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Evaluating the Foundation Phase

Key Findings on Child Involvement and Wellbeing

Research Summary

Social research

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The Foundation Phase (introduced in 2008) provides a developmentally appropriate experiential curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation (led by WISERD) aims to evaluate how well it is being implemented, what impact it has had, and ways in which it can be improved. The three-year evaluation utilises a range of mixed methods at a national and local scale.

This is one of four papers focused on **impact**. It draws on 239 classroom/setting observations, 357 practitioner interviews, 604 school/setting and 671 Year 2 survey responses, seven Year 2 focus groups, and 37 Local Authority and four non-maintained organisation interviews.

Key Findings

- Researcher observations of individual children's **involvement and wellbeing** in the classroom (using the Leuven Scales) varied according to the type of pedagogy experienced by the child at that time.
- The use of most Foundation Phase **pedagogies** was associated with slightly higher levels of child involvement and/or wellbeing, and this was apparent across all Foundation Phase year groups.
- The strongest overall associations between pedagogy and involvement/wellbeing were for **physical activity, explorative activity and child choice**.
- The vast majority of **practitioners** and **stakeholders** interviewed and surveyed held the opinion that Foundation Phase pedagogies can improve children's involvement and wellbeing in the classroom.
- However, interviews with Year 3 teachers suggest that unless **Key Stage 2 pedagogy** continues to develop positive learning dispositions, potential benefits of the Foundation Phase might be lost.

Dadarnodi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Further Key Findings

Researcher observations¹ indicated that **child choice** and **physically active, explorative, first-hand pedagogies** were associated with high involvement *and* wellbeing.

Practical pedagogies, open questioning, peer collaboration and working in small groups was associated with high involvement (but not high wellbeing).

Outdoor learning experiences were associated with high wellbeing (but not high involvement).

Practitioners and key stakeholders interviewed and surveyed said that children enjoy having the chance to **develop skills (and learn from mistakes) in small groups**.

Reflection (e.g. activity review) was associated with low child involvement and wellbeing, and normally took place at the end of a session and was conducted on a whole-class basis.

The **presence of a teacher** (with or without an additional practitioner) was associated with higher involvement (but not wellbeing), compared to the presence of only an additional practitioner.

Traditional '**direct teaching**' and worksheets were associated with low wellbeing (but not low involvement).

The strongest association with involvement/wellbeing was for **child-adult** and **child-child interactions**. For example, child involvement was found to be, on average, 20% higher when associated with a warm (as opposed to cool) adult-child interaction.

In comparison, child involvement was found to be, on average, 5% higher when associated with physically active (as opposed to physically inactive) pedagogy. This accounts for the **largest impact of pedagogy** on involvement or wellbeing.

¹ 3,343 child observations from the 239 classroom/setting observations.

Despite the observed associations between particular pedagogies and involvement/wellbeing, no meaningful associations were found between snapshot observations of overall classroom pedagogy and Year 2 **children's survey attitudes** towards school, learning and/or wellbeing.

However, the Year 2 focus group discussions suggested that there may be a positive relationship between snapshot observations of overall classroom pedagogy and Year 2 children's **enthusiasm for learning**. The more qualitative focus group method was perhaps better able to identify these associations.

Year 2 Foundation Phase pupils surveyed in 2012/13 reported **liking school more** than Year 2 Key Stage 1 pupils surveyed in 2008 (also in Wales) as part of the Millennium Cohort Study.

However, the Year 2 Foundation Phase pupils were **less positive about reading**, and reported **more behaviour problems** and **lower general life wellbeing** (when

compared to the 2008 Millennium Cohort Study data).

Some **classrooms** and **schools** yielded higher observed child involvement and wellbeing ratings than others (average ratings were 3.57 and 3.63 respectively, where 1= very low and 5= very high).

Observed child involvement and wellbeing ratings were usually **higher for girls** than for boys, and were usually **higher in funded non-maintained settings and school Nurseries** than in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes.

Observed child involvement and wellbeing ratings were generally lower for '**Language, Literacy and Communication Skills**' and also '**Mathematical Development**' than some of the other areas of learning.

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