

## **Children's Participation in Schools: Voices from our Partnerships**

### **A Celebratory Conference Event**

**12:30 – 12:55:** Arrival and lunch - buffet lunch and networking

**13:00–13:10:** Opening Remarks (Emeritus Professor of Law, Jane Williams)

**13:10–13:45:** Project findings presentation (Led by Principal Investigator Dr Sarah Chicken, Associate Professor of Childhood and Education)

**13:50–14:50:** Symposia Set A

**14:50–15:15:** Refreshment break

**15:15–16:05:** Symposia Set B

**16:05–16:40:** Panel discussion with the Children's Participation in Schools team

**16:40–17:00:** Closing remarks (Gemma Moss, Director of the Education Research Programme, UCL).



**Scan here to access our online area for the conference. Here you will find the materials for each session as well as a resource bank for some of our other project outputs.**

We have designed our celebration event to be participatory in practice and to reflect the mixed stakeholder partnerships we have developed through the curation of 4 different spaces.

- **The Bradbury Zone:** Classroom Space 1. The room has a typical classroom style layout. The room lends itself to a mixture of presentation and discussion.
- **Science Theatre:** Lecture hall layout. The room lends itself to presentation sessions.
- **KLA Lab:** Classroom Space 2. Science lab layout. The room lends itself to a mixture of presentation and discussion.
- **Exhibition Floor:** Roundtable layout. The room lends itself to discursive sessions with a focus on group discussions.

## Symposia Set A, 13:50–14:50

Symposium Set A1, Room: Bradbury Suite (Classroom Space 1 – presentation & discussion)

### **VOICES OF CHILDREN: WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?**

**CHAired BY: Anna Westall, Policy Team Manager, Children in Wales.**

**How do children understand and experience participative rights? From abstraction to visibility**

**Facilitated by: Jacqui Lewis, University of the West of England; Rachel Birch, Cadoxton Primary School; Eve Parry, Student Intern.**

**Abstract:** This session is a partnership presentation between a school-based researcher and an internship student, centred on the research question: *How do young children understand and experience participative rights?* We will share young children's perceptions of participation and explore what participation means to them within their lived experiences. The presentation will make visible how children engage with their right

to be heard, how they are involved in decision-making, and how participation is experienced in their everyday lives within educational settings. We will outline our pedagogical and methodological approach to valuing children's voices, situating this work within the context of our Children's Advisory Board, and critically examine the complexities and ethical sensitivities of participatory research with young children. Participants will be invited to reflect on creating a climate of participation and consider how children's participative rights can be enacted in classrooms through relationships, environments, routines, and everyday moments.

**Key words:**

- Children's advisory board
- Collaborative research
- Children's participative rights
- Early Childhood Education
- Working with children

Simultaneous Welsh translation will be available during this session.

Symposium Set A2, Room: Science Theatre (Science Theatre - x2 presentations followed by a Q&A).

**VOICES OF PRACTITIONERS: EXPLORING THE DATA FROM OUR IN-SERVICE TEACHERS**

**CHAired BY: Dr Tim Clark, University of the West of England.**

**Facilitated by: Dr Jacky Tyrie, Swansea University.**

**A Framework for Being Heard in Early Education: The Everyday Model of Children's Participation**

**Abstract:** This session presents the Everyday Model of Children's Participation (EMCP). The model was developed through an empirical investigation of how participative rights are understood and enacted in everyday practice in early schooling; drawing on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, critical engagement with academic literature, and qualitative data generated with teachers of children aged 4–7. The research addressed limitations in existing participation frameworks, which often conceptualise participation as discrete, hierarchical, or event-based, rather than embedded in daily educational life. Grounded in this research, the session will outline the EMCP which comprises three interdependent dimensions: (1) children's participative rights, (2) a cyclical set of adult actions that support the enactment of these rights in everyday practice, and (3) the wider ecological contexts shaping participation at individual, organisational, and sociocultural levels. There will also be time for interactive activities. As an output of the *Children's*

*Participation in Schools* study, the EMCP illustrates how meaningful participation emerges through the alignment of rights, adult practices, and enabling environments, offering a theoretically informed and practice-relevant framework for advancing children's participative rights in early schooling contexts.

### **Key words**

- Everyday Model of Children's Participation
- Participatory frameworks
- Children's participative rights

Simultaneous Welsh translation will be available during this session.

Symposium Set A3, KLA Lab (Classroom Space 2 – presentation followed by discussion).

## **NOTICING THE 'SMALL AND THE ORDINARY' MOMENTS**

**CHAired BY: Dr Giselle Tur Porres, Swansea University.**

### **Small and Ordinary: Enacting Participation through Practitioners' Noticing Stories from Wales**

**Facilitated by: Dr Samyia Ambreen, University of the West of England.**

**Abstract:** The session will include a discussion of a working paper that explores children's everyday encounters alongside the role of 'practitioners' noticings' in shaping opportunities for participation. It examines how both teachers and children aged 3–7 conceptualise and experience participation, drawing on qualitative research conducted with teachers and children in Wales, a context shaped by strong rights-based commitments.

Participation is a central aspiration in early childhood education policy, yet it is often interpreted through formal democratic mechanisms that do not fully reflect how younger children participate in everyday school life. Using a qualitative, interpretivist design, data was generated through pre- and post- interviews with 14 teachers and 21 focus groups with 109 children. The paper discusses our sustained engagement with children and teachers, supported by iterative and collaborative analysis, which enabled close attention to the small and ordinary moments through which participation occurs.

Our findings indicate that children described participation through everyday decisions for example, managing temperature, opening windows, choosing clothing and negotiating outdoor play, highlighting participation as embedded in routines, relationships and multimodal, embodied communication. Teachers initially expressed uncertainty about terms such as participation and children's rights, recognising that their practices had focused on formal structures like pupils' voice and school councils. Through involvement in the project, they reported shifts in practice, including increased relational engagement and greater recognition of symbolic and embodied communication.

The session will invite discussion around the key contributions of this work-in-progress, including the significance of everyday participation, the role of practitioners' noticing as a mediating process, and the implications for inclusive and participatory pedagogies, particularly for younger children and those who communicate in diverse ways. The session will also provide opportunity for attendees to view draft documentation for practitioners and to discuss discursively as a group.

**Keywords**

1. Children's Rights
2. Participatory Pedagogy
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Teacher Professional Learning
5. Reggio-Inspired Practice

Simultaneous Welsh translation will be available during this session.

Symposium Set A4, Exhibition Floor (Discursive space – short presentation followed by table discussions)

**VOICES FROM ITE**

**CHAired BY: Dr Paul Redford, University of the West of England.**

**Young Children's Participative Rights in Wales: What are we [not] telling our student teachers? Insights from ITE in Wales**

**Facilitated by: Dr Patrizio De Rossi, University of the West of England.**

**Abstract:** This discursive session presents findings from Phase 3 of project, focusing on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales. Drawing on learning from earlier work it will begin with a presentation examining how children's participation is understood, taught, and enacted within ITE programmes. Working collaboratively with teacher educators from schools and universities, alongside ITE students, the project interrogated the Curriculum for Wales requirement for learners to learn *about, through and for* human rights. The session challenges default notions of 'learner voice' and assumptions about young children's capabilities, exploring opportunities for children's participation in everyday classroom decision-making and curriculum-making. Using an enquiry-based approach, the research identified existing opportunities and constraints within both school-based and university-based elements of ITE. Findings suggest that while participatory pedagogy is often overlooked in ITE provision, there is significant potential for development, with important implications for professional learning and effective realisation of children's participative rights within the Curriculum for Wales.

**Keywords:**

1. Children's Participation
2. Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
3. Participatory Pedagogy

#### 4. Curriculum for Wales

As this session is discursive in nature, it will only be available in English.

## Symposium Set B: 15:15–16:05

Symposium Set B1, Bradbury Suite (Classroom Space 2 -x2 presentations by practitioners followed by a Q&A).

### LEARNING FROM PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS

**CHAired BY: Dr Jacky Tyrie, Swansea University.**

### Learning Together: Teachers' Experiences of Supporting Children's Participation

**Facilitated by: Anne-Marie Jones, Ysgol Yr Hafod; Rachel Birch, Cadoxton Primary School.**

**Abstract:** This session brings together teachers who have participated in the project to reflect on their professional journey, involvement, and experiences of embedding participation in practice. Teachers will share their perspectives on how their understanding of participation has developed over time and whether they have adopted new approaches to planning for children's participation. The session will explore how classroom environments have been intentionally designed or adapted to support children's voices, agency, and involvement in decision-making. Teachers will also discuss small, yet significant changes made to everyday routines, interactions, and practices that have contributed to a culture of participation. Through reflective dialogue, the presentation will highlight practical insights, challenges, and moments of learning encountered throughout the project. Finally, participating teachers will offer advice and considerations for other educators seeking to strengthen participatory practice.

#### Key words

- Practitioner reflections
- Participatory pedagogy
- Children's participation in schools

Simultaneous Welsh translation will be available during this session.

Symposium Set B2, KLA Lab (Classroom space 1 - presentation, creative activity and discussion)

## VOICES FROM PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH: REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGICAL LEARNINGS

**CHAired BY: Dr Kevin Smith, Cardiff University**

**Reggio Emilia as a Participatory Methodological Framework: Working  
Dialogically with Teachers in Wales,**

**Facilitated by: Dr Patrizio De Rossi, University of the West of England; Debi  
Keyte-Hartland, Artist-researcher-consultant.**

**Abstract:** Participatory research with teachers is often presented as democratic yet constrained by accountability pressures that reproduce hierarchy (Koutselini, 2008; Parsons, 2021). This methodological session repositions principles of the Reggio Emilia approach as a framework for participatory research with adults (Cagliari et al., 2016; Rinaldi, 2021), asking how such principles can be operationalised with teachers and what conditions shape participation. Drawing on a year-long collaborative enquiry with primary teachers in Wales, the session examines how *progettazione* (iterative design), *reciprocal formazione* (co-constructed professional learning) and *confronto* (dialogic exchange) informed the design, ethics and conduct of research encounters (Giamminuti et al., 2024). Dialogic workshops, supported by multimodal and symbolic languages, generated spaces for uncertainty, affect and professional tension to surface (Kara, 2020). Findings show participation as continually negotiated rather than achieved, shaped by time constraints, institutional norms and dominant talk-based practices (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). The session contributes an emergent Reggio-inspired relational methodological framework, positioning participation as slow, dialogic and ethically attentive work within structurally constrained systems. The session will include a group activity led by Debi Keyte-Hartland using creative methodologies, inviting participants to explore “**What do young children’s participative rights look or feel like?**”

Keywords:

1. Participatory research
2. Reggio Emilia approach
3. Teacher professional learning
4. Dialogic methodology

### References

Cagliari, P., Castagnetti, M., Giudici, C. & Rinaldi, C. (2016). *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A Selection of His Writings and Speeches 1945–1993*. London: Routledge.

Dahlberg, G. & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education*. London: Routledge.

Giamminuti, S., Cagliari, P., Giudici, C. & Strozzi, P. (2024). *The Role of the Pedagogista in Reggio Emilia: Voices and Ideas for a Dialectic Educational Experience*. London: Routledge.

Kara, H. (2020). *Creative Research Methods: A Practical Guide*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Koutselini, M. (2008). Participatory teacher development at schools: Processes and issues. *Action Research*, 6(1), pp. 29–48.

Parsons, S. (2021). The importance of collaboration for knowledge co-construction in 'close-to-practice' research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(6), pp. 1490–1506.

Rinaldi, C. (2021). *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning*. London: Routledge.

Simultaneous Welsh translation will be available during this session.

Symposium Set B3, Exhibition Floor (Discursive space – a number of table discussions centred around key project issues)

**Chaired by: Dr Paul Redford, University of the West of England.**

**Collective Dialogues on Children's Participation: Tensions, Learning, and Change**

**Facilitated by: Dr Sarah Chicken, University of the West of England, Dr Samyia Ambreen, University of the West of England, Dr Tim Clark, University of the West of England, Dr Paul Reford, University of the West of England, Jacqui Lewis, University of the West of England.**

**Abstract:** This session creates a discursive, collaborative space to critically explore key issues raised by stakeholders during the conference. Through structured dialogue, participants will examine key issues raised during the project and will be responsive to responses given by attendees before the conference.

Discussion tables are likely to focus on some of the following:

1. Enablers and barriers to participatory practice
2. The small and the ordinary
3. Creating the Conditions for Participatory Research and Professional Learning
4. Next steps for ITE
5. Scoping out future research in the area

The session invites shared sense-making and dialogue across participation roles, contexts, and perspectives.

As this session is discursive in nature, it will only be available in English.

## 16:05–16:40: Panel

A 35-minute panel discussion with the Children's Participation in Schools team chaired by Professor Jane Williams.

Attendees can add their questions for the panel to the online Mentimeter. [CPIS Conference Panel Questions - Mentimeter](#). **Please note the Mentimeter will close during the 14:50–15:15 refreshment break.**

Any questions that are not answered on the day will be responded to via email communications.