

Children's Rights in Early Years Education

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Background Literature

The stance on children's rights distinguishes Wales from the rest of the UK and children's rights have been described as 'emblematic' of Welsh devolution.

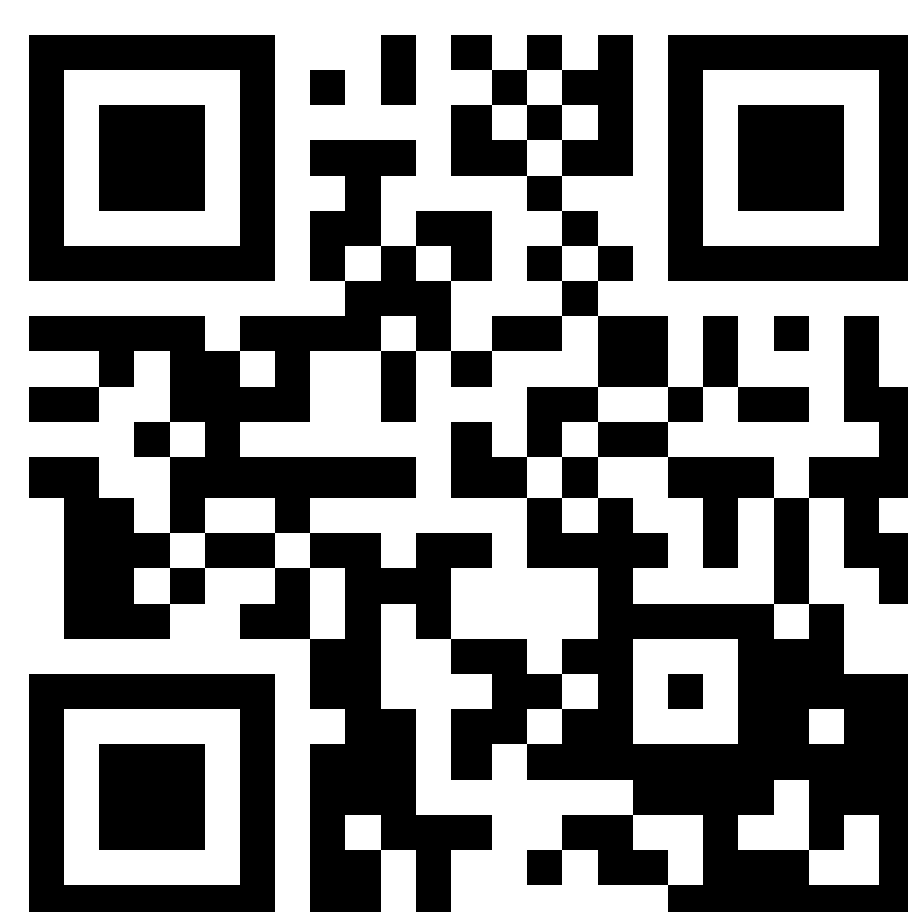
- In 2011, the National Assembly for Wales passed a law requiring Welsh Ministers, to have due regard to the UNCRC.
- Studies which focus on 'how' children enact their rights in the classroom are limited (Bae 2009; Theobald et al. 2011; Venninen et al. 2014),
- At a European level, there is limited research that focuses on the enactment of the UNCRC principles in practice (Lundy 2012).
- In terms of 'participation', many international curricula have acknowledged children's participation (Theobald et al. 2011) however, Bae (2009) highlights that practitioners are faced with the difficulty of how this may play out in practice.
- Vandekerckhove (2013) suggests that the majority of the policy rhetoric around children's rights is vague and open to interpretation.
- Herczog (2012) suggests that children's participation needs to be improved across Europe despite many efforts being made to listen to children in practice.
- More analysis is needed across Europe on the impact of policies and practices relating to children's rights which would help to broaden knowledge and understanding, and improve services for children and their families (Herczog 2012).

ETHICS

The research team acknowledges there are limitations in the extent of the reviewed evidence-base; some sources of evidence may have been omitted inadvertently and the sources used vary in methodology, remit and timescale.



Figure 2 Some of the team at conference



QR Code: The full paper referenced in this Poster is available

Methods

Desk based Research

(Undertaken by Lewis, Sarwar, Tyrie, Waters, Williams)
A review of empirically-based literature that evidences the extent to which young children in Wales (aged 3-7) routinely access their rights in education settings

A review of available evidence to examine the extent to which the embedding of children's rights in practice and pedagogy has become an integral part of daily experiences within educational contexts in Wales.

Thirteen sources (published between 2007 and 2015) were reviewed systematically, using a pre-determined analytical framework based upon the UNCRC. The sources included curriculum evaluations/reviews, UNCRC monitoring reports from children, reports from Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Government reports and a range of Estyn inspection reports.

Secondary analysis was undertaken (Bryman, 2012; Hakim, 2000) to summarise the empirical evidence-base within each document in relation to the enactment of rights in education amongst children aged 3 to 7 years. The research team then developed initial codes (see Gibbs, 2007 and Robson, 2011) which were utilised during thematic analysis.

Results

In response to the research question, "What do secondary sources tell us about the extent to which young children's rights are enacted in educational settings in Wales?" This research has concluded:

1. There is limited empirical evidence in relation to the enactment of young children's rights in educational settings in Wales, with a reliance on educational outcome measures as indicators of such enactment;
2. The evidence conveys an inconsistent picture across Wales with regard to young children's enactment of their rights in educational settings and some of that evidence is contradictory;
3. Most of the evidence was related to children aged over 7 years, thus indicating that the experiences of the young child are largely unreported.

Therefore, an analysis of secondary sources indicates that inconsistencies and tensions exist between the rhetoric of children's rights and evidence of their enactment in practice in Wales, particularly in relation to young children. For example, the rhetoric for the participation of children in decisions that affect their lives is strong but represents a contrast to the evidence in practice, which depicts a patchy and far from inclusive or embedded picture (Croke 2013).

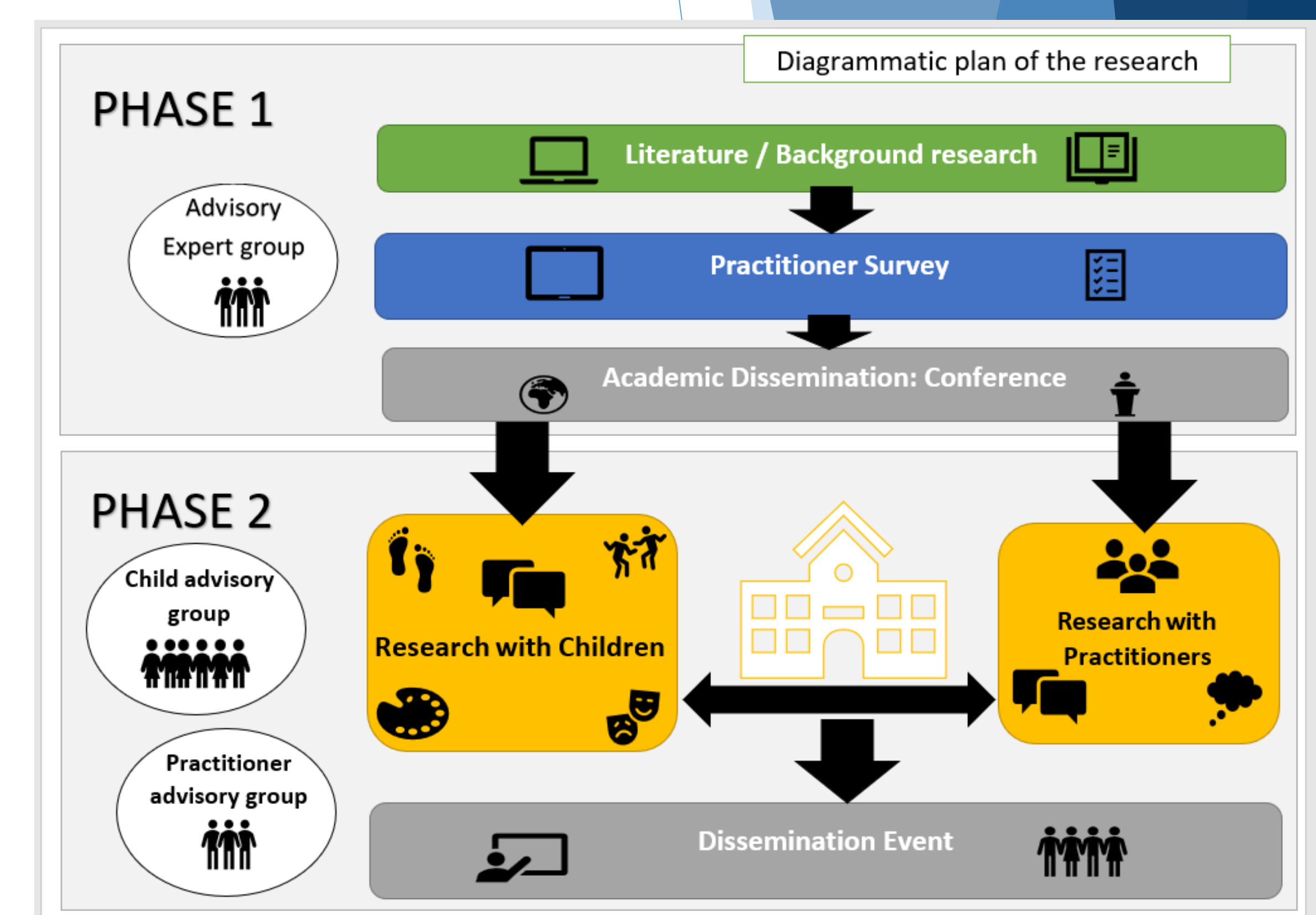
Discussion: Current research

Empirical research

Based on the results outlined, new research is being undertaken which aims to examine children's participation rights within education in Wales and represents a collaboration between six academics (Tyrie, Waters, Sarwar, Murphy, Chicken and Clement). This research is titled:

'Children's Participation Rights in Early Childhood Education in Wales' (CPRECEW).

The qualitative design includes a literature review, online survey and qualitative data collection within schools.



There is evidence that children's participation within education in Wales is currently lacking and the data that does exist does not address the Foundation Phase age group (3-7-year olds) (Lewis et al. 2017). This has particular relevance now as the rhetoric of children's participation within education is strong both in the New Curriculum (Welsh Government, 2018) and within rights legislation and policy (Williams 2013, Tyrie and Beauchamp 2018). Given the rhetoric in Wales about children's rights, it is critically important to explore how young children's participation rights are understood and enacted in the school context.

Therefore this research will build an empirical evidence-base. It is intended that the findings will provide a springboard to enable educators to engage with and consider young children's participation in a meaningful way.

Contact

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