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# *Childhood and Youth Studies and the Curriculum for Wales 2022: Synergies and Opportunities*

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we outline the academic field known as Childhood and Youth Studies (CYS), a multidisciplinary and international field that places children and young peoples' lived experiences at the centre of debate, research and practice. CYS has emerged over the past 30–40 years as a distinct field of scholarship influenced by ideas from the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, geography and history. Our paper discusses the relevance of these key ideas to the work of teachers and school leaders within the context of the Curriculum for Wales 2022, which places the child at the heart of a holistic approach to education. This lends itself to a timely recognition of the potential synergies between education and CYS as allied and complimentary disciplines.

We suggest there is an argument for all teachers and initial teacher education (ITE) providers to understand and engage with the academic field of CYS, which centres on the recognition of children and young people as social beings with rights and agency in society. We highlight key areas and issues of relevance for the work of teachers, school leaders and educators across different contexts, demonstrating how the field of CYS can act as a bridge between schools and the broader social world of children and young people, via research and teaching that engages with issues that are pertinent to contemporary childhood and youth. As a

group of lecturers who teach on CYS undergraduate and postgraduate courses, we propose a need for closer dialogue and understanding between the scholarship of CYS and initial teacher education.

**Keywords:** Education, Initial Teacher Education, Childhood Studies, Childhood and Youth Studies, Curriculum for Wales 2022, Connections Childhood and Youth Studies and Education, Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Synergies, Multidisciplinary

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### *Introduction*

As a field of study that is relatively new both conceptually and in academic disciplinary terms, the relevance of Childhood and Youth Studies can often be downplayed. However, as pointed out by Morrow (in Cook, 2018) it is now being ‘taken more seriously by other disciplines’ with particular developments in children’s geographies and law notably via the *International Journal of Children’s Rights* and the journal *Children’s Geographies*. In higher education institutions across the UK and beyond, the subject may sit within Departments of Education or Social Work for example, and may be called by different titles such as ‘Early childhood studies’, ‘Working with children and families’, or ‘Childhood and youth studies’. As a team of lecturers who teach on the latter at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, we are keen to join the voices of others to expound the virtues of this multidisciplinary field. We teach a CYS degree course that is based in a School of Education, and as recently highlighted by Prout (2019) this raises challenges and opportunities. The common challenge is perhaps based on perceptions of the course that align CYS with ‘education and teaching’ in a broad sense, rather than as a distinct field of study, research and scholarship in its own right. The unique perspectives on childhood that characterise the discipline offer a multitude of opportunities for greater synergies between CYS and initial teacher education. Our central argument is that to support a child through the journey that is education must involve an engagement with the concepts of childhood as well as with the realities of the social worlds surrounding the child or young person. In our work with students we are committed to preparing them as practitioners in many different roles (across diverse contexts and settings), but also to open them to different

ways of thinking about children from three conceptual perspectives: the child as individual, the structural state of childhood, and the notion of childhood as a collective (see Qvortrup, 2018). These conceptual and philosophical perspectives underpin the field of CYS and offer a framework within which to understand the multifaceted nature of the lives of children and young people. In recognition of these perspectives, and as part of the planning for this study, it was proposed that each member of the team would map their own particular sub-disciplines (each a part of the broader multi- and interdisciplinary field of CYS, e.g. children's rights and child-centred research, mental health and wellbeing, gender and identity, inclusion and children's literature) alongside the key skills, knowledge, purposes and requirements embodied within the Curriculum for Wales 2022. Conducting a review of issues and literature relating to these sub-disciplines within the context of key focus points from the new curriculum allowed for the identification of areas of potential synergy and resultant opportunities for collaboration between CYS and ITE provision. These areas were then developed as further discussions of key concepts that form our understanding of childhood and education, such as identity, participation and health and wellbeing. It is hoped that these discussions will form the basis for an ongoing dialogue, informed by perspectives and ideas from both CYS and the broader fields of education and ITE, that will help to inform the context within which the new curriculum is implemented and developed in Wales.

*Childhood Studies: An international, multi-disciplinary  
and rigorous field of study*

'What is childhood?' may be the first ontological question undergraduate students on a Childhood and Youth Studies (CYS) course are asked to grapple with. Students often respond that, at age 20 or 23, they do not yet see themselves as 'real adults', echoing Arnett's (2000) seminal discussions of 'emerging adulthood'. This kind of personal reflection is an invaluable jumping off point for students to begin the journey of critical engagement with the rich scholarship and debate in CYS, challenging many widely held beliefs about 'the child' and 'childhood'. The discipline explores thorny and sometimes uncomfortable ideas about conceptual boundaries between childhood and adulthood, power dynamics, labelling and socially constructed notions of 'the innocent child' or 'the demon

child’ (see James and James, 2012; Kehily, 2013): these two perceptions of children as good or evil reflect the Romantic and Puritan historical discourses of childhood and represent a classic dichotomy that endures in contemporary stories such as the Bulger case (see Morrison, 2011). As such, students of CYS are invited to question the existence and consequences of culturally, politically and socially packaged assumptions about who we think children are.

Childhood as a socially constructed concept has been at the core of this academic field since its emergence in the 1980s, known then as ‘the new sociology of childhood’ (James and Prout 1997, 2015; Qvortrup et al., 2009). Since then, childhood studies has taken several turns on its journey to progress the field (Alanen, 2019) and insights from child focused research in fields such as anthropology (Lancy, 2008) and geography (Kraftl, 2013) have informed debate across disciplinary boundaries. In 2018, the international journal *Childhood* marked its 25th anniversary by publishing conversations with key thinkers and emerging scholars from across disciplines and cultural contexts (see Alanen, 2018; Cook, 2018; Hanson, 2018; Spyrou, 2018). These seminal articles continue to refine and define the interdisciplinary nature of childhood studies, with reference to research spanning diverse issues relating to children’s lives in local and global contexts such as citizenship (Cockburn, 2013), gender and sexuality (Renold, Ringrose and Egan, 2018), friendships and family (Corsaro, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2017), and cross-cultural perceptions of children’s rights (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013) to mention just a few examples.

Amongst scholars in the field there is acknowledgement of what Cook (2019) calls ‘a distinctive emancipatory ethos’ which has characterised the field of CYS and which, according to Cook, aims to ‘(make) research and inquiry matter to the lives of children and their childhoods’ (Cook, 2019, p. 4). However, Cook also argues that the ‘default’ perception common in our society tends towards the more sentimental figure of the ‘innocent child’. There is a strong resonance between ideas underpinning CYS and the aims of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 that are worth highlighting here. The new curriculum places emphasis on the process of learning itself, moving away from an overemphasis on testing and outcomes. In parallel, CYS emphasises recognition of a child as ‘being’ rather than merely a future ‘becoming’. Recent research from the British Academy’s Childhood Policy Programme (2020) highlights the need for a move away from policy that emphasises outcomes for the adults that children will become, and to focus more fully on the child as ‘being’.

*Linking academic research with educational practice*

As readers of this journal will be familiar with current education reform in Wales, rather than unpick the vast mission of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 our aim here is to make links with specific elements, including its four key purposes as recommended by Donaldson (2015), whereby all children and young people are seen as ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives, enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work, ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world, and healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The connections and synergies that exist between CYS and education are evident when examined at various levels within the context of the new curriculum. They are found within the philosophies and rhetoric that have inspired the development and articulation of the broader educational vision and formulation of the overarching aims of the reformed Welsh national education programme. Similarly, concepts that form key understandings about childhood as examined through the multidisciplinary lens that embodies the CYS approach can be found at curricular and at classroom level within the new iteration of the Welsh education system.

The Curriculum for Wales is part of a broader enterprise to further develop national learning and achievement. The ambitions set out within these reforms relate a vision of an ambitious, just, equitable and responsible approach to the education of Welsh citizens, as embodied in ‘Our national mission: high standards and aspirations for all’ (Welsh Government, 2023). Within the six broad objectives that form the foundations of the continuous and measurable improvements planned for the Welsh education system, several objectives (including Objectives 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) make specific reference to children’s agency, social justice and equity – concepts that underpin many aspects of research within CYS. These objectives are concerned with the development of learners as ‘children and young people who have strong relationships and a positive sense of self – and who can understand and manage their own health and emotions – are in a better position to reach their full potential in the future’ (Welsh Government, 2017, p. 31). The connections with concepts of agency, identity and of ‘being’ clearly echo areas of research that are central to CYS. The capabilities of those

entering, or within, the teaching profession in communicating these concepts would undoubtedly be enriched by exploration of the connections and synergies found between CYS and ITE, with results forming the basis for provision in ITE as part of the research-informed approach favoured by Welsh Government. The importance of the translation and articulation of these concepts, not only for the education of learners in Wales, but also as part of a broader vision of collaboration towards achieving fairer and enlightened societal goals, find expression in the ambition of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 to enact ‘collaboration that continues to extend the co-construction that is at the heart of developing and promoting the transformation required within a broader society that will continue to challenge our thinking’ (Welsh Government, 2020, p. 29).

These concepts are developed further within an inclusive framework, as expressed in the commitment to breaking down barriers to achieving universal educational goals (Objective 2) ‘so that excellent education opportunities and outcomes can be achieved by all learners, at all ages, in classrooms, online, and in work’ (Welsh Government, 2023, p. 10). An approach that embraces concepts of social justice and equality of access to education are enacted on a practical basis through enterprises designed to overcome barriers that prevent Welsh learners from accessing educational opportunities, including the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), formulated to tackle barriers related to deprivation and vulnerability within parts of the wider community. Similarly, many parts of the curriculum are explicitly located within broader rights-based frameworks, including the ALN Code for Wales (2021) that makes direct links with, and calls upon Local Authorities and schools to act according to the recommendations of a combination of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4, the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – with particular reference to Articles 28 and 29, and the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

These approaches echo Davidson’s (2020) views, within the wider context of the formulation of the internationally groundbreaking Wellbeing of the Future Generations of Wales Act (2015), that ‘the school, therefore, has a hugely important role in the culture, identity and values of the cities, towns and villages of Wales, and acts as a clear bellwether of the health, happiness and stability of our communities’ (Davidson, 2020, p. 43). The acknowledgement that the child within the community is integral to concepts of Welsh citizenship and the future

development of Welsh society and culture is also articulated in Objective 5 of 'Our national mission: high standards and aspirations for all' (Welsh Government, 2023) as part of the assumption and encouragement of the fact that learners are a key part of the wider community. The issue of location and belonging, widely studied within the context of CYS as part of research into children's spaces and geographies, also forms part of the broader concept of 'cynefin', explained as 'the place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable' (Welsh Government, 2021). The intention of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 to encourage independent learners who can make meaningful contributions to their communities and beyond echo these understandings of childhood within social, temporal and geographical spaces - all concepts that are central to the field and study of CYS.

At a curricular level, these concepts are embodied not only within the aforementioned Four Purposes, but also in the planning of the six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLEs). The distillation of these ideas is communicated most convincingly within the 'Statements of What Matters', attached to each AoLE. These 'Statements' encourage learners, supported by the educational experience created by the classroom practitioner, to engage with centrally important concepts that allow the individual to examine their role and identity within society. Examples of the types of ideas that link directly with those that are central to the study of CYS include:

- Within the 'Health and Wellbeing' AoLE, concepts related to lifelong health and wellbeing, mental and emotional wellbeing, and the impact of individuals' decision-making on own and others' quality of life.
- Within the 'Humanities' AoLE, concepts related to citizenship, authority and governance, interconnectedness, justice and equality, enterprise, rights, and social action and responsibility.
- Within the 'Languages, Literacy and Communication' AoLE, an exploration of the connective properties of linguistic expression, the importance of language in self-expression and the development of identity, and as key to understanding the wider world.
- On a broader, cross-curricular level, the aims of the statutory development of digital competence involve core elements that encompass the development of digital identity, wellbeing, rights and ownership, and an awareness of online behaviour.



These approaches clearly link with a perception of children and childhood as being agentic and are an acknowledgement of the active interaction between the child or young person and their society and environment, whether on a local, global or digital basis.

The Four Purposes, the six Areas of Learning and Experience and related Statements of What Matters provide focus for the planning of educational experiences that invite learners into the broader societal experience, and to interact from a starting point of their own experience. Planned lessons and educational experiences encourage interaction with the natural, physical, cultural and intellectual environment. Furthermore, these interactions are envisioned not only within the learner's local environment, but also with the intention of expanding the enquiry through national and international levels. The effect of this is intended as one that bridges the communitarian approach with the internationalist and cosmopolitan and, in so doing, linking with broader concepts of global responsibility and citizenship. There are important ties here, then, between the concepts, ideologies and epistemologies that form the basis of CYS, and the broader understanding of Welsh Government's proposal that curricular planning link directly with societal, cultural and environmental issues at different levels. The requirements that the Curriculum for Wales 2022 makes of teachers and classroom practitioners in relating these broader concepts within subject areas and AoLEs offer insights into the crucial nature of the relationship between CYS and ITE in planning for the success of the new curricular enterprise and its wider ambitions.

Working with children to support the development of these skills and aspirations requires a deep understanding of the multifaceted factors that shape the lives of children and young people. The next sections offer snapshots of some key contemporary issues that are informed by the sub-disciplines of sociology, education and psychology and which are of direct relevance to the work of all educators: children's rights and child-centred research, mental health and wellbeing, gender and identity, inclusion and children's literature, providing further evidence of the synergies between these fields and the new educational proposals.

### *Children's Rights and Perceptions of Childhood*

The vision of enabling children and young people to be 'ethical, informed citizens' echoes notions of children as social actors (James and

Prout, 2015) and the children's participation agenda (see Lundy, 2018; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010) that has burgeoned since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was universally ratified in 1989 (UNICEF 1989). The fundamental principles of children's rights can be summed up by the 'three Ps' underpinning the UNCRC: Protection, Provision and Participation; it is the latter, as expressed in Article 12 (the child's right to express their view and to be heard) that has been the topic of ongoing debate and which paved the way for initiatives such as school councils and youth parliaments. In the UK context Wales is at the forefront of advocacy and real participatory work with children (see Children's Commissioner for Wales <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk>). The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (WAG 2011) establishes the requirement of Welsh Ministers to have the duty to provide 'due regard' to the rights and obligations as set out in the UNCRC when making any strategic decisions.

A child's right to make decisions about issues that may affect her can be seen to stand against traditional paternalistic views of childhood. Such debates enable CYS students to connect policy and theory with practice, and as future practitioners across a range of work contexts with children and young people, they are equipped with knowledge and insight from contemporary and cutting-edge research. For those planning a career in teaching, an engagement with CYS research brings a deeper understanding of the social worlds that young people in their care may inhabit; it also offers would-be teachers access to critical conceptual debates around issues relevant to the social worlds of young people in and out of the school gates. For example, the opportunity to reflect on the agency and empowerment of a young child (Kirby, 2019) can open up the way for emancipatory education in the classroom.

A new curriculum that is committed to developing ethical and informed citizens is to be welcomed, but we believe this must come hand in hand with a belief in children's voices and ability to make decisions; this belief must go beyond any tokenistic participation in a school council.

### *Mental Health and Wellbeing*

One of the most urgent concerns within today's society is the rise of mental illness in children and adolescents (Gunnell, Kidger and Elvidge,

2018). In 2018, it was reported by the NHS that 1 in 8 children and adolescents between the ages of 5–19 were diagnosed with at least one mental illness. The figures were even more worrying for 17–19 year old young women, with 1 in 4 reporting to suffer with disorders such as anxiety and depression. This means that on average, three children in every classroom will have some form of a mental illness, with the numbers even more alarming for those in secondary schools.

With child and adolescent mental health becoming an increasing concern and many of those affected having to wait over three months to access treatment (Crenna-Jennings and Hutchingson, 2020), it is vital that practitioners who work with these groups have a good understanding of this field. This means that mental health and well-being in children and adolescents must be an integral part of any course relating to children and young people today. Within the discipline students gain extensive knowledge of the range of mental health problems and disorders that affect children and adolescents and the criteria for identifying them, but we also explore the impact these illnesses might have on the child and their family and how a practitioner would therefore support them by possibly adapting their approaches, environment and using evidence-based strategies to deal with various issues.

For example, the Conduct Disorders (CD) ‘group of behaviours that violates either the rights of others or major societal norms’, (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) are the most common mental disorders that affect children (Green et al., 2005) and produce great challenges for parents, teachers and other child-health practitioners (Baker, 2016). Without an effective intervention, the long-term outcomes for children with such conditions are poor (Baker, 2016). Research shows that an understanding of issues and factors associated with CD is key to help support that individual alongside knowledge of how to deal with such behaviours in an evidence-based effective way (Wilkinson, Waller, Viding, 2016). Engaging with such research provides our students with relevant knowledge and equips them with the right tools for dealing with children and young people with these and other conditions; such knowledge is particularly important for those working in school contexts.

Attention to the wellbeing of children and young people is reflected in the fourth listed purpose of the new curriculum, to create ‘Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society’; however, in order to build emotionally resilient children, teachers require more support. A recent report showed that

most school-based staff not only ‘lacked the confidence’ to help support children’s mental health fearing that they might make matters worse rather than better, (National Assembly Wales, 2018) but others reported that teachers lacked knowledge and understanding regarding various illnesses that they might encounter and that they were also lacking in strategies to deal with various problems (Atkinson, 2015).

Considering the UK Government’s promise of additional funding focusing on training non-health professionals such as teachers to be able to deal with children who are experiencing mental health problems (DoH, 2017), it can be seen that we are already committed to such provision in providing these skills to practitioners of the future through our CYS courses.

### *Child Development, Gender and Identity*

The link between Education and Child Development is, perhaps, obvious. One of the key aspects of work with children and young people is to facilitate their development across every area of life. A further aim of the new curriculum is to develop a Welsh citizenry of ‘ambitious, capable learners’. This aim recognises that development in one area – be it cognitive, social, physical, etc. – does not happen in isolation. In CYS our discussions of child and adolescent development goes beyond the ‘how’ and explores the ‘why’. Familiar theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bandura are discussed but their theories are discussed in diverse contexts.

For example, the recent emphasis on encouraging girls to engage with STEM subjects is considered. We question whether this reflects a biological difference or a result of Social Learning (Bandura, 1969). Evidence shows that girls and boys receive types and levels of input from their parents. Girls tend to receive more instruction on reading and writing from parents at pre-school ages than boys, but fathers give boys more of their time after the age of 3 (Baker and Milligan, 2016). As part of their socialisation, girls and boys learn that different things are acceptable or expected of them. This results in some girls learning, by the age of 6, that being ‘really, really smart’ belongs to boys and a higher proportion of girls might begin to disengage from activities traditionally associated with high intelligence (such as STEM subjects) (Bian, Leslie and Cimpian, 2017). Furthermore, these discussions explore the difficult

balancing act our society expects girls to achieve in being both feminine but not 'too girly', where femininity is also seen as essential for girls but at odds with science (Francis et al., 2016).

The discipline has a strong emphasis on interrogating our own assumptions, values and prejudices in order to help children to navigate their development beyond acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge. These discussions are explored within an intersectional framework, acknowledging that experiences of development will vary with a range of factors (e.g. race, social advantage, culture, etc.) and that these factors may be combined in different ways for individual children (Hankivsky, 2014).

Tracing the contours and interplay between some of these factors, Wells (2018, p. 3) argues that as scholars in Childhood Studies we must begin with the acknowledgement that childhood is '*a profoundly unequal space*'. The factors that impact on children's sense of who they are constitute what Wells refers to as the 'multiplicity' of childhood. As explored in the next section, literature can offer a lens into this multiplicity.

### *Literature and Children's Social Worlds*

In order that children and young people develop strong and confident identities, they need to see their realities reflected in the world around them. Analysis of children's literature within the context of CYS is one means of doing this. This is not a new concept, with Hoffman (1984) recognising that literature is influenced by social and political change and enabling children to place themselves within the context of stories. For example, at the end of the Cold War arms race in the 1980s, nuclear war was explored in the graphic novel *When the Wind Blows* (Briggs, 1981) and *Children of the Dust* (Lawrence, 1985). The theme of nuclear war in young people's literature followed a wealth of stories published in the 1970s about Second World War, including *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (Kerr, 1971) and *Carrie's War* (Bawden, 1973). These genres of books enable children to understand how their society was shaped through the eyes of the characters in the stories. They remain classic texts in schools today as they powerfully and authentically capture eras in history for children to experience.

Stories provide a safe context within which children can explore challenges and dilemmas. Some of the earliest stories that children

engage with are traditional tales that, paradoxically, often contain cruelty and danger. Bettelheim cited in Martenova Charles (2009) suggests that through such stories children can identify with characters' problems and are reassured to see them resolved. The traditional tale, therefore, validates the child's experiences as being worthwhile and this supports their well-being. Booker's seven basic plots (2005) of death or danger, good versus evil, poverty, jealousy or desire, deceit or trickery, sorcery or magic, escape and rescue that are prevalent in these traditional tales, also relate to contemporary children's literature. Students on a CYS programme might analyse stories using these themes and apply their understanding of theories in developmental psychology and sociology to them. They discuss what aspects of characters older children could relate to and how stories could be used to raise awareness of real-life issues such as bereavement and bullying. Discussions about how Harry Potter's family life (Rowling, 1997) presents as a child protection case study, that his human rights are violated and that his relationships with adults may suggest attachment difficulties, are a valuable process in unpicking personal, social and emotional issues in an accessible way. Literature analysis, therefore, can be useful in encouraging safe and healthy relationships and helping to develop resilience. As both literacy and well-being are integral parts of the Areas of Learning and Experience in the Curriculum for Wales 2022, educators will continue to have cross-curricular opportunities to use literature as a vehicle for supporting well-being.

There are challenges, however, in promoting inclusion and diversity and there is evidence to show that not all children's realities are reflected in contemporary literature. The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education's *Reflecting Realities* report (2018) released a survey of ethnic representation within UK children's literature. Their findings showed that only 4% of children's books published in 2017 included characters from a black or minority ethnic (BAME) background, under-representing the 32% of pupils of compulsory school age in the UK of BAME background.

Children with disabilities are also under-represented in children's literature, particularly those with profound learning difficulties. Greenwell (2004) recognised a trend in young people's literature of characters with autism following Asperger's syndrome being formally recognised in the 1990s. This trend has continued with publications such as *The State of Grace* (Lucas, 2017) which challenges some of the stereotypes of autism, but overall representation of disability is minimal. For younger children,

Graham (2019) found only 29 picture books with a character with a learning disability and 43 with a character who is a wheelchair user.

The way in which minority groups are portrayed in children's literature needs to be radically addressed as, if children do not see themselves portrayed in society or only see negative representations, their well-being and identity could be at risk of harm (CLPE, 2018). It follows then that as practitioners, scholars and educators if we are to nurture 'enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work' – the second listed purpose of the new curriculum – we need to understand the social realities experienced by all children and young people, so that we can nurture their self-esteem and empower them to steer their own lives. Students on CYS degree programmes engage with real-life case studies from cutting-edge research to develop the skills and ability to question thorny dichotomies such as the over-protection and the empowerment of children and young people. Furlong called for an initial teacher training that is 'expansive rather than restrictive' (2015, p. 39), echoing Donaldson's proposal for a profession that responds to 21st century schooling. We would add that this new vision for education in Wales must also expose future teachers to philosophical, conceptual and real questions about who they think children are; working with children in research endeavours is one way to achieve this.

### *Child-Centred Research*

The multi- and interdisciplinary nature of CYS provides a wealth of opportunity to develop students' critical appreciation of research. Being research literate, and able to engage in research-integrated practice, is a core skill underpinning many of the professions that support children and young people, including speech and language therapy, clinical psychology, educational psychology, social work, and, of course, teaching:

The critique and integration of appropriate research to inform and evolve effective teaching and learning practices is an essential requirement for teaching professionals ... This should involve teachers engaging in, and with, research in order to be able to use research discerningly to inform their own practice and that of others ... (Evans, Waring, and Christodoulou, 2017, p. 404)

Consuming, producing, evaluating and participating in research are key components that inform students' learning, exposing them to a variety of research methods, paradigms and traditions and to various ways of addressing an issue. Drawing on research from the fields of sociology, psychology, law, education and health, to name but a few, students are empowered to build a holistic understanding of the child and young adult from a cognitive, emotional, social, and physical perspective and to apply this knowledge in future work contexts.

Like many other disciplines, CYS research employs a host of conventional research methods, designs and procedures in order to address various questions relating to children and childhood. These include ethnographic, narrative, experimental, correlational, survey and grounded theory designs that span across qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and various other overt measures of behaviour (e.g. psychometric tests or ecological momentary assessment). Understanding the relative merits and limitations of these approaches in various contexts of exploration is crucial in order to be an effective consumer and/or producer of research and develops students' critical understanding of the relative contribution proffered by a given study and the limitations of those findings.

Within CYS a central and defining ethos of the research process is its strong focus on the child's voice (Tisdall and Punch, 2012) and a recognition of the importance of involving children in the research process. One of the cornerstones of the founding paradigm for CYS was the recognition of ethnographic methods as the best way to engage with children's views and insights (James and Prout, 1997; 2015). Across disciplines researchers may often neglect the child's perspective on issues that have direct impact on their lives, whilst still claiming to be participatory or emancipatory in their approach. Yet, as advocated by the constructivist position, children have an innate capacity to explore, question and discover, which makes them ready-made for the research process. Involving children as active participants in, and co-designers of research and policy – researching *with* and not *on* children – idealised the notion of children and young adults as being 'competent social actors to counteract traditional views of children as passive dependents' (Tisdall and Punch, 2012 p. 255) – and marks the centrality of the child within the research process. Within an education context, involving children in the research process is important, and can serve to empower pupils' own learning as autonomous agents:



... teachers should also collaborate with their pupils to get them engaged in and with research. In doing so, pupils can develop their abilities and take ownership of the skills that allow them to critically engage with research evidence and help them to make informed decisions in evolving learning contexts on an ongoing basis (Evans, Waring and Christodoulou, 2017, p. 404)

In Wales, the BA Childhood and Youth Studies programme at Bangor and the Early Years programme in Swansea are closely aligned with the work of the Wales Observatory on the Human Rights of Children and Young People, and in particular the pioneering *Lleisiau Bach/Little Voices* project which has developed the 'Children as Researchers (CAR®) methodology (see Dale and Roberts, 2018). Accessing the child's voice in research requires a different set of methodological tools, principles and approaches (Clark, 2005), and accessing this information is a crucial element in the training of professionals working with children.

*Crossing the bridge between Childhood and Youth Studies  
and Education in Wales*

The Curriculum for Wales 2022 lends itself to timely recognition of the relevance of academic courses in higher education in Childhood and Youth Studies and their impact on the ways in which childhood and children's lives are conceptualised in education contexts.

The curriculum content of such courses enables students to engage in deep reflection and debate about social, psychological, educational, political and emotional issues that impact the daily lives of children and young people and as such is clearly aligned with the aspirations of the Curriculum for Wales 2022. Via dialogue and an understanding of each other's perspectives, academics, students and schools are ideally placed to address the issues facing children and young people in contemporary education and the broader social world. In his 'defence of interdisciplinary Childhood Studies', Prout (2019, p. 310) makes a convincing case for the broader 'utility' and relevance of the field noting that 'it is impossible to understand schooling and schooling processes without unsettling widely held notions of childhood – even the ones held by teachers and parents.' He goes on to stress the urgency of renewed ways of thinking about education and the institution of schooling:

The walls of the school (and also those of the household) are dissolving and making the connection with children's everyday lives is becoming a more and more urgent task – and one to which Childhood Studies can make a crucial contribution. (Prout, 2019, p. 314)

The ideas explored here seem to map out a synergy of aspirations for the children and young people of Wales evidenced in the missions of Welsh Government, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and the ethos and scholarship within the field of Childhood and Youth Studies. The four purposes of the new curriculum offer, in our view, a unique opportunity for collaboration and learning across these institutional contexts.

It is the subjective and lived experiences of children's lives that give us insight and understanding of childhood. As scholars, practitioners or policy makers it is our duty to listen to what children and young people have to say, and our responsibility to support them in being (rather than just becoming) active, well informed and healthy members of society. On a final note, it is worth reflecting on the mission of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 which is summed up as being 'Designed by teachers. Built for children', echoing Freeman's (2014) much cited suggestion that the next treaty on children's rights should be designed and written by children. The new curriculum is an opportunity to question our assumptions on what is good or right for children, and to engage daily in conversations with them to get a real answer to our questions.

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