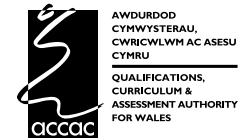


Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age



FOREWORD

Pre-school places should be of good quality and should offer education which will lead to desirable outcomes for children's learning. This document, first published in 1996, has been republished following consultation during the review of the National Curriculum in Wales.

This document:

- provides clear guidance as to the desirable outcomes for children's learning before compulsory school age
- takes account of the best practice developed in Wales in the provision of pre-compulsory age education
- should help to improve standards in this key area of educational provision.

The document does not set out programmes of study and attainment targets for under-fives to achieve. However, the areas of experience outlined in the document are complimentary to the National Curriculum and will facilitate children's entry to the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum when they are five years old.

This document is for all those people - parents, teachers, nursery nurses, voluntary workers and teaching auxiliaries - who work with and are involved in the education of young children in Wales.



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Note:

Compulsory schooling starts at five although, in Wales, very many children attend nursery classes in primary schools, reception classes in primary schools, nursery units, nursery schools, private nursery schools, private day nurseries or voluntary playgroups before that age. This group of children is often referred to by a range of terms: pre-school children, nursery children or early years children. This document uses the term 'under-fives' for them. The term 'under-fives' refers, therefore, to the age of the children and not to the provision they receive.

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INTRODUCTION

Pan feddwn dalent plentyn
I weld llais a chlywed llun ...
(When I had a child's talent to see a voice and hear an image...)

In the opening lines of his epic poem Afon (River), Gerallt Lloyd Owen longs for the magic of early childhood. It is the time when the world is there to be explored and the adventure of discovery is all around. He has evoked the very essence of childhood.

That essence is the foundation of early childhood education. It is understanding, appreciating and rejoicing in the extraordinary ability that young children have to search systematically for knowledge, to negotiate relationships, to decode and acquire languages, to agree on symbolic meaning, to respond to challenging adults. It is the imperative to learn.

Principles

In Wales, good quality education of under-fives:

- contributes to the all-round growth and development of every child
- provides a springboard for learning through both structured and spontaneous play
- ensures active involvement and relevant first hand experiences in an environment rich with possibilities
- values the contribution which parents or carers make to their child's education and encourages a working partnership
- ensures that equal opportunities are offered to girls and boys, to children with special learning needs and to those from different cultures
- provides experiences and opportunities for young children to become aware of the distinctiveness of Wales, its languages and culture.

Adults concerned with under-fives have a particular responsibility for their care, safety, protection and well-being.

The Context for Learning

The early years curriculum is about the child. It is concerned not only with the content but also with the context of the learning. The process is as important as the outcome.

The Importance of Play

Well structured and purposeful play activities enhance and extend children's learning. For the child, play can be and often is a very serious business. It needs concentrated attention. It is all about perseverance, attending to detail, learning and concentrating - characteristics usually associated with work. Play is not only crucial to the way children become self aware and the way in which they learn the rules of social behaviour; it is also fundamental to intellectual development.

Young children learn most effectively when they are actively involved in first hand experiences. Educational provision for young children is centred on the child. It is about adults understanding, inspiring and challenging the child's talent to learn, with adult involvement in children's play being of vital importance. Good early years educators are there to help children, to guide their play, to offer choices, to challenge children with care and sensitivity, to encourage them and to move their learning along.



The Principle of Appropriateness

The principle of appropriateness must underpin education for under-fives. Young children vary in the rate and timing of their growth and development. A curriculum designed for them must acknowledge this. Accomplished early years educators understand that age-appropriate and development-appropriate activities do not always match.

The developmental norm will encompass a wide range. Some four year olds will barely speak in comprehensible language, whereas others will be reading confidently. Some will have difficulty in completing a simple jigsaw and others will be constructing complex water carriers out of meccano, buckets, wood off-cuts and string.

Four year old children will move along a continuum. This will not be a steady or uniform progression. It can often be erratic, unpredictable and can sometimes be regressive. The same child may have needs and skills at both ends of the continuum at almost the same time, for example:

- within minutes a child can be both dependent and independent, depending on changes in environment or adult expectations
- a young child will need a stable, predictable environment, but will also enjoy challenges and surprises.

Special Needs

Most children, at some time, will have particular needs which educators will need to recognise, consider, understand and cater for appropriately. All children, whatever their needs, have the same entitlement to an invigorating and enriching play curriculum.

Children in their early years can have special educational needs which will, in many cases, be temporary. With vigorous and planned intervention these needs can be addressed. Other needs will be permanent and long-term planning will be needed in order to meet them properly.

Nursery educators should be alert observers. They should recognise, evaluate, understand and respond to the needs of the individual child. They should take appropriate action if children are not progressing.

Welsh and the Curriculum Cymreig

When children reach compulsory school age, they will learn Welsh as part of the National Curriculum. They will also be given opportunities, where appropriate, to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, environmental, historical and linguistic characteristics of Wales ('the Curriculum Cymreig').

Many playgroups and nursery classes use English as the medium of provision, although some of these will use some Welsh. Experiencing Welsh at an early age, when language acquisition skills are at their most effective, can be a valuable preparation for the child's learning of Welsh at school.

In other provision for under-fives, both voluntary and statutory, Welsh is the medium of provision. Children in these settings may come from homes where Welsh is not spoken, but with appropriate support and planned progression, these children become successfully bilingual.

All under-fives can be given opportunities to hear about Wales, about their locality, about customs, about names, about stories and legends, about people and events. These experiences form part of a rewarding and lively learning experience for children of nursery age in Wales and allow children to have their experience of life in Wales enhanced.

AREAS OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE AND DESIRABLE OUTCOMES

What follows is not an exhaustive list of competences. It sets out areas of learning and experience and desirable outcomes within them. It is not a self-contained checklist against which children can be tidily matched. Not all children will be able to do all of these things. But most children should be able to do most of them. Children with limited mobility or sensory impairment should not be excluded from these areas of learning, but may need alternative strategies to demonstrate their capabilities. The quality of provision should be aimed at achieving the desirable outcomes.

These areas of learning are not discrete, separate subject areas but rather integrated and over-lapping areas of experience. Beginning to understand the uses of money, for example, is a mathematical experience as much as it is a social experience and it has also to do with understanding the world about us. Similarly, understanding spatial relationships - that is where things are in relation to other things - needs effective language experiences, but also a grasp of mathematical and scientific ideas which may, in turn, need physical skills to realise.

Language, Literacy and Communication Skills

Competent use of language is the most fundamental of human skills. It is a decisive factor in making progress in other areas of learning. The acquisition of language in early childhood is a complex process. If a child has a wide range of language experiences, that acquisition should become well established and the child's intellectual, emotional and social learning will be enhanced.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- listen to a good story
- listen, respond to, and recall songs, nursery rhymes, poems and jingles
- communicate needs
- ask questions and listen to responses
- relate the broad thrust of the story
- re-tell their own experiences, broadly in the order in which they occurred
- discuss their current individual and group play and refer to their intentions
- express opinions and make choices
- identify and explain events illustrated in pictures
- choose a book and hold it the right way
- understand that written symbols have sound and meaning
- understand some of the functions of writing
- enjoy marking and basic writing experiences - using pencils, crayons, etc
- use marking implements for a range of purposes: painting, drawing, writing, scribbling.



Personal and Social Development

Under-fives will be learning about themselves. They will be learning about relationships with other children and with adults, and about the responsibilities that are involved. They will be learning about the world outside the family, about how people live and work, about the past and about people and places outside their direct experience, including people from different cultures and backgrounds. They will be learning about standards of good behaviour and developing appropriate attitudes.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- feel confident and be able to form relationships with other children and with adults
- demonstrate care, respect and affection for other children and adults
- begin to show sensitivity to others and to those with difficulties
- concentrate for lengthening periods when involved in appropriate tasks
- explore and experiment confidently with new learning opportunities
- acknowledge the need for help and seek help when needed
- begin to take responsibility for personal hygiene (for example, washing hands after using the toilet, before handling food and so on)
- dress themselves, if given time and encouragement
- take turns, share and begin to exercise self-control
- understand that all living things should be treated with care, respect and concern
- respond positively to a range of new cultural and linguistic experiences.

Mathematical Development

Beginning to understand mathematical processes and concepts is the foundation of numeracy. Children need to see the processes in action. For example, they need the concept of number to be visual, concrete and practical. They need to see it done and do it themselves. In order for mathematical ideas to be meaningful, they must first be understood in the context of an activity.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- use mathematical language in relevant contexts: shape, position, size and quantity
- recognise and recreate basic patterns
- recall a range of number rhymes, songs, stories and counting games
- sort, match, order, sequence, compare and count familiar objects
- begin to understand mathematical concepts such as "less" and "more"
- begin to understand the mathematics of money
- begin to recognise numbers and begin to match number to sign and sound.



Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Children should have experiences of other cultures, of past events, of the work people do, of the use of money, of the environment, of animals and other living things.

They should be encouraged to enjoy pulling, pushing, turning, experimenting, pouring, testing, digging, building and generally finding out how things work.

These will often be the experiences which will be the foundation of confidence in science and technology and its enjoyment.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- talk about home and where they live
- begin to understand about different places such as the countryside and the town
- have a basic understanding of the seasons and their features
- begin to understand the idea of time: meal times, times of the day (morning, bedtime), sequencing (yesterday, today and tomorrow)
- identify some kinds of workers by characteristics of work: for example, dentist, doctor, farmer, teacher, postal worker, factory worker, mechanic
- have a basic understanding of the purpose and use of money
- begin to find out about outcomes, problem-solving and decision-making
- begin to understand the use of a variety of information sources (for example: books, television, libraries, information technology)
- begin to appreciate the importance of the environment
- begin to understand about food and where it comes from
- begin to appreciate the differences in and uses of a range of materials
- make choices and select materials from a range, exploring their potential, cutting, folding, joining and comparing.

Physical Development

Under-fives need to understand the concepts of health, hygiene and safety. They need to begin to understand the importance of diet, rest and sleep.

They will be developing physical control, mobility, awareness of space and a range of manipulative skills. They will need a range of experiences and should have access to safe and stimulating outdoor play.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- have an awareness of their own bodies and their growth
- move confidently, with increasing control and co-ordination
- use a range of small and large equipment with increasing skill and confidence (for example: bikes, balls, climbing frames)
- handle small tools and objects with increasing control and for appropriate purposes (for example: pencils, paintbrushes)
- understand, appreciate and enjoy the differences between running, walking, skipping, jumping, climbing and hopping
- understand and respond to suggestions about spatial relationships (for example: behind, underneath and below, on top of and above).



Creative Development

Under-fives will be continually developing their imagination and creativity. Their ability to communicate and express that imagination and creativity will also be developing. Children with limited mobility or sensory impairments should not be excluded but may need alternative strategies for creative expression.

By the time they are five, the experiences that children have had should enable them to:

- respond to and enjoy rhythm in music and music-making with a range of instruments and with their voices
- use a range of materials to create representational images (for example: pictures, drawings, constructions)
- make choices about colour and medium
- respond to suggestions for dance and imitative movements
- discuss work in progress and completed (for example: painting, instrument-making)
- begin to enjoy role play and imaginative drama
- begin to observe and appreciate the work of others
- begin to differentiate sounds without visual clues (for example: animals, instruments, voices).



GOOD PRACTICE

Some Features of Good Practice

- Children will feel secure, valued, respected, confident and will develop a sense of achievement through learning which is pleasurable and rewarding both within the nursery setting and at home.
- The primacy of parents as educators is acknowledged and a partnership, based on shared understanding, mutual respect and discussion, is developed.
- The physical environment supports learning with appropriate space, facilities, high quality equipment and resources; it is organised with imagination and care and has due regard to health and safety.
- Children are encouraged to participate in a range of experiences which take account of and are appropriate to their developing physical, intellectual, emotional and social abilities.
- Guidance, praise and encouragement are applied in a consistent manner.
- Educators have a knowledge of children's backgrounds, interests and earlier learning and apply it to achieve high standards.
- Children are encouraged to discuss, converse, analyse and generally talk about their experiences.
- Children's progress is assessed and recorded through frequent observation and is discussed regularly with parents.
- The provision is underpinned by a policy statement, agreed by adults working there and understood by parents, which outlines the aims, objectives and content of the curriculum. It will also include descriptions of the learning opportunities offered together with information about how children's progress is assessed and recorded.
- Strategies for early identification of children's particular needs are implemented and appropriate referral is made and support sought.
- There is good liaison with other agencies and carers, such as health visitors and childminders, and these contacts are used in planning for individual children.
- Close relationships, based on mutual respect and support, are established between this and the next stage of education.
- Educators have access to appropriate initial and in-service training.



Examples of Skills Developed Through Good Practice

These are only three examples of categories of development, learning and play and some of the resources which enhance them. There are, of course, many other kinds of activities which are essential in order to ensure that children have a broad range of experiences: music, story time, table games, sand and water play, construction play, imaginative play and so on.

Skills developed through social play, learning and development

Mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world

- ordering
- sequencing
- matching
- distributing
- setting
- understanding shape and dimension
- measuring and weighing
- understanding time

Personal and social

- co-operating
- sharing
- turn taking
- clearing, cleaning, tidying
- identifying emotions, controlling responses
- understanding and appreciating differences
- understanding and applying social and cultural rules

Language, literacy and communication

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| • listening | • planning |
| • conversing | • repeating |
| • imitating | • listening |
| • sequencing narrative | • inferring and deducing |
| • commenting | • writing |
| • proposing and discussing | • rephrasing |

These are the sorts of activities, toys and equipment which enhance social play, learning and development:

Home corner:

furniture, range of utensils, dolls, clothes, prams, dolls furniture etc

Communication:

telephone, paper and pencils, cards (birthday, notes), magazines and books, directories etc

Acting and doing:

range of clothes, accessories (for example: bags, beads, scarves, hats, caps)

Floor play:

garage, vehicles, traffic signs, farm, animals, equipment, fencing, range of blocks and building equipment etc

Skills developed through creative play, learning and development

Mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world

- identifying shapes
- understanding concept of size
- organising
- spatial relationships
- setting
- classifying
- dimension
- experimenting
- observing
- learning and reproducibility of events

Physical

- gaining mastery of manipulative actions (cutting, shaping, holding pens and brushes)
- mixing
- pouring
- co-ordinating

Language, literacy and communication

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| • listening | • responding |
| • questioning | • imagining and projecting |
| • thinking logically | • comparing |
| • discussing | • naming |

These are the sorts of activities, toys and equipment which enhance creative play, learning and development:

Range of paper and card, powder paint, range of brushes, glue, scissors, pencils, clay, dough, felt pens, easels, sponges, materials (for example: cotton, felts), cutting out shapes, range of junk (for example: boxes, cartons), range of picture books.



Skills developed through physical play, learning and development

Mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world

- comparing
- size
- shape
- the body
- patterns
- balance
- seasons
- matching
- spatial relationships
- understanding speed

Personal and social

- turn taking
- patience and control
- co-operation
- imitating
- taking care
- consideration

Language, literacy and communication

- communication
- listening
- choosing
- discussing
- negotiating
- commenting
- describing
- comparing
- sequencing
- predicting
- naming

These are the sorts of activities, toys and equipment which enhance physical play, learning and development:

Variety of balls, mats, hoops, ropes, bikes, barrels, tunnels, climbing frames, ladders, slides etc.

Observing, Planning, Assessing and Record-keeping

Good practice is a combination of critical factors which include observing, planning, assessing and record-keeping.

Good educators of under-fives need to understand the child's progress, the child's needs, the child's development. They need to evaluate the children's learning.

This is done by:

Observing

This is the continual process of watching, looking, listening to the child in a wide range of settings including daily routines. Observation is a basis for gathering information in order to assess and can, in itself, be a valuable assessment method.

Planning

This is a co-operative process. It will involve, at various levels, all staff, parents and children. It is often done through themes and topics either for the week, for the month or for the term.

Assessing

This is concerned with children's progression along a learning continuum and it is an on-going, regular process. It is about the child's response and reaction to the education provided. It is a process of informing the planning of appropriate provision for the individual child.

We assess in order

- to know the individual child and identify his/her needs
- to identify the plan for the child's progress
- to give information to parents
- to enable easy transfer between under-fives experiences and statutory education
- to enable staff to identify, monitor and evaluate their own skills and professional needs.

Assessing should not be an isolated event. It should be a process of observing children when they are actively involved in learning experiences.

Record-keeping

This is the means by which observations and assessments are kept and the ways in which children's progress is recorded. These records can be a simple file with dated examples of the child's work, narrative and anecdotal reports or more elaborate systematic analyses of particular aspects of learning.





NOTES

