

Overarching research aim: To explore whether early years' practitioner views of children's competence and capability have an impact on their practice and pedagogy in Flying Start settings in Wales

AIMS

1. To evaluate how practitioners' constructions of young children influence the environment and resources made available to them.
2. To understand whether practitioners' views of children's competence and capability affect their interactions with young children.
3. To identify the role of professional development in supporting practitioners to view children as capable and competent.

RESEARCH GAP

Insider inquiry (Saidin, 2017) to challenge deficit discourse and foster professional curiosity

TERMINOLOGY

Using a curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh Government, 2022) as the lens for research

Terminology in key Welsh Government documentation describes the enabling adult who views children as capable and competent.

Action research (McAteer, 2013) in a setting where the threshold concept of the capable child has not yet been reached

POSITIONALITY

Lives in a socioeconomically deprived area
Works as a Flying Start Advisory Teacher and is Responsible Individual for two Flying Start settings
Co-authored the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh Government, 2022)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Does a well-intentioned professional position mean that some children are restricted from access to play and pedagogy that might serve to support curiosity an conceptual thinking?' (Waters-Davies and MacDonald 2022)

IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Despite 'knowing' about developmentally appropriate pedagogy the practice often lags behind due to entrenched beliefs (Murphy, Greenway and Conn, 2024)
The idea of the "threshold concept"—seeing the child as capable—is central to bridging this gap (Waters-Davies and MacDonald, 2022)
Risk aversion, and lack of trust in children's abilities contribute to the gap (Jerebine et al, 2022, Jerebine, 2022a)

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN BASED ON CRESWELL AND POTH (2016)

Paradigm: Pragmatism

Ontology: Reality is constantly renegotiated, debated, interpreted considering its usefulness in new unpredictable situations

Epistemology: The best method is one that solves problems. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim

Theoretical Perspective: Deweyan Pragmatism

Methodology: Mixed Methods

Methods: Qualitative description (Hall and Liebenberg, 2024)

Quantitative data gathering through questionnaires: to elicit the views of the practitioner on pedagogy, resources and children's approach to play and learning based on the five point Likert scale. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)(Goodman, 2005). The version which will be used is the 'One-sided SDQ for parents or educators of 2-4 year olds' and 'Scoring instructions for SDQs for 2-4 year olds, completed by parents or teachers'.

Qualitative data gathering through Semi structured interviews and observation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Participants will give voluntary, informed opt-in consent in line with BERA (2024) guidelines.
- A pre-project briefing will explain the research aims and methods (questionnaires, interviews, observations).
- Participants have the right to withdraw at any time.
- The researcher's dual role as Responsible Individual will be acknowledged, with assurance that findings will not impact employment.
- Safeguarding concerns will be reported in line with All Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2021), overriding confidentiality.
- Written consent will be renewed for each data collection activity.

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaires, observations, interviews (Mukherji and Albon, 2009). Online questionnaires using Microsoft forms and PDF 'fill' Interviews using transcribe on Microsoft Teams

DATA ANALYSIS

A thematic framework (Braun and Clarke, 2019) will be used to analyse data and note emerging themes

SAMPLING

Purposive and convenient (Cohen et al, 2018)

Convenience sampling will be used to access a pre-existing group of 15 childcare practitioners within a Flying Start setting, where the researcher is the gatekeeper. Purposive sampling will be applied to select 8 participants for narrative interviews and SDQ completion, based on their role and relevance to the research aims.

CONSENT

- Consent will be obtained through an initial discussion, accompanied by a written consent form and participant information sheet.
- Participants will receive a debrief and feedback in line with BERA (2024) guidelines.
- They will have influence on the outcomes of the research, as findings will inform the development and delivery of a bespoke professional learning package aimed at enhancing their understanding of the notion of a capable child.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Each participant will be assigned a unique code to ensure their data remains anonymous and cannot be traced back to them.
- Data will be securely stored using the following measures:
- Electronic data will be saved on secure networks such as UWTSO OneDrive, protected by passwords and two-factor authentication (BERA, 2024).
- Hard copy materials (e.g. questionnaires, observation notes) will be kept under lock and key on secure premises until digitised.
- Once digitised, original paper documents will be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.

DISSEMINATION

- Findings will inform a bespoke professional learning (PL) programme using Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (Guard, 2023) modelling, and training.
- Knowledge will be co-constructed with participants, ensuring relevance and impact (Ince and Kitto, 2019)
- Outcomes will be shared across settings, supporting wider professional development.
- Recommendations will be shared with senior leaders

Piloting a method: Semi-structured interview.

This will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, with recording and transcription.

Analytical Approach: Discourse analysis (Gunn, 2029), focusing on listening and generating meaning from transcribed data.

Data Interpretation: Guided by Miles & Huberman (1994), including: Frequency counts of ideas, themes, and words; Identification of patterns and Gestalts (repeated themes and causes)

Pilot study: Gathering viewpoints of early years practitioners about their construction of the child.

APPROVAL PROCESS

- Ethical approval will be obtained from the University by completing and submitting an application for ethical review.
- Appropriate permissions will be sought and secured from the local authority

References

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Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use:

I acknowledge the use of copilot which is available at <https://copilot.cloud.microsoft/> to proofread my reference list.
I used the prompt(s):

Can you proofread this reference list and make sure it's in alphabetical order - harvard style please

I have used Canva templates (free version) to create the concept map

I used the free version of 'grammarly' which is installed on my laptop to help identify any spelling errors

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence