing children it is important to know when it is appropriate to intervene to talk to the children or to ask questions, and when it is appropriate to stand back and allow the children to continue with their activity without any interruption.

The quality of questioning is vital in helping children to become independent thinkers and learners, and to extend their learning.

Some questions only allow children to recall information or demonstrate their understanding/comprehension. More thought-provoking and stimulating questions will allow children to reason, evaluate and devise their own solutions and answers to the questions.

The two main styles of questioning are:

- **closed questions**, which tend to have a specific focus and usually only allow for one correct answer. Closed questions are useful in:
 - ascertaining what children have understood; for example, in a story
 - encouraging less-confident children to provide short answers
 - acting as a stimulus/springboard for the introduction to extended conversation.
- **open questions** which tend to be short (sometimes just one word; for example, 'who?', 'when?', 'why?') and provide children with the opportunity to think and discuss a number of possibilities, solutions and ways forward.

The most experienced practitioners can often have very unexpected answers to their questions, as illustrated in the following case study.

This case study illustrates how 3-year-old Daniel took great care in painting a picture of a penguin in deep water. I had observed Daniel painting his picture and had become intrigued by his precision and attention to detail.

A penguin picture

Daniel had brought a toy penguin to school. He told us Percy wanted deep water to swim in. I thought he would make a plan to use the water tray but when it came to planning time he told the group he was going to the art area to paint deep water.

Daniel chose a piece of blue card and created a wonderful effect with paint. He explored the drawers in the art area and was delighted to find a penguin picture that he glued and stuck on the water. Daniel then carefully cut some art straws to particular lengths and spread glue along the lengths of the straw pieces, pressing them onto his picture. Satisfied, he hung his picture to dry.

At recall/review time Daniel brought his picture to show us.
"This is the deep water. Percy is on the bottom under the water, look."
"And these?" I said, pointing to the straws.
"They're straws," said Daniel, looking at me as if I really should have known this.



When should practitioners intervene?

It is through observing and understanding children's development that practitioners develop the skill of knowing when to intervene and when not to intervene. The most obvious reasons for intervening are when children:

- need help and/or are struggling with a task and could become frustrated if support is not provided
- have reached a plateau in their learning and need to move on to the next stage of the learning continuum
- are at risk because there could be a health and safety issue
- are in disagreement with other children and are unable to reach a positive solution
- are being aggressive with the resources, or when resources need to be added or removed from a play situation to extend play/learning
- want to include you.

Extracts of text from this case study have been included in the *Foundation Phase Play/Active Learning: Overview for 3 to 7-year-olds guidance document*. The section of text included here describes how the class teacher incorporated an intervention strategy focusing on two boys in a class activity.

Day and night – The shiny sack

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.

More than one child at this point asked if we could take the bag outside to open. 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. 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. 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 that it described. Year 2 children led this part of the activity.

The children were then allowed free choice to play with the items. This provided me with a planned opportunity to observe two cousins at play. These two boys were often aggressive in their relationships with other children and usually preferred

I was hoping that the dressing-up activity would allow the boys to reveal a side to them previously unseen in school.

to solve disagreements with a punch or a kick rather than a discussion. Their mutual grandmother had previously told me that the boys didn't like dressing up unless as a Power Ranger.

Both boys were extremely aware of their masculinity and very rarely showed any affection. It was becoming increasingly apparent that some intervention was needed if the boys' behaviour was to be modified. I was hoping that the dressing-up activity would allow the boys to reveal a side to them previously unseen in school.

At first, they were reluctant to have the fabric draped around them, but with encouragement from their peers (not a practitioner in this situation) the boys eventually found that no-one was laughing at them. By the end of the session the boys were to be found not only in the 'cloaks', but wearing a tiara each, one of the pink shiny gloves each and holding a wand! They were running around the playground putting spells on each other.

I considered this a huge step forward in their personal and social development. For the first time, the boys were able to join in with a role-play activity that did not include aggressive behaviour towards other children. I also felt that because the children had more space outside they did not feel 'watched' by anyone. At the end of the activity, all the staff involved felt that, in particular, the increased personal space had helped these boys to investigate freely.

Ways of recording observations

Settings/schools may have set formats for recording children's achievements and developmental progress. The following are a sample of the different ways a setting/school may wish to record their initial and ongoing observations of children's achievements and developmental progress.

Notebooks

These can be strategically placed in a setting/classroom and all practitioners working with the children have access to use these notebooks to write down/record their observation on children's significant achievements and/or important events or incidents that may have occurred.

Diaries

These can be used on a daily basis and can record children's responses and developmental progress, individually and in groups.

Sticky notes

These can be placed in a number of places around the setting/classroom for ease of access. Once completed they should be placed in a secure place. They are used in a similar way to notebooks.

Index cards

These can be used to record children's individual developmental progress and achievements.

Adhesive labels

Used in the same way as index cards, but are transferred directly onto the children's records.

Record sheet

These are pre-prepared record sheets with identified sections for recording.

Technology

Digital and ordinary photographs, videos and audio tapes can all be used to record children's achievements and progress.

The information that has been collated should be used in future planning and to inform parents/carers of the children's progress. Some information will be needed in the short term while some will need to be kept for the longer term. It is important that any form of recording is not burdensome for staff and that the amount of paper is kept to a minimum.

The type and range of record keeping to assist with practitioner assessment is a matter for settings/schools to decide. Elaborate arrangements for recording and retaining evidence of assessments are neither required for Foundation Phase assessment purposes nor necessary to satisfy Estyn inspection requirements.



Questions to consider when observing children

This section focuses on examples of questions and triggers that practitioners could ask themselves when observing children's skills development in the following areas:

- personal development
- social development
- well-being/emotional development
- cognitive development
- language development and communication skills
- physical development.

Personal development

Do they organise themselves when playing or completing set tasks?

- How do the children respond to being separated from their family? If they find it difficult, how long does it take for them to calm down and by what means are the children comforted?
- How able are the children in dressing/undressing themselves? Is help required?
- Are the children able to feed themselves? What are their eating habits like?
- Do the children demonstrate awareness of personal hygiene? How are they progressing?
- How do the children react to the environment – do they show respect, do they manage their own choices? Do they use resources constructively, with care?
- Are they independent in getting and putting away appropriate resources to complete a task?
- Are they able to resolve conflicts with their peers without adult intervention?
- Do they organise themselves when playing or completing set tasks?
- To what extent are children aware of what they are good at, and to what extent do they understand how they can improve their learning and use feedback to improve their work?

- Are the children able to concentrate for lengthening periods when involved in appropriate tasks, and are they able to value the learning, success and achievements of themselves and other people?



Social development

**Are they able to form relationships?
How confident are they to work cooperatively?**

- To what extent do they understand the difference between right and wrong? Do they take responsibility for their own actions?
- How do the children interact with their peers and practitioners? Are they communicative? Do they initiate conversation/play? Do they help others?
- Are they able to form relationships? How confident are they to work cooperatively?
- Are they aware of and respectful of each other, and are they accepting of individual similarities/differences?
- Have the children developed an awareness of different cultures and religions? Are they aware of the differing needs and views of other people in their own and in other cultures and religions?
- Do the children have an understanding of the diversity of roles that people play in different groups/communities?
- Do the children demonstrate an understanding and empathy towards other children's views and beliefs? Are they able to debate in an appropriate manner over social issues?
- Do the children show respect and care for the natural world? How do they treat plants/animals, etc.?

Do the children choose healthy options for snacks/dinners independently?

Well-being/emotional development

- Do the children recognise, express and discuss a range of emotions?
- Is the children's well-being having a positive or negative effect on their learning?
- Are the children aware of their own feelings and do they have the ability to express them in an appropriate way?
- Are the children confident enough to approach practitioners to ask questions?
- How do the children respond to the feelings and emotions of others?
- How well do the children resolve their emotional conflicts, etc.?
- Do the children understand the relationship between feelings and actions, and understand that other people have feelings?
- Do the children demonstrate care, respect and affection for other children, practitioners and their environment?
- How well do the children respond to disappointments? Are they able to change to alternative solutions?
- How do the children relate to (different people) peers/practitioners?
- Do the children choose healthy options for snacks/dinners independently?
- Have the children begun to understand the impact of healthy foods, exercise and hygiene on their bodies?
- Are they aware of dangers within the home and outside environment?
- Are they aware that some medicines are taken to make them feel better and that some drugs are dangerous?

How developed is their concept of time?

Cognitive development

- Are the children independent in their thinking? How do they go about solving problems, choosing activities and resources? What assistance do they need?
- How developed are the children's memory skills? Are they able to recall? How much prompting and revisiting is needed?
- Do the children show an interest in materials/environment? Do they enjoy the challenge of experimenting with new materials? How do they react to them?
- How well do the children match, order and classify objects/events, etc.?
- How able are the children in sequencing and ordering? Can they extend sequences of events in a logical way? How sophisticated are these skills?
- How involved are the children in their learning? Are they demonstrating a preferred learning style? Which one?
- Are thinking skills developing? Are they starting to think logically?
- What approaches do they take to solve problems? Are they able to communicate/discuss their solutions?
- Are they able to distinguish between real and pretend?
- How developed is their concept of time?
- Are the children able to discuss and say what they have found out from their work? Are they able to extend it further? How?
- Are they able to transfer their learning to new situations? How confident are they?

Language development and communication skills

Are the children aware of other languages? How do they respond to them?

- How do the children respond to and demonstrate an understanding of stories, rhymes, etc.?
- Do the children follow instructions? Can they cope with detailed instructions?
- How do the children express their thoughts, ideas, needs and feelings?
- How well are the children's ideas communicated – are they easily understood? Are the children confident when communicating?
- How fluent are the children when speaking, and how effective are the children at communicating with their peers and practitioners?
- Do the children use facial and body gestures to express needs, etc.? If so, how often and what type?
- Do children respond to the facial/body gestures of others?
- Do the children incorporate relevant detail in explanations, descriptions and narratives, and distinguish between the essential and less important?
- Do the children recognise the importance of language that is clear, fluent and interesting in order to communicate effectively?
- Do the children respond appropriately and effectively to what they have heard?
- Do the children ask and answer questions that clarify their understanding and indicate thoughtfulness about the matter under discussion?
- Are the children aware of other languages? How do they respond to them?
- Are the children's reading skills developing, what strategies do they use to assist them?
- Are the children's writing skills developing? Which stage of writing have they reached?

Physical development

How are the children's balancing skills developing?

Gross motor

- How well do the children control their bodies when rolling, jumping, running, etc.?
- How do the children respond to different sounds?
- Do the children demonstrate an understanding of spatial awareness?
- Are the children able to use the space that is around, behind, underneath, below, over and under, on top of and away from them? Can they adjust their speed and direction, show fast/slow and high/low movements or strong/light movements, and stop suddenly?
- Has the children's coordination improved and do they have increasing control over their bodies when undertaking different activities?
- How are the children's balancing skills developing?

Fine motor

- How able are the children in manipulating objects and materials? How competent are they at completing construction materials and sets? Are they making progress?
- Which hand does the child favour? How well do they use mark-making materials and equipment such as scissors?
- How competent are the children becoming in their hand-eye coordination, and their artistic and writing skills?



Appendix 1

The observation sheet used during the 'Day and night' activity (case study on pages 15 and 16) is replicated below.

Observation sheet Taflen gofnodi	Class Dosbarth	Staff Staff	Day/Night Dydd/Nos
Term Tymor	Date Dyddiad	INDOOR/OUTDOOR DAN-DO /YN YR AWYR AGORED	
<p>Brief outline of activity/Braslun byr o'r gweithgaredd: <i>Investigating contents of a shiny bag. Inside were many lengths of different shiny fabric, shiny wands, plastic tiaras and a cutlass, a shiny car, hairbrush, a shiny box containing silver beads ("Treasure!"), silver bells, a mirror and word cards such as 'shiny', 'glistening', 'shimmering', 'shine', 'glow', 'glowing', etc.</i></p>			
Child/Plentyn 1: Sioned	Child/Plentyn 2: William	Child/Plentyn 3: Ella	Child/Plentyn 4:
<p><i>Dressed up, says to Millie "You look fabulous darling," in a posh voice. Conversation follows - admiring everyone else in their cloaks. Didn't complain at changeover time when she was left with just the mirror. Proceeded to show everyone else their reflections in her mirror. (Clearly loved dressing up - silver cloak, tiara, gloves and wand.)</i></p>	<p><i>Standing by me says that his cape "...is sparkling on you, it's magic". Pretends to be a knight with the sword, while Karl and Rhys put a spell on him with the wands. But his cape is his armour; so he's protected. (Wonderful imaginative role play which evolved with changeovers bringing new objects to the game.)</i></p>	<p><i>Didn't choose a cloak, but took a silver bag which she filled with all the small items she could find. She used a wand and ran around waving it "using magic"; "We've got a special power," she said, holding a cup. She seemed to be loving being part of a small team of fairies and wizards, running constantly from one end of the yard to the other.</i></p>	
<p>Next step/Y cam nesaf: <i>This type of activity seems to reinforce the importance of providing the freedom to explore and imagine in a wide open space. All the children (and the practitioners) came back in looking exhilarated and 'sparkly'. More of the same, please.</i></p>			

Useful information and contacts

Effective Early Learning Project/Programme (EEL) by C Pascal and T Bertram (University College Worcester)

Primary Effective Early Learning Project/Programme (PEEL) by C Pascal and T Bertram (University College Worcester)

(These are programmes for assessing children's involvement in their learning.)

A Practical Guide to Child Observation and Assessment by C Hobart and J Frankel (Nelson Thornes, 2004) ISBN: 978 0748785261

How to make Observations and Assessments by J Harding and L Meldon-Smith (Hodder Arnold, 2008) ISBN: 978 0340647489

Tracking Significant Achievement in the Early Years by V Hutchin (Hodder Murray) ISBN: 978 0340790830

A Process-Oriented Child Monitoring System (research started 1976) by F Laevers (*Experiential Education* series, Centre for Experiential Education, Belgium). This is a programme for observing and assessing children's well-being and their involvement. The English learning tools section of it, and other related materials, can be accessed by visiting www.cego.be

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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