



Children's
Participation
in Schools



ESRC
**Education
Research
Programme**
Empowering educators

Children's Participation in Schools

Embedding children's participative rights
in pedagogical practice in lower primary classrooms
in Wales

Lunch & Learn Seminar
24th April 2024



Meet the team



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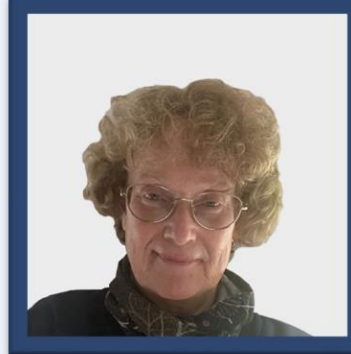
WP4 LEAD



Dr Jane Waters - Davies

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WP3 LEAD



Prof Jane Williams

Co-Investigator, Professor
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Meet the team



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Research Associate,
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Louisa Roberts

Research Associate,
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Research Associate,
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About this research

- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded - budget £700,000+
- 3-year project - Dec 22 to Nov 25
- A collaboration across four UK universities
- A focus on young children's participative rights in lower primary settings
- The research aims to uncover ways to integrate participative rights into everyday teaching and learning activities, and to create classroom environments where children's voices are not only valued but actively integrated into the teaching and learning processes.

Project work packages



WP1: Scoping out the landscape

- Legislative and policy review
- Survey of ITE and CPD providers

WP2: Using Reggio Emilia inspired pedagogy to explore participative rights

- Interviews and dialogic workshops with teachers
- Supported class-based projects with children
- Focus groups and creative research with children

WP3: Embedding participative rights in practice

- Focus groups and dialogic workshops with educators and student teachers from UG and PG courses in Wales

WP4: Impact and dissemination

Scoping out the legislative and policy landscape

Louisa Roberts



Research questions

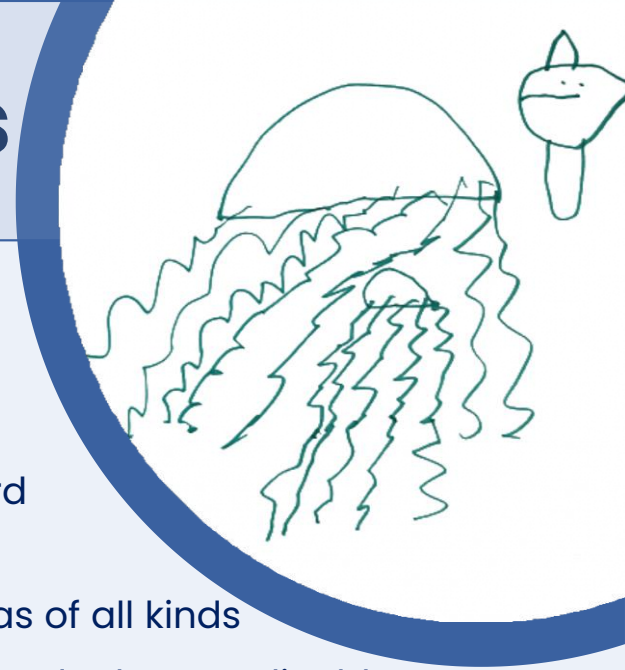


- 1. How does the distinct Welsh policy context position teachers in relation to young children's participative rights in primary schools in Wales?**
2. To what extent do providers of professional learning (including initial teacher education) support Welsh Government rhetoric for pedagogic practice that embeds young children's participative rights?
3. How do primary teachers in Wales conceptualise and support young children's participative rights and what are perceived enablers and barriers to practice?
4. How are young children's participative rights in Welsh primary schools understood and experienced by young children themselves?
5. How can findings from this work be drawn together to understand the process by which pedagogies can be transformed in order to embed participative rights?



- Range of legislative and policy documents from Devolution
- 2000–2022
- Cardno (2018)
 - Authorship / Audience / Purpose / Context
 - **Text**
 - Consequences
- Deductive qualitative content analysis

Defining participative rights



Article 7: birth registration and nationality

Article 8: identity

Article 12: right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. Opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child.

Article 13: freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds

Article 14: freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child

Article 15: freedom of association and peaceful assembly

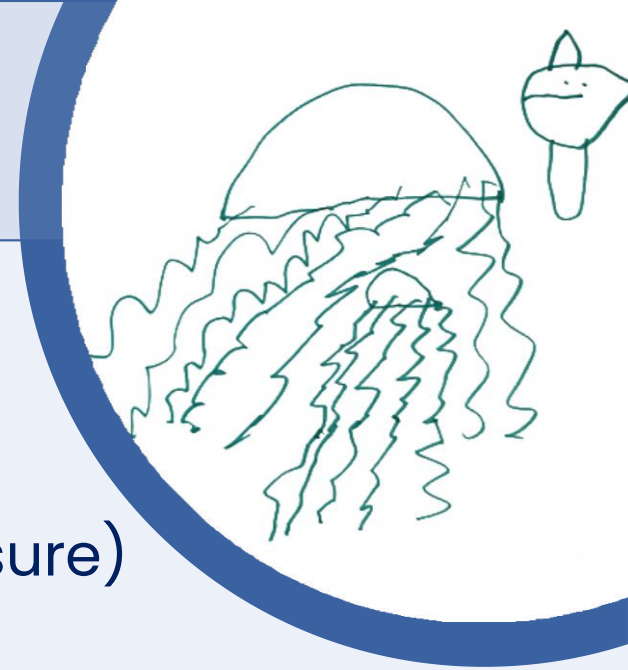
Article 16: freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence, and from unlawful attacks on child's honour and reputation.

Article 17: obligation to encourage mass media to enable child's access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of child's social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health

Articles 28 and 29: right to and aims of education

Article 42: obligation to make the principles and provisions of UNCRC widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike

Legal framework in Wales



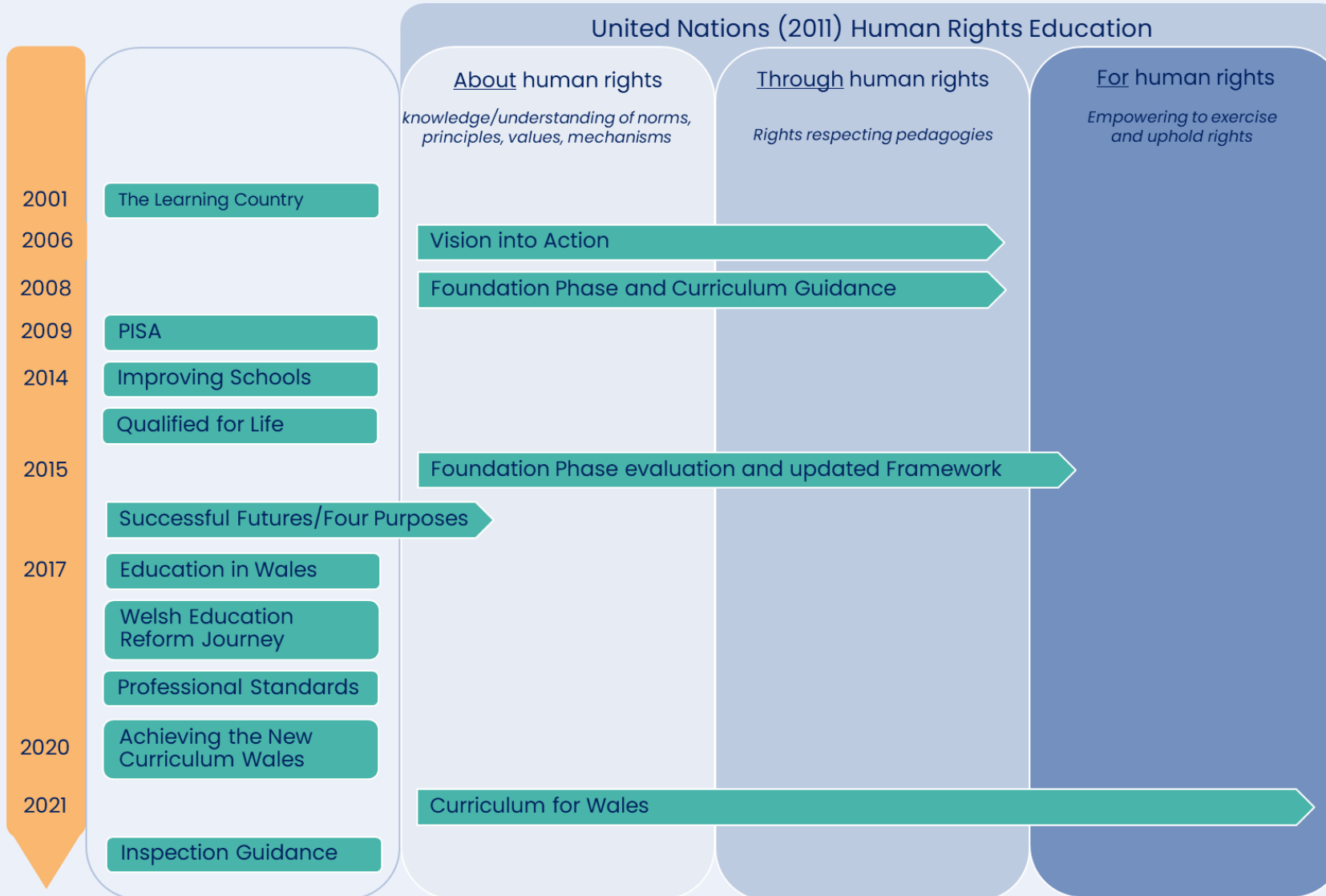
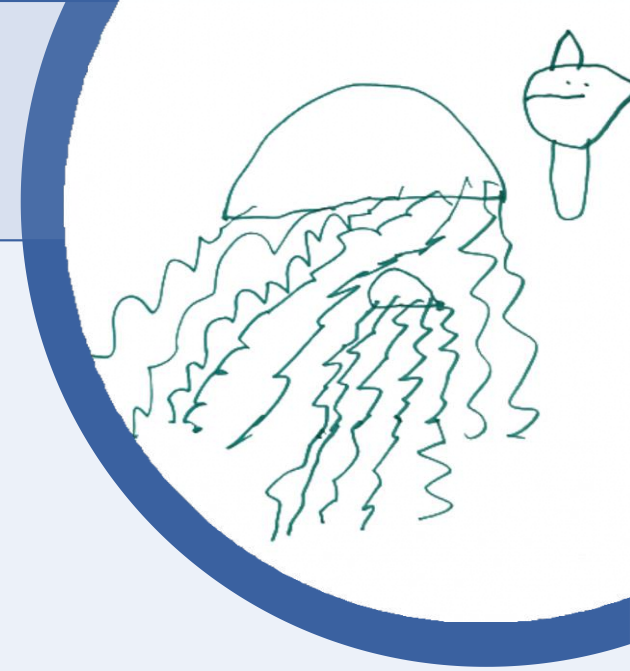
- Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010
- Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (2011)
- Welsh Ministers' Children's Scheme (under s.2 of the 2011 Measure)
- UNCRC (to which Welsh Ministers must have 'due regard')
 - Interpretative texts: General Comments issued by the UNCRC (we identify 1, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17 and 25 as of particular relevance)
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
- Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) 2021

Policy analysis



- We looked for references to the UNCRC, Human Rights Education and participation
- We found four kinds of data:
 - Entirely absent
 - Referenced with no detail or further explanation
 - Containing differing understandings of participative rights
 - Explicit and contextualised

Policy analysis





Dominant themes

- Improving literacy, numeracy, digital skills
- Reducing the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes
- Skill acquisition, preparing future citizens, 'participation' in society

Participative rights

- Cites WG commitment to UNCRC as a positive aspect of Welsh Education.
- One of the four purposes for pupils to be "ethical informed citizens of the world"...
- ...but there is very limited detail of what is meant by an ethical informed citizen
- Within 68 recommendations - no references to UNCRC / HRE / participative rights



Lemke and Zhu (2018)

- Technocratic and performance-oriented language, fundamentally future-oriented
- Doesn't address necessary reworkings of curricula and pedagogy required to enact transformational change
- Successful Futures (2015) fails to engender child rights consonant with the spirit of the UNCRC

Curriculum for Wales: UN Framework

Experiencing rights through education

Children's rights approach

The right to participate in decisions

Collaboration

Equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination

Both practitioners and learners

Duty bearers accountable

Education
about human
rights

Education
through
human rights

Education
for human
rights

Motivation of social action

Empowerment of active citizenship

Advance respect for the rights of all

What it means to be an ethically
informed citizen of Wales and the
world

School leaders responsible for ensuring
knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC

Curriculum design



Human rights is one of five cross-cutting themes

“Ethical and informed citizens’ understanding and exercising their human and democratic responsibilities and rights”

Co-constructing the curriculum

Enabling learner participation in creating an engaging curriculum

Dialogue between learner and professionals is a valuable learning experience

Feedback should be given on decision-making

Differing levels of participation are appropriate at different points

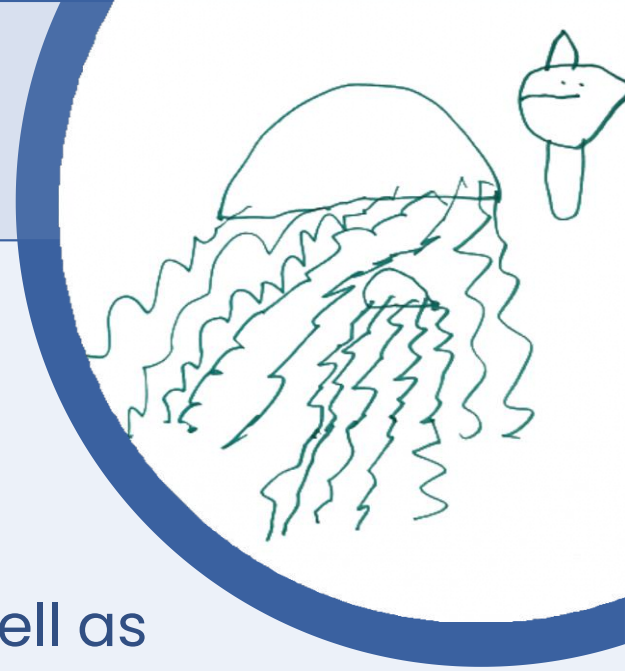
Assessment

Learners at the heart of assessment

A holistic picture of the individual learner should be used

In discussion with learner

Headline findings



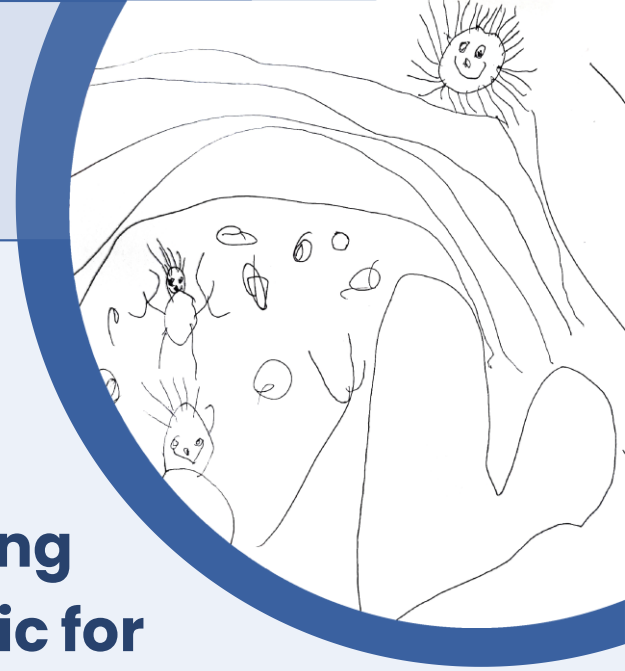
- Legislation introduces requirements to know about and have due regard to children's rights but lacks detail on what this means in practice
- Omissions and inconsistencies in Welsh education policy as well as differing understandings of participative rights
- Practical guidance for educators in Wales (Hwb) from 2006 is inclusive of education *about* and *through* human rights at all ages
- The new Curriculum for Wales (2021) is underpinned by HRE and details extensively the *about, through* and *for* of the United Nations Framework (2011)
- Focus on 'what' not 'how'
- Golden thread of implementation through to impact
- Maintaining the commitment

Young children's participative rights across Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales

Dr Alison Murphy



Research question



1. How does the distinct Welsh policy context position teachers in relation to young children's participative rights in primary schools in Wales?
2. **To what extent do providers of professional learning (including initial teacher education) support Welsh Government rhetoric for pedagogic practice that embeds young children's participative rights?**
3. How do primary teachers in Wales conceptualise and support young children's participative rights and what are perceived enablers and barriers to practice?
4. How are young children's participative rights in Welsh primary schools understood and experienced by young children themselves?
5. How can findings from this work be drawn together to understand the process by which pedagogies can be transformed in order to embed participative rights?

Methodology

- A survey administered to all HEIs that provide ITE in Wales
 - Programme title
 - Number of current students
 - Aims and learning objectives related to young children's participative rights in validation documents
 - Modules titles where young children's participative rights are covered
 - Aspects of young children's participative rights to rank order
- Deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008)
- Tibbitts (2017) three models of Human Rights Education



Tibbitts models of Human Rights Education



- **Values and Awareness**
 - Affirm existing HR discourse
 - Provide knowledge of HR
 - Learner is not encouraged or empowered to take action
- **Accountability**
 - Linked to professional roles
 - Intended to influence knowledge, attitude and actions specific to roles
- **Transformation**
 - Transformative learning to bring about profound change in the individual learner
 - Results in taking action to eliminate HR violations

Survey responses

Of 11 programmes across 7 HEIs:

- 9 responses
- 5 postgraduate courses (PGCE)
- 4 undergraduate courses (BA)

Programmes noted between 21–316 students each (2022–2023) reflecting 1666 student teachers



ITE programmes



- **7 programmes:** No specific aims or learning objectives
- **2 programmes:** Included specific aims or learning objectives
 - Recognising the needs and rights of all pupils
 - Familiarising students with the most recent national guidance on UNCRC
- **4 Programmes:** Implicit references within aims or learning objectives
 - exercise their contractual, pastoral, legal and professional responsibilities to meet the needs and maximise the potential of all learners
 - meet the [requirements for] Professional Standards for QTS

ITE modules

Within 9 programmes there were 24 modules that related to young children's participative rights:

- **16 modules:** No specific aims or learning objectives
- **8 modules:** Included specific aims or learning objectives
 - develop skills of listening to learners and valuing pupil voice
 - the use of learner voice
 - appreciate and accommodate the role of the learner's voice in the development of effective learning and teaching
 - voice of the teacher and the learner in relation to co-shaping school experiences and curricular experiences
 - consider the role of pupil voice



Module content



Additional modular content outside specific aims and objectives included:

“...understand the key principles of the UNCRC”

“...gain an understanding of current legislation, including ... children’s rights”

“...explore . . . learner rights in the context of Four Purposes”

“...consider global curriculum models and approaches (such as Reggio Emilia) where the voices of young children are considered”

“...design a research project that ensures that the voices of young children are respected and listened to in their research”



Participants were asked whether and how they would like support in developing this area of practice

- More information on children's participative rights
- Guidance and resources to supplement delivery, curriculum design and implementation
- Specific professional learning regarding children's participative rights
- Guest lectures
- Resources (current and relevant)
- Development of assessment criteria that better reflects theory relating to children's participative rights

Headline findings



Tibbitts models of HRE

- The programme and module aims and objectives detailed sat within the first two of Tibbitt's models of HRE
 - Values and Awareness
 - Accountability and professional Role
- Only one programme had some features of Tibbitt's third model of HRE
 - Transformation

Headline findings



Themes related to children's participative rights were ranked

- Those considered to be covered most were:
 - Knowledge of the UNCRC
 - Pedagogies to support young children's participative rights
- Those considered to be covered the least were:
 - Understanding tensions between theory, policy and practice
 - Constructions of children and childhood

All but one response asked for support with young children's participative rights

Using Reggio Emilian inspired pedagogy to explore participative rights with teachers across Wales

Dr Sarah Chicken



Research Questions



- **How do primary teachers in Wales conceptualise and support young children's participative rights and what are perceived enablers and barriers to practice?**
- **How are young children's participative rights in Welsh primary schools understood and experienced by young children themselves?**
- **How can findings from this work be drawn together to understand the process by which pedagogies can be transformed in order to embed participative rights?**

Interim findings



Understanding participative rights

- Teachers find it challenging to conceptualise participative rights but report supporting these often via two main ways within schools:
 - following their interests in the classroom, in different ways they often equate this to 'child's voice' but this is often under theorised.
 - democratic participation in the broader processes of their class and school

Interim findings



Barriers and Enablers

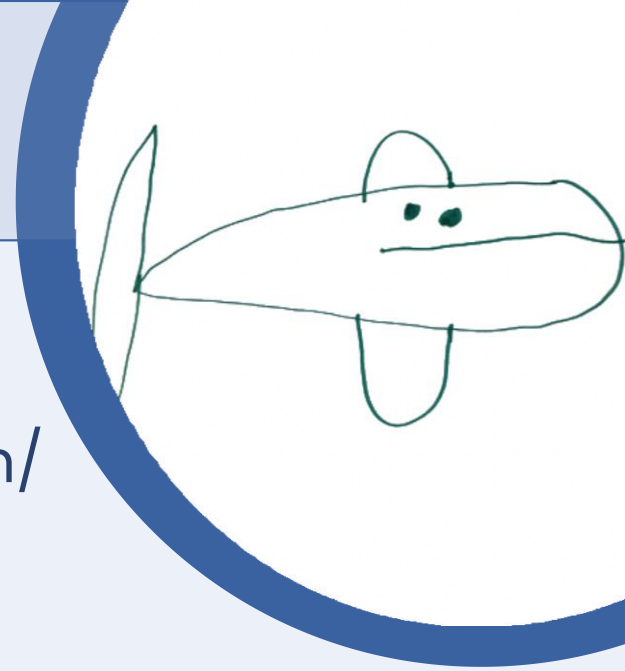
- **Barriers:** time, resources, perceived external expectations, lack of knowledge, confidence, teachers themselves
- **Enablers:** supportive leadership and school ethos, training, staffing, *time to enquire together*
- Constructions of children and teachers and wider debates around the purpose of education can be viewed as both enablers and barriers

Working with student teachers and educators

Dr Jane Waters–Davies

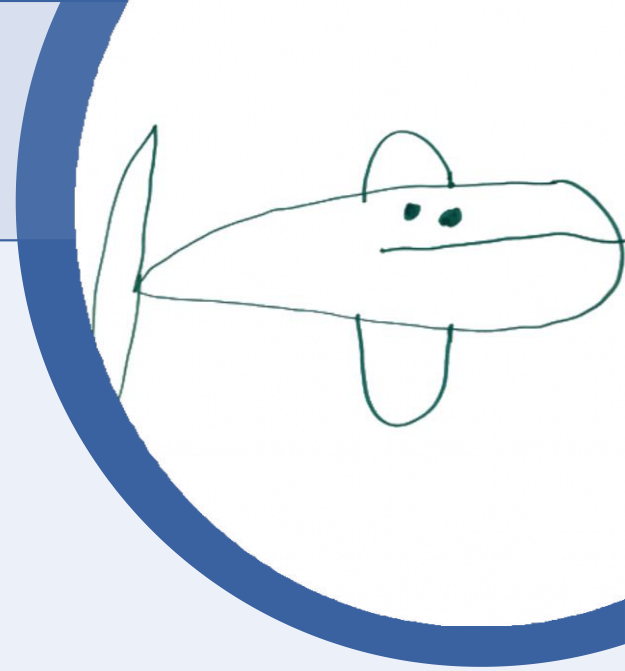


Research questions



- To what extent do programmes of professional learning, including Initial Teacher Education (ITE), support the WG vision/rhetoric for pedagogic practice that embeds young children's participative rights?
- How do primary teachers in Wales conceptualise and support young children's participative rights and what are perceived enablers and barriers to practice?
- How can findings from this work be drawn together to understand the process by which pedagogies can be transformed in order to embed participative rights?

Methodology



- Working with one ITE (Initial Teacher Education) partnership
- Four focus groups with ITE students and two with teacher educators
- Next academic year we will engage ITE students and teacher educators working in schools and in the university with the learning derived from WP2
- We plan to use an action learning set design to enable the WP3 participants to consider the barriers and enablers that they experience regarding the enactment of participatory pedagogies, and the preparation of students for such pedagogies

Impact and Dissemination

Dr Jacky Tyrie

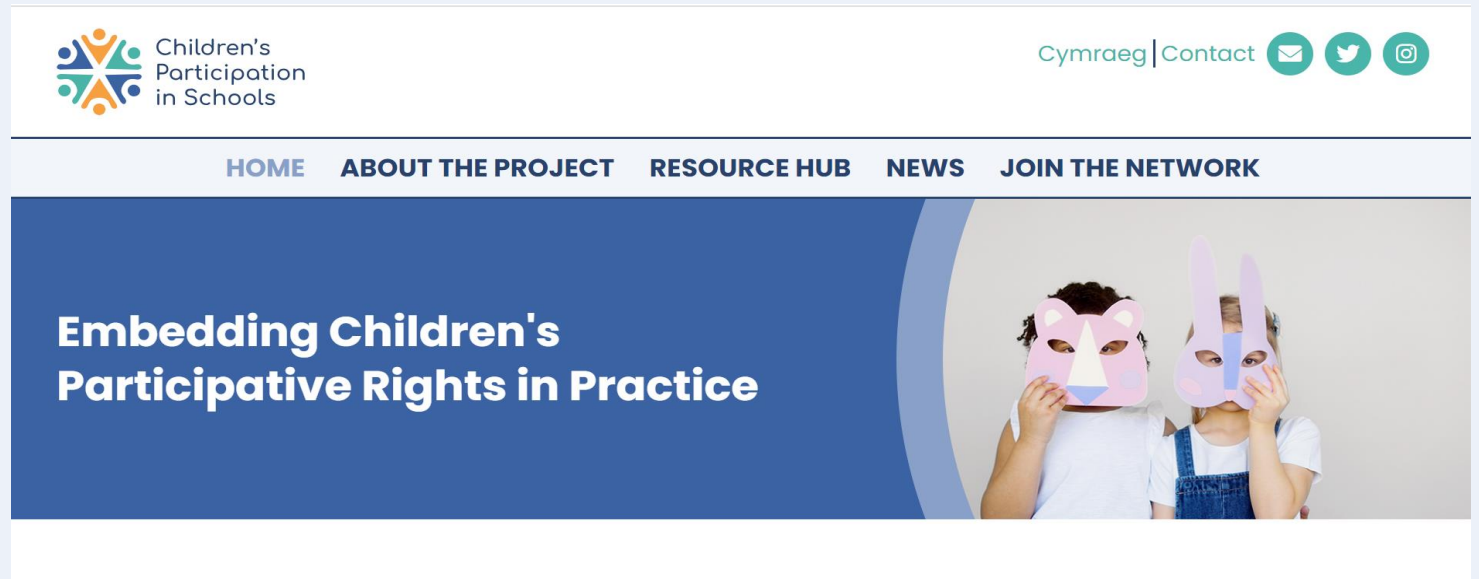


Collaborative network and public engagement

1. Children's and adult advisory groups
2. Webpage and Social Media 
3. Branding / Coms
4. Network (CPIS Network)
5. Outputs and Resources (Publications, blogs, vlog)
6. Public Engagement activity (Conferences, Project Events)
7. Impact

Website

- **Resources Centre** for all things related to children's participation in schools
- **Latest news and events** in the field such as upcoming training sessions, conferences and webinars.



Key messages



1. There is now a **robust legal and policy framework** in place in Wales for children's participation, there is **less about how** this can be enacted in practice both from in-service teachers and within ITE provision
2. Interim findings show teachers are **willing but uncertain** about pedagogical approaches that support the enactment of participative rights.

Key messages



- 3. Perceptions** of the purpose of education, constructions of children, the role of the teacher, and the agency of the child can all influence understandings of participative rights and associated pedagogies, yet these are not currently a focus within ITE provision.
- 4. Offering participatory dialogic opportunities via communities of practice** has revealed teachers' strong desire to enact participative rights for all children in their classrooms, and a willingness to challenge, adapt and reflect on their practice in this area

Any Questions?

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