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Embracing the UNCRC in Wales (UK): policy, pedagogy and prejudices

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Most countries are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In 1999, the Government of Wales was devolved from the UK, and in 2011 the “Children and Young Persons Rights Measure” put the UNCRC as the basis of all its work. Any programme introduced in schools should therefore promote the UNCRC. To address this, we implemented the Philosophy for Children (P4C) in Schools Project in 64 schools and monitored teacher and pupil responses. This paper reports on a meta-analysis of quantitative and qualitative data that suggests that the models of childhood held by teachers impacts on how they respond to the UNCRC. Teachers who held models of children as “innocent”, “evil”, “blank slates” or “developing” found it hard to embrace the UNCRC. Teachers who were authoritarian, punitive and epistemologically directive also questioned the UNCRC. In contrast, teachers who practised rational authority and restorative approaches to wrongdoing and held a social competency model of the child embraced P4C, a democratic, community of inquiry approach to learning that puts pupil voice centre stage. We argue that P4C can provide a practical pedagogic tool to support the implementation of the UNCRC and has the potential to address barriers that arise from widely held deficit models of childhood.

Keywords: UNCRC; Philosophy for Children; childhood; democracy

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises that children are human beings fully worthy of the moral and intellectual respect due persons, which requires society to re-examine its responsibilities towards them and reflects the expectation that changing the legal status of this group will lead to a change in our moral attitudes towards children and young people. All countries in the world, apart from the USA are signatories to the UNCRC, but at the time of writing only one country, Wales in the UK has incorporated the UNCRC into articles of government. This has implications for education and in this paper I will argue that pedagogical approaches in classrooms will need to change to take into account the UNCRC.

I begin by providing an overview of the UNCRC and its implications for teachers in Wales. I go on to discuss findings from a training-the-trainers programme for key stakeholders in education designed to ensure all schools put the UNCRC at the heart of its planning, policies, practice and ethos. Responses from adults attending

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the training supported Williams' (2013, 1) claim that scepticism and resistance to children as rights-bearing is strong. The training revealed children's rights are an important and contested concept that challenges commonly held perceptions of children. Adult attitudes are identified as a key barrier to the successful implementation of the UNCRC in educational settings.

In the second part of the paper, I provide an overview of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme which has been endorsed by the Welsh Government as a pedagogic approach that has the potential to support the UNCRC in educational settings. Some findings emerging from the intervention known as the P4C in Schools Project (P4CISP) are presented.

I conclude that P4C is an approach that has considerable potential to challenge deficit narratives of the child that constitute a barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC. This has implications for initial teacher education and continuing professional development for teachers.

UNCRC

The UNCRC is an international vision of children as human beings with rights (United Nations General Assembly 1989) and involves a paradigm shift in the status of children (Freeman 2011). It presents the "citizen child" (Doek 2008) who is entitled to consideration in his or her own right despite lack of formal capacity and political influences. According to the charter, adults should promote the best interests of the child and recognise that this will be different in different cultural contexts (Article 3), but that in all contexts the child's voice must be taken into account (Article 12). It is one thing for all countries in the world (with the exception of the USA) to sign this convention, but implementation will depend on how politically and socially acceptable it is to the adult population. The UNCRC recognises the child as a full human being and is designed to empower children, but unless it is firmly rooted in social policy that the adult population supports, it will remain rhetoric.

The UNCRC organises children's rights into three categories: provision, protection and participation. In much of the western world, children are limited to clearly define social spaces which are policed and regulated by adults who easily refuse/avoid the call for participation. Two diametrically opposed narratives of childhood are evident: children as "innocent" or "vulnerable" and in need of protection from danger in public spaces, or children as "unruly" and in need of discipline and containment to protect adults from their behaviour (Valentine 2004) and reduce crime (Squires 2008). The introduction of the anti-social behaviour order in the UK is a policing response to fear of crime from young people in public places and has resulted in the criminalisation of many young people for offences that in previous times may have been labelled "bad manners" rather than criminal behaviour (Williams 2013). It can be seen that adult perceptions of children influence societal attitudes and practices that constitute a barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC.

The UNCRC requires us to re-consider the binary opposites of child/adult as there is no such thing as a "child" apart from an "adult" to observe it (Kennedy 2006). As Aries (1962) has documented, the boundary between adult and child has been drawn very differently in different historical epochs, but it is largely an asymmetrical relationship: the child is less powerful. The UNCRC challenges this power relationship by insisting on children's rights, in particular the right to full

personhood. The implications of the UNCRC for education are wide ranging: there are political implications for the running of schools, for ethics and moral education and for classroom practices.

Policy

The discussion in this paper takes place in the context of Wales, the first country in the UK to put the UNCRC as the basis of all its work across government by passing the “Children and Young Persons (Wales) Rights Measure” (WG 2011). The Welsh Government (WG) requires schools to put the UNCRC at the heart of its policies, practice and ethos. By declaring the “rights of the child”, the WG challenges many of the assumptions of society about the relationship between adult and child. Society in general does not take seriously the idea of children contributing to debates about things that affect them, whether in or out of school. This raises some important questions for educators:

- What is a child/young person/adult?
- What does it mean to *be* a child young person/adult?
- How do adults listen to children’s/young people’s voices?
- What is involved in respecting children’s/young people’s opinions?
- What judgements and decisions can children/young people make for themselves and for/with others?

These questions have been explored in the UK by the Teaching and Learning Research Project.¹ The WG commissioned a review of the research literature on learner voice and a briefing paper for educators was produced (Lyle and Jenkins 2010). The review concluded that when genuine opportunities for participating in learning are provided, there are many benefits for children and young people and their teachers. As Rudduck et al. (2003) conclude:

From an early age young people are capable of insightful and constructive analysis of their experiences of learning in school and they have a contribution to make to the development of strategies for improving learning and raising achievement.

However, Rudduck and Flutter (2007, 1) also point out that the traditional exclusion of young people from the processes of dialogue and decision-making is founded upon an outdated view of childhood that “fails to acknowledge young people’s capacity to take initiatives and reflect on issues affecting their lives”. State school has bound into its structures a thick set of class-based assumptions about power and control which is deep-rooted and will be difficult to eradicate as they are part of the “taken-for-grantedness” of institutional life (ibid. 10). Therefore, although the benefits of pupil participation are well researched, making this a reality will require major change in policy and practice and the WG has set out to address this.

To facilitate the inclusion of children and young people in all aspects of life, in March 2012, the Children’s Rights Scheme was developed and subsequently approved by the Welsh National Assembly. It is designed to ensure the UNCRC is taken into account in all policy and practice involving children and young people. Through this measure Wales has signalled its intention to fully implement the

UNCRC. This has put the position of children and issues related to childhood at the centre stage of public life in Wales.

The measure demands that Welsh ministers involve Non-Government Organisations and children and young people in the creation of a children's scheme. It also requires action to ensure wider awareness and understanding of the UNCRC. Provision is therefore made for including children in the public sphere by focusing on participation and at the same time challenging social structures and practices that exclude children. This offers scope for empowering children as a social group to be decision-makers on matters that affect their lives with access to engagement in the public sphere. An independent Children's Rights Commissioner for Wales was established in 2001 to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. In 2004, the WG set out its core aims for children and young people which are mapped onto the articles of the UNCRC (WAG 2004). Following this, every local authority is required to set up a *Children and Young People's Forum* to ensure local organisations listen to children and to provide representatives for the Council of Funky Dragon (the children and young people's assembly) (2013). Funky Dragon meets regularly with Welsh Assembly Ministers to provide input to key policies and is a good example of participatory action that ensures young people are active participants in the *development* of policy, not just *consulted* on policy.

Education is expected to play a key role in the implementation of the UNCRC and all schools are required to establish effective school councils which should be used to "actively engage children and young people in the planning and management of their learning environment, thus giving them an explicit stake in the learning process and its outcome" (DCELLS 2008a). The rights of the child in Wales is thus firmly linked to pedagogy and the concept of learner voice is central to the functioning of the school's council. Learner voice is further supported by curriculum guidance. At the heart of the curriculum is *The Skills Framework 3–19* (DCELLS 2008b), a learner-centred, skills-focused approach designed to support learner voice and provide a coherent approach to learning and to progression. The PSE Framework (DCELLS 2008c) for 7–19 year olds in Wales should, "empower learners to participate in their schools and communities as active responsible citizens locally, nationally and globally". The Foundation Phase curriculum (DCELLS 2008d) for the 4–7 age range is based on a view of children as competent and having rights. In Key Stage 2/3 (8–13), the emphasis is on participation, engagement and active citizenship. The 14–19 provision seeks a student-centred approach. Echoing Dewey, the father of progressivism, emphasises upon the "participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his [*sic*] activities in the learning process" (Dewey 1916, 67).

Following the establishment of a curriculum framework in 2008, the WG's UNCRC Action Plan for Wales, *Getting it Right*, (WAG 2009) set out how the WG and its partners will take forward actions to strengthen participation in school, the classroom and any learning setting, to increase opportunities for all children and young people in Wales to participate in decision-making on issues which affect them. The embedding of *Learner Rights* through the UNCRC means taking seriously what young people tell us about their experiences of being a learner, of what gets in the way of their learning and what helps them to learn.

It can be seen, therefore, that Welsh national policy provides a framework for teachers and schools who wish to promote learner voice. This is also reflected in the vision of Estyn, the office of HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) in Wales. Estyn

(2009a) emphasises the importance of consulting and listening to pupils to inform goal setting and ensure schools are “responsive to the needs of learners” (27) and meet “individual needs”. In their annual report, Estyn reiterated that, “staff in all sectors need to take more account of learners’ opinions about provision” (2009b, 9). Estyn inspectors are required to, “take care to listen to what learners tell us about the quality of education and training ... in all settings, the view of learners should be a key source of evidence” (III).

If pupils are to be included in the process of deciding what makes an effective school, teachers will need to see pupils as competent and agentic (that is having the capacity to make choices and to impose those choices on the world). Schools will need to review and change aspects of school organisation, relationships and practices, to review what young people are capable of and ensure all learners are actively involved in decision-making processes.

A key barrier to the acceptance and implementation of the UNCRC is the perceived differences between children and adults where they are in relations of power. Children’s position as dependent on adults makes it easy for latter to impose the culture of adults on the former. The Measure will be meaningless unless adults accept their obligation to children and young people. Teachers form part of the interpretive community who have the power to subvert meaning to their own priorities (Torbin 2010) and Aspinwall and Croke (2013) found baseline knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC to be low. Fitzpatrick (2013) argues that we cannot legislate for the removal of injustice – saying it should happen, does not make it so.

This raises many questions about what is at stake in this call for recognition of children’s rights and how it is to be balanced with adult authority. Answers depend on how one defines children and can be fraught with anxiety for teachers. The ethical climate prevalent in schools impacts on children, we therefore need to understand the network of rules or norms that sustain attitudes and values (Campbell 2003).

Research

I was employed by the WG to train key stakeholders in education in Pupil Participation to ensure that the UNCRC, in particular Article 12 (the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child) of the UNCRC is understood and taken seriously by schools. During that training, it became evident that there was widespread scepticism about the WG’s policy and resistance to its implementation in schools.

Barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC were identified during 12 one-day training programmes with teachers, head teachers, local authority advisors, CPD providers, initial teacher educators and school governors. Data were collected during the training for the purpose of evaluating the training programme and included field notes by the trainers, documentary evidence generated during training activities and questionnaires completed at the end of the training. All the data were collated for reporting to WG and were examined to identify key barriers to the UNCRC to help inform future training.

Data collection and analysis

At each of the training days, following an introduction to the UNCRC and in particular, Article 12 participants were given post-it notes and asked to identify barriers and affordances to the UNCRC that they perceived would be raised by teachers against the UNCRC, based on their experience as senior leaders in education. The data collected does not necessarily reflect their personal views. They were also asked to consider what assumptions about children they thought were being made by the WG policy and what they considered were the implications for teachers and schools.

Following the training days, the post-it notes were read (480 comments on barriers and under 200 on affordances) and categories under which to group the comments made were identified. All the post-it notes were completed anonymously so it is not possible to identify individuals in the analysis. We wanted participants to respond honestly and not to feel constrained.

The categories emerging from this first analysis of the data indicated the presence of societal discourses about children, childhood, school and learning. There were frequent references to children's immaturity or incompetence with regard to their rights. Many participants wanted to emphasise children's responsibilities as well as their rights and were concerned that some children would "take advantage" to behave irresponsibly. There were clear indications that participants thought the fact that "children don't know enough" to use their voices appropriately, or were "not ready to take on the ideas" because it was developmentally inappropriate.

Having been alerted to different ideas about childhood emerging from the data, I decided to carry out a theoretical review of accounts in the literature on prevailing narratives of childhood coming from anthropology, sociology, psychology and philosophy to examine how theory could help understand the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC identified by participants.

The themes that emerged from the literature are strongly linked to the data collected during training sessions in the UNCRC. I therefore seek to look beyond the surface meanings of the data that came from the initial responses during training and what follows is an attempt to interpret and theorise the significance of the patterns identified and consider their broader meanings and implications in order to identify assumptions, conceptualisations and ideological positions which, I argue, act as barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in Wales.

Barriers to UNCRC***Theme 1: immaturity***

A key barrier identified during training was the view that rights for children are not appropriate. Participants expressed the view that adults are in a better position than the child to assess the interests of the child. Narratives that cast children as incompetent and too immature to be involved in decisions about their lives were sometimes legitimated by reference to Article 3 of the UNCRC, "the best interests of the child" to justify adult decision-making in children's lives. This was seen to override Article 12, which seeks to prioritise children's voices.

Adults in training commonly assumed children were incapable of forming their own views because they are not old enough; therefore, age becomes a key objection to the UNCRC in schools, especially in the early years and infant classroom (age 4–7). Children were seen as "developing" suggesting that developmental

psychology has a powerful influence on educationalists, which limits their expectations of children. The assumption that children should be taught in a developmentally appropriate way that is assumed to fit the majority of children appears to constitute a major barrier to the UNCRC. There is considerable evidence that under the sway of developmentally appropriate practice, teachers frequently assume children cannot exercise their rights as they are developmentally inappropriate (James 2007). Furthermore, the notion that childhood is an apprenticeship for adulthood with the assumption that there will be “an arrival”, “an age of majority”, when the rights and status of citizenship will be conferred is commonly held (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998). MacNaughton (2005) likens the discourse of developmental psychology to a “regime of truth”, which was widely accepted by adults in our training. The dominant discourse of child as “citizen-in-waiting” is an attitude that works against the UNCRC.

Theme 2: narratives of childhood

As well as a developmental approach to childhood, there was evidence that historical narratives of children were present in educators’ thinking and informed arguments about immaturity. The view of children as “innocent” was expressed and used in argument for the withholding of knowledge from children under the guise of protecting them. Adults were seen as gatekeepers who should protect children from information they consider too difficult for them to deal with.

In contrast, some children were seen as unruly and needed to learn “how to behave” and be taught “how to be good”. Such children were regarded as potentially disruptive and subversive to the process of participation. Both views of children as “innocent” and “unruly” can support the notion of adults as protectors of children and knowledge gatekeepers. This has the effect of shielding children from participation as active citizens and impacts on the provision made for them.

A third objection to the UNCRC was the existence of a given curriculum that “had to be covered”. This revealed a *tabula rasa* approach to children, believing that it was the teacher who had to “deliver” a fixed curriculum to children who would remain ignorant if this was not done. The requirement that children should have choice over topics to be discussed or that teachers should follow the children’s interests was felt to be in conflict with teaching a set curriculum.

These expressed views suggest that many aspects of the Welsh curriculum that prioritises children’s voice will be seen as inappropriate by many teachers, and it remains to be seen how it will be interpreted and implemented on the ground.

Theme 3: power relations

Teachers’ positions of power, authority and responsibility for children emerged as a concept in discussion of the UNCRC. A key barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC is the dominance of the teacher’s voice at the expense of students’ own meaning-making voices (Harper 2013). This power relationship between teachers and learners is likely to be a stumbling block to participatory practices in classroom settings.

The implementation of the UNCRC was seen as a threat to traditional boundaries between adults and children. A key objection came from those who saw teachers as authority figures that should not be challenged. Similar to Lundy’s findings (2007)

when investigating children's participation in decision-making, training participants frequently made statements that made it clear that "adults know best" and deserve to have their views and authority respected. Participants expressed the view that many teachers are used to occupying a position of authority that has traditionally been exercised in an authoritarian manner and often find it difficult to imagine, let alone implement, an alternative approach. The asymmetrical valuation of adults and children and teachers' conceptions of what is due to them as adults clearly influences how they respond to the UNCRC.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales also found evidence of this barrier:

It is clear that some adults are confusing respect with fear and obedience, perhaps hankering after some bygone age when children were fearful of adults. It seems equally clear that many more adults are unwilling to think about how they might earn the respect of the young. They seem to expect automatic respect in a way that they do not from fellow adults. (CCfW 2004–5)

Summary

Narratives of children as "innocent", "unruly", "blank slate" or "developing" limit children's participation in society and are deficit models of the child and therefore unsupportive of the UNCRC. The implications of such views are wide-ranging, as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) point out, by protecting children from the world in which they exist or providing a pre-determined developmental curriculum, adults deny children their right to seriously engage in that world. Our findings suggest that these meta-narratives are recognised by senior educators and have the power to impact on attitudes towards children that limit the participation agenda.

Although the existence of the barriers discussed above is thought by the senior educators consulted to be widespread, they by no means represent the only views expressed. There were indications of different narratives of childhood that support the UNCRC; however, there was a widespread belief that the objections outlined above would be made by the classroom teacher whose job it is to implement the policy. The presence of deficit narratives of childhood is also widely discussed in the literature, (for e.g. in philosophy, Kennedy 2006; Stables 2008; Wall 2010. In anthropology, James 2007 and sociology, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; Dahlberg and Moss 2005).

The WG is aware of these deficit attitudes towards children:

They [children] are not a species apart, to be alternatively demonised [unruly/disruptive/evil] and sentimentalised, [innocent] not trainee adults [citizens-in-waiting] who do not yet have a full place in society ... Children and young People should be seen as young citizens, with rights and opinions to be taken into account now. WAG (2004, 4)

Ways forward

The senior educators consulted believe that if teachers are to see children as social actors and participants whose opinions are valid and important, they need to be made aware of pedagogical approaches that model ways of working that can fully take into account the participation agenda. We must give teachers the tools by which outcomes can be achieved – where rights become reality – otherwise the Measure will be meaningless.

The WG also recognises that guidance is needed for schools to, “encourage a change of culture, where pupil participation becomes part and parcel of everything the school does, including teaching and learning” (WG 2010, Proposed Statutory Guidance on Pupil Participation).

P4C is one such pedagogical approach that has been endorsed by the WG and was introduced into schools in South Wales. An overview of P4C is provided next.

Pedagogy

P4C was identified as a pedagogical intervention that has the capacity to support the UNCRC agenda and was introduced into schools in South Wales through continuing professional development provided by the university. P4C is a pedagogical tool for promoting philosophical thinking in children that has been the subject of increased discussion in the last 20 years. First developed by Lipman (1988) in the USA and now widely used in over 50 countries worldwide, it is an approach to classroom practice which sees development and understanding best achieved in dialogue between peers in a classroom community of enquiry (COE), facilitated by the teacher (Lyle 2008a). Research evidence to support the value of P4C comes from both qualitative and quantitative studies. An impressive body of research evidence suggests the impact of P4C on improved pupil academic outcomes in a range of assessments is considerable (for a review of quantitative studies, see Trickey and Topping 2004). This is important, teachers are unlikely to embrace P4C merely on the basis of it supporting the rights of the child, it would also need to support the standards agenda which, one could argue, has a greater influence on practices in schools and classrooms. Qualitative studies focus on analysis of classroom transcripts of children engaged in communities of enquiry and challenge assumptions about what children know and are capable of thinking and exemplify the role of the teacher as facilitator of enquiry (see, for e.g. Lipman 2003; Haynes and Murriss 2009). Therefore, the proposed pedagogy was endorsed by research as a sound learning and teaching approach suitable for all children (3–19 years).

The roots of P4C can be found in Socrates’ famous maxim, “the unexamined life is not worth living”; it is a philosophical way of looking at the self and the world in order to reflect on what it means to lead a good life. A democratic practice, P4C seeks to develop a COE in the classroom and through communal enquiry challenges children to think for themselves as they explore philosophical concepts together. The concepts to be examined are identified by considering whether or not they are *common* to all human societies, *central* to understanding how people live together and yet *contestable* (making it hard to agree on a universal definition), but *connectable* to human experience to provide a practical context for enquiry – sometimes referred to as the 4Cs (P4C.com); therefore, P4C seeks to help pupils understand what it means to be human and to explore how to live a good life. In sum, the COE is considered a site of participatory and inclusive practice whereby children are invited to co-construct a learning environment in which they are listened to and each child’s uniqueness, subjectivity and rights are recognised and valued. It actively seeks to help all children express their thoughts and strengthen their participation in classroom life.

P4C starts from the premise that young children have the capability to engage in conceptual enquiry and challenges common developmental views of the child as not capable of abstract thought until they have reached the stage of formal operational

thought (12–14 years). Children’s capacity for abstract thought is demonstrated through practice and therefore questions the notion that children’s thinking styles and capacities are a matter simply of age or maturity.

The practice of P4C aims to promote a COE. In order to do this, teachers have to create an intellectual, social and emotional space for children’s questions and contributions in the classroom. Teachers also need to be highly skilled in listening to and observing children’s dialogue, and in asking questions that enable children to build on each other’s ideas. This poses a challenge for teachers as it is in opposition to much of the talk that goes on in classrooms.

Since the mid-1970s, classroom observational research in countries all over the world has produced a consistent picture: schools and classrooms are full of talk, but little collaborative talk between learners (Alexander 2005; Lyle 2008b). It is generally accepted that what is now seen as a monologic style of discourse structure between teacher and pupils known as the IRF (Initiation/Response/Feedback) is a fundamental feature of all official talk in classrooms, constituting around 60% of the teaching/learning process (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). This practice, often referred to as the recitation, is understood well by teachers and plays a central part in the direction and control of student learning. There is widespread agreement, based on a large number of studies, that the IRF provides the basis of teaching by direct instruction still and enables teachers to stay in control of events and ideas in lessons. Its effect is to emphasise the asymmetrical nature of relationships between teachers and taught and the epistemological dominance of the teacher, something the UNCRC seeks to challenge.

The primary purpose of the recitation is the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through teacher questions designed to test or stimulate recall, or to cue pupils to work out answers from clues in the question. The Recitation supports the traditional power relationships of the classroom which tend to reproduce a pedagogy based on the transmission of pre-packaged knowledge. Dialogic discourse styles favoured by P4C have to compete against this dominant form of classroom interaction. It follows that implementing a change from the traditional classroom to one that values talk is not a simple matter (Lyle 2008a).

The driving force of P4C is the COE. In a P4C lesson, children sit together in a circle to examine questions they have identified themselves. This is a major shift for most teachers who are used to asking the questions in their classrooms. In a COE, the teacher’s role is that of a facilitator and requires very different questioning skills. The teacher must be skilled at asking *procedural* questions to help pupils think more effectively. Pupils are asked to define concepts, speculate on alternative definitions, give reasons for their interpretations and provide evidence to support their ideas; for example, “Can you explain what you mean?”; “Why do you think that?”; “What evidence have we got to support that?”; and “What would someone say who disagrees with you?”. Pupils are asked to give examples or counter-examples to illustrate their ideas, to make connections between each other’s ideas and to unpick the assumptions that lie behind them; for example, “Can you give me an example?”; “Who disagrees with that?”; and “How is what you have said similar/different from what X said?”. Through such questioning, teachers enable pupils to build criteria to support their views that are consistent. In a COE, the teacher is no longer the sole source of knowledge in the classroom, her questions are designed to help the children build new, principled knowledge and understanding through dialogue and enquiry, it is therefore a socio-cultural process and links to Bakhtin’s notion that

truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual, “... it is born *between* people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin 1984, 110). Such dialogic interaction requires a teacher to focus on helping or encouraging the children’s discussions.

A second form of questioning the teacher needs to adopt is *substantive* questioning that focuses on the concept/s that the children are exploring through the enquiry. The nature of substantive questioning can be illustrated using an example from an enquiry that was video recorded as part of our research. The children, age 9–10 were enquiring into the question, “What does it mean to be disabled?” During the enquiry the children established that there is a difference between people who had been *born* disabled and those who *become* disabled and they considered some of the implications of this. The teacher asked them to consider, “If you *become* disabled rather than are *born* disabled, are ‘you’ still you?” In this question, he is drawing on the concepts of disability and identity and whether or not one’s inner identity changes if our physical capability changes. The question promoted deep discussion amongst the children that enabled them to dig deeper into the question and explore the concepts of disability and identity. In the process, children offered examples from their own experiences of disability in their families in order to examine quality of life issues.

The democratic nature of P4C and the expectation that each child can participate and be heard makes it an important pedagogic tool to support the UNCRC. It provides the training in facilitation necessary to help children express their voice and the structures to ensure that voice is listened to.

P4C in schools research project

The university-led P4CISP trained whole staff in 64 primary schools to introduce P4C into their classrooms by following the SAPERE Level 1 training course.² The primary schools are located in a range of different socio-economic contexts. In Wales, schools are judged to be poor or affluent by the number of pupils receiving free school meals. Schools in this study ranged from 6 to 48% free school meals and therefore were representative of schools as a whole. Research into the impact of P4C was carried out by teachers enrolled on post-graduate degrees, either as part of their action research assignments (MA), their MA dissertation or PhD thesis. Other research studies were carried out by seven teachers seconded from school to take up posts as research fellows for six-week periods and by one teacher who was seconded to the university for a year. Each of these teachers engaged in collecting data from a total of 26 schools on the impact of P4C. In addition, an independent evaluator was employed for six weeks to visit eight schools to observe P4C in action and interview children (Boyce 2008). As the lead researcher, I also collected case study data from one school over one year and took responsibility for carrying out a thematic review of all the data collected.

Data collection techniques are mainly qualitative and include interviews with head teachers, teachers, teaching assistants and local authority advisors; non-participant observations of P4C enquiries in schools; focus group interviews with children and pre- and post-testing of children using standardised tests. The entire data-set is therefore large and specific aspects of the research have been examined for the purpose of preparing papers. Publications so far include a theoretical paper arguing that P4C is a dialogic pedagogy (Lyle 2008a); investigation of leadership approaches in

seven schools who have successfully embedded P4C across the school (Lyle and Thomas-Williams 2011); a case study investigation into the impact of P4C on children who were under-attaining in literacy in one school (Lyle and Jenkins 2010), the impact of P4C on the development of pupil voice and participation (Casey 2011) and a DVD to illustrate practice (Journey into Children's Minds 2009).³

More generally, the research carried out by teacher-researchers set out to investigate the impact of P4C on children's engagement in learning from the perspective of adults and children. Data were collected using observation, interviews and focus groups. Each set of data was analysed by the teacher-researchers carrying out the research and reports were prepared. I carried out a thematic review (Braun and Clarke 2006) of the total data corpus which informs the discussion that follows.

The epistemological framework that guided the thematic review is social-constructivist. My goal in carrying out an interpretative analysis of the whole data-set was to theorise the significance of the patterns emerging in relation to current literature on childhood. What I present is my attempt to identify the sociocultural influences that informed the way respondents talked about and practised P4C.

The data in this section are drawn from the P4CISP as discussed above. The research took place in schools that had embraced P4C as a pedagogic tool and were sympathetic to the UNCRC. Most teachers saw P4C as a practical way of implementing the requirement to promote pupil voice in the classroom. I report on just two of themes that emerged from the training process: narratives of childhood and power relationships to show how the adoption of a participatory pedagogy can successfully challenge deficit narratives of children and asymmetrical power relationships between adults and children as well as actively promote positive attitudes towards the UNCRC.

Theme 1: narratives of childhood

Many teachers in our meta-review of schools who had implemented P4C embraced a participatory narrative of children as competent and agentic; they saw children as active citizens and wanted to support children's practice as citizens of today rather than "citizens-in-waiting". A competency narrative has its roots in sociology that defines children as, "*social actors* who shape their identities, create and communicate valid views about the social world and have a right to participate in it" (MacNaughton, Hughes, and Smith 2007). Teachers who articulated this view of the child were more likely to embrace P4C as a practice because it seeks to promote children's democratic involvement in communities of enquiry. They wanted to consult children about curriculum and saw their views as both valid and important. Importantly, findings from an independent evaluation of eight schools indicate that P4C can also be a catalyst for attitudinal change, for example, "Involvement in P4C enquiries has helped me re-evaluate the way I see the children"; "[P4C provides] an insight into their [children's] world and what it means to be young now"; overall, "teachers of the oldest and youngest pupils said that the experience had enabled them to see into their pupils' worlds and to understand what it means to be a child or young person at this time" (Boyce 2008).

This research suggests the participatory practice of P4C has the power to shift teachers' narratives of childhood away from the deficit narratives of "immature", "incompetent", "innocent", "unruly", "blank slate" or "developing" identified during training in UNCRC as discussed above, towards a competency model, which

suggests it is an important pedagogical tool that can support the UNCRC. Teachers who accepted children as social actors and participants generally found P4C a supportive pedagogic tool. The actual process of implementing P4C in their classrooms was a major factor in supporting this model of childhood and reinforcing it; in interviews many teachers spontaneously expressed their “surprise and amazement of what small children are capable of” (Boyce 2008).

My teachers have been surprised at the depth of thought of young children. (Head Teacher, James and Watts 2009).

Theme 2: power relations

We found that teachers’ attitudes and relationships to authority were relative to their engagement with P4C. In schools that had successfully embedded P4C over a period of a year or more a different attitude to authority than that identified during the UNCRC training has emerged. Following Mathews (1994), the concept of rational authority rather than authoritarian approaches to teacher/child relationships is seen as an essential aspect of behaviour management in some P4C schools. For Matthews (1994, 123) children are, “People, fully worthy of both the moral and the intellectual respect due persons”; therefore, rational authority is based on respectful relationships between all adults and children in the classroom and school. It acknowledges a teacher’s responsibility for the well-being of the children in their care, acknowledging that sometimes they will make decisions on behalf of the child, but expect such decisions to be justifiable, as teacher-researcher Brindley (2013) has found, “Actions taken must be based on good reasons, which the children can understand and will benefit from”. Extracts from head teacher and teacher interviews support this, for example:

We used to have a lot of behaviour problems; we don’t now. Philosophy is part of the definite drive to address the culture of the school. (James and Watts 2009)

The practice of P4C challenges many of the assumptions that underpin traditional power relationships between adults and children and, by implication, requires that such relationships change. Evidence of the capacity of P4C to challenge authoritarian attitudes and promote rational authority comes from the teacher and student interviews:

[in P4C] we respect each other’s views, and children know that the teacher has not got the answers – ‘cos we are very bossy aren’t we, as teachers – but not in P4C (Teacher, James and Watts 2009)

In P4C I can express my opinion and the teacher doesn’t argue back. (student, James and Watts 2009)

This has implications for the quality of pupil/teacher relationships in schools. Summarising her independent evaluation of eight schools, Boyce (2008) claims:

Pupil teacher relationships were excellent, with warm, professional teachers and respectful, confident pupils ... It would appear that P4C will flourish where the overall school ethos supports its values.

Many teachers were aware of the importance of being responsive to children through listening to them (Biesta 2004) and recognised the learning that comes from the practices engaged in, for example:

P4C has given me a framework, 'cos I wasn't doing it before, and I didn't really like class discussions or group discussions. I didn't, I always seemed to end up telling them off. But this way we follow the procedure and it just seems to work. It is quite, quite miraculous really. You just follow the rules and you, you won't go wrong.

Children learn by listening to others and realise they can change their opinions.
(Teachers talking, James and Watts 2009)

Students frequently made comments to show how much they valued P4C where they listened to others and were listened to. The following quotations from pupils are typical of their comments and are replicated time and again in our data:

The teacher gets to know me better in P4C
You can hear other people's side
[P4c] helps you to be more open-minded
[you] need to see someone else's point of view
We get to know each other better
(Pupils talking, James and Watts 2009)

We conclude that P4C provides a model that supports learner voice which is valued by students and teachers alike.

It follows that in implementing the UNCRC, schools will need to look carefully at their authority structures and consider how a move towards rational authority can support the changes necessary to embrace participatory approaches.

Implications

If the WG's UNCRC agenda is to be implemented, it will require models of pedagogy such as P4C to help teachers make the necessary changes. Our research suggests that a reconceptualisation of adult understandings of children, childhood and children's citizenship away from those promulgated by developmental psychology and historically located meta-narratives (as innocent, unruly or blank slate) need to be identified and challenged. The widespread presence of deficit models of children, as identified in UNCRC training and in the review of literature, mitigates against the realisation of children's rights. In parallel with legislation and the creation of participation spaces, Welsh teachers need new ways of thinking about children, childhood and children's citizenship to open avenues for children's claims for rights. However, this would not be easy, as Wall (2010, 35) says,

Overturning historical biases about childhood will take more than empirical investigation ... It will also require ethical self-critique.

Different ways of viewing children will influence how adults mediate the requirement to promote participation and support the political child. The influences of theories of childhood, in particular the dominant model of developmental psychology, serve to limit the opportunities for participation available to children. In contrast, theoretical positions which see the child as competent and agentic

contribute counter narratives to the dominant theories that can open doors for the promotion of active citizenship.

Our research suggests that adopting the UNCRC as policy and putting in place practices to promote children's rights is necessary, but not sufficient to ensure that institutions dealing with children will embrace the ideas. Our research indicates that deficit narratives of childhood will need challenging in a proactive way if the UNCRC is to achieve its aspirations.

Challenges to the hidden assumptions that underlie developmental psychology's normalisation of childhood come from anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and historians that challenge the hegemony of developmental psychology and its central tenet – the notion of a general, unitary model of child development. Within anthropology, for example, there has been a recent move to study children in their own right and not just in terms of what they will become (James 2007); this child-centred anthropology insists upon the social competence of children and can contribute to the task of dispelling the historic constructions of children as innocent, passive or “adults-in-waiting”. Our research suggests that P4C as a pedagogic tool is a powerful vehicle for acknowledging and promoting the competence of children and has the power to shift the thinking of teachers away from a developmental model.

Conclusion

Teachers' engagement with the UNCRC is informed and sometimes distorted by a myriad of assumptions about children and childhood that are influenced by the academic disciplines of psychology, anthropology and sociology. These disciplines are in turn influenced by historical and cultural meta-narratives of childhood that need to be identified and subjected to critical examination.

Our research suggests that developmental psychology has the biggest current impact on teachers' conception of childhood that is pervasive and undermines the potential of the UNCRC to impact on practice in schools. In contrast, new inter-disciplinary narratives of childhood that critique developmental approaches to understanding children can offer a different and more positive view of children today that has the potential to impact on teachers.

In considering the community of adults and children that is a school, Kennedy (2006) wants to conceptualise adults and children as co-learners and co-enquirers; the child is not “less-than” an adult, but a complete human being who may lack the experience of an adult, but who deserves the same respect we would accord to any human being. The practice of P4C can support the enactment of this vision and has much to offer to the task of embedding the UNCRC in Wales.

In our global world, the concept of “child” and “childhood” is being challenged by the diverse experiences of the world's children. The blight of AIDS means many children lead households all over Africa. Child poverty in the so-called developed world of the US and Europe puts children in danger in our inner cities, while 100,000s of children are living their lives in refugee camps across the South. If we listen to the voices of these children – the child soldiers (Beah 2007) and the displaced (Eggers 2006), those living in the inner cities of the USA (Kozol 1995) – our concept of childhood and the rights of the child are challenged. It is one thing for the nations of the world to sign up to the

Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is another to make that a reality. The eyes of the world will be on Wales to see what changes occur as the UNCRC is embedded in the practice of government.

Notes

1. The Teaching and Learning Research Programme is the UK Education Science Research Council's largest investment in research from 2000 to 2011.
2. See the SAPERE website www.sapere.org.uk
3. Available from Imaginative Minds, <http://www.thinkingonlinecatalogue.co.uk>

Notes on contributor

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