

Reflections on year one of Children's Participation in Schools (CPiS), a 3-year ESRC funded project

As we are close to the second half of our three-year ESRC funded project, I have been reflecting on the twist and turns of our journey, in my role as project lead. The very late nights spent working on the bid in the winter and spring of 2022 seem like a very long time ago! As the Principal Investigator, I have quickly realised that the skills needed to lead on a successful bid are not the same necessary to project manage and lead a large-scale project; I have upskilled rapidly, navigating university processes across institutions whilst drawing on resources and resilience that I didn't know that I had. I am very fortunate to be consistently supported by such a collegiate team!

As a team we have achieved a lot over the last sixteen months; The Work Package One team (Dr Alison Murphy, [Prof Jane Williams](#), [Dr Jennie Clement](#)) have undertaken a thorough policy analysis of the policy context in relation to children's participative rights within Wales. This analysis is demonstrating that whilst there has been welcomed shifts over the last 20 years which are really promising, there remains work to be done around *how* participative rights might be translated into the context of primary school classrooms. Survey data from work package one demonstrates that whilst teacher training institutions across Wales hold a commitment to children's participatory rights, they too would like support with the 'how' reporting this is an area that needs to be developed across ITE provision. These findings have been presented at our successful first annual event and we are successfully developing our network via our [website](#) and [social media](#) presence (supported by Georgia Fee).

Currently, I have dual roles as the principal investigator with responsibility for managing the overall project and responsibility for leading our second work package. Work Package Two involves working with teachers across Wales exploring participatory pedagogies through the lens of Reggio Emilia as a provocation to current practice. During dialogic sessions supported by an artist consultant ([Debi Keyte-Hartland](#)), we have been co-constructing key ideas around participatory pedagogies and 'children's voice' and surfacing enablers and barriers to practice. I feel an acute sense of ethical responsibility to our collaborator- participants and know that at times we may be destabilising their thinking. I recognise that this is often a very uncomfortable place to be but a possibly natural part of the process when critically reflecting upon our own pedagogical repertoires. Central to our way of working is the development of mutually respectful relationships with our teachers in communities of practice and this takes time and sustained resource. Our research associates have been key here ([Louisa Roberts](#), [Jacqui Lewis](#), [Patrizio De Rossi](#)) with multiple trips across South and North

Wales. This feeling of disequilibrium also resonates with how I sometimes feel about my role as project leader where the co-constructive nature of the second work package means that I am not always certain of the direction of travel of this part of the project, and I have had to become increasingly comfortable with being uncomfortable!

Drawing on participatory action research principles, participants are currently engaging with research projects with children within their settings which focus on how children understand and experience participatory pedagogies themselves. Teachers are adapting planning and learning environments whilst reflecting upon the meaning of 'children's voice'. Are currently visiting settings to talk to children about the process and asking them what they would like to tell teachers across Wales about how their rights might be enacted. This will then be fed into Work Package Three led by [Jane Waters-Davies](#) where we will carry out face-to-face research with educators and student teachers to map how children's participative rights are taught and explored in teacher training partnerships in Wales.

Our children's advisory board supports our work here, aiming to amplify children's voice and agency, through a lens of inclusion, collaboratively shaping the participatory research.

As a team we have become more relaxed in our approach and with adapting our plans as necessary, allowing the process to 'flow' during what is often an iterative part of the project. Ultimately, we have become more 'marathon' and less 'sprint', becoming comfortable with slowing down, with slow pedagogies (Clark, 2023), where reflection is a central requirement with lots of space for collaborative reflection and reflexivity (Bath, 2012; Maldonado-Ruiz et al, 2021; Rinaldi, 2021). As a team we continue to consider big questions about the process, such as when co-construction is co-construction, whilst grappling with the tensions of a project that is ultimately time (and resource) bound. We have another exciting twenty months ahead so watch this space!

If you would like to know more about our project and to join our network, you can do so [here](#).



References

Bath, C., 2012. 'I can't read it; I don't know': young children's participation in the pedagogical documentation of English early childhood education and care settings. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(2), pp.190-201.

Clark, A., 2023. Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: Time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367854539>.

Rinaldi, C., 2021. In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367854539>.

Maldonado-Ruiz, G., Soto Gómez, E. 2021. Researching WITH Children's Actions: Stimulating practical thinking through pedagogical documentation in Initial Teacher Training. ECER 2021. European Educational Researcher Association, Geneva, 2-3 September. EERA [online]. Available from: <https://eera.ecer.de/ecer-programmes/conference/26/contribution/50166>.