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# **An Exploration of the Conceptualisation and Enactment of Children's Rights in the Curriculum for Wales**

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Sarah Stewart

# An Exploration of the Conceptualisation and Enactment of Children's Rights in the Curriculum for Wales

*How are children's rights conceptualised in the Curriculum for Wales and enacted by schoolteachers?*

The aim of this research was to:

- Explore the conceptualisation of children's rights including those drawn from legal, modernist, sociological discourses from academic theory and Welsh educational policy
- Investigate and critically analyse the role of children's rights within the Curriculum for Wales as outlined in curriculum guidance
- Explore teachers in Wales's conceptualisations and perceived enactment of children's rights within their practice in relation to the curriculum.

## Theoretical Framework

- Critical theory and Foucault
  - *Power, knowledge and discourse*
  - *Governmentality, discipline and neo-liberalism*
- Post-modernism
- The agentic, competent child

## Methodology – Ethics - Reflexivity

### Research Design

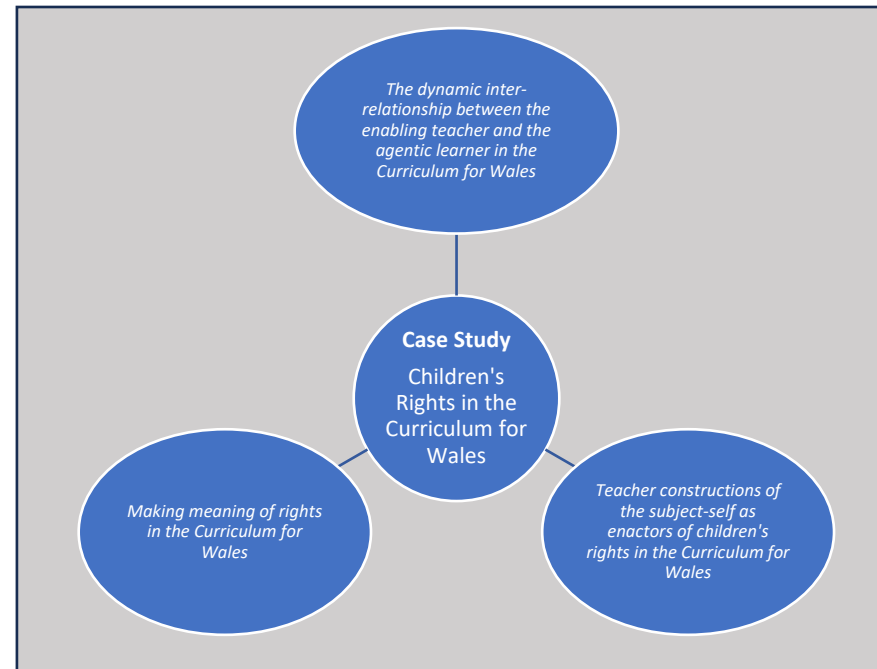
- Qualitative
- Post-structuralist
- Case Study (=CfW)
- Sampling
  - Non-probabilistic
  - Purposive

### Data Collection

- Literature Review
- Document Analysis
- Questionnaires (n=60)
- Interviews (n=3)

### Data Analysis

- Braun and Clarke
- Reflexive thematic analysis
  - Coding
  - Theme Mapping



# What?

# Making Meaning of Rights in the Curriculum for Wales



*[The curriculum] is an important vehicle for embedding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the experience of learning and teaching for our children and young people and for giving them an understanding of their rights.*

(HWB Curriculum Guidance, 2022)

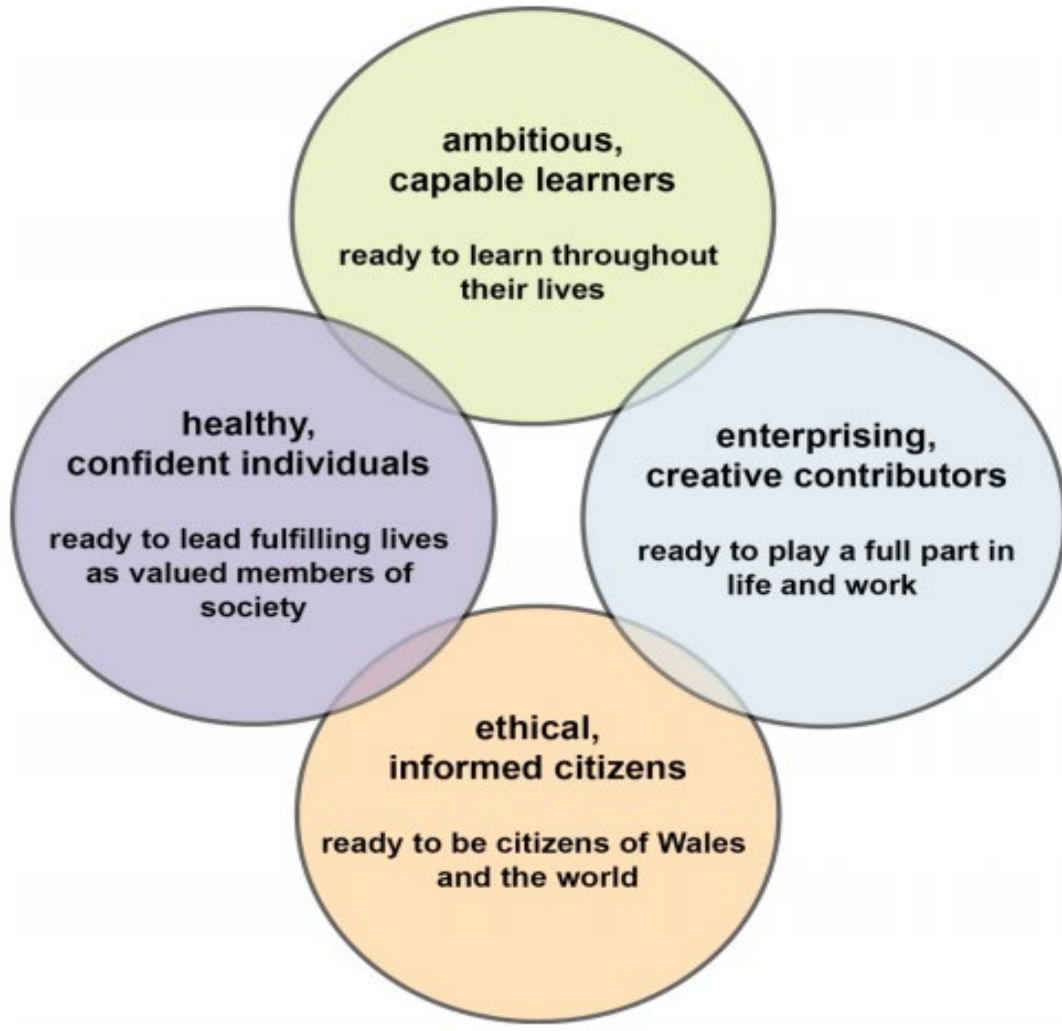


*The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act) provides that schools and other settings must promote knowledge and understanding of the two conventions among those who provide learning and teaching in respect of their school or setting's curriculum. This means, for example, that **school leaders must make sure that practitioners and other school staff providing learning and teaching gain knowledge and understanding of human rights**, as set out by these two conventions. (HWB Curriculum Guidance, 2022)*



- *A key principle of this approach is the rights of children and young people to participate in decisions about their learning and their wider school experience. **However, learners and adults** should have opportunities to collaborate to develop and maintain a school or setting community based on equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation; this includes learning and teaching in a way **that respects the rights of both practitioners and learners** and promotes well-being. (HWB Curriculum Guidance, 2022)*
- *It is important to recognise that there are different levels of participation, and that enabling learners to take part in curriculum design can take place in different forms...[which] will be appropriate at different points in curriculum design. (HWB Curriculum Guidance, 2022)*





# Four Purposes as Discourse

*It is a purpose driven curriculum and therefore rights entwine everything.*

(Participant 4, Questionnaire)

*The new curriculum places significant emphasis on creating healthy and confident and ethical and informed students.*

(Participant 50, Questionnaire)

*You know, every school, whether they agree with it or not, has to take into account of it. I think it's mentioned in several different AoLEs. It's mentioned... ah, it's in one of the purposes, looking at the ethical informed... talks about rights and responsibilities... I know, they need to be uncoupled [laughs], I know that now. I'm not putting them together, but it does mention both. (Mrs Jones, Interview 3)*

*When designing and implementing your curriculum, you should consider the following key questions. How will your curriculum:*

- *enable your learners to develop an understanding of their rights and **the rights of others**?*
- *draws on learner voice and responds to learners' needs, experiences and input?*
- *understand and exercise their human and democratic **responsibilities and rights**?*
- ***respect the needs and rights of others**, as a member of a diverse society?*
- *have the skills and knowledge to **manage everyday life as independently** as they can?*

*Nothing is so essential as universal access to, and acquisition of, the experiences, knowledge and skills that our young people need for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship.*

*Supporting learners to know their rights and respect those of others through human rights education enables a curriculum driven by the four purposes.*

(HWB Curriculum Guidance, 2022)

# ***The dynamic inter-relationship between the enabling teacher and the agentic learner in the CfW***

*Children will have more opportunities to be independent and research /learn more.*

(Participant 5, Questionnaire)

*[Children's Rights] Integral to the new curriculum, pupils having more choice over what and how they learn.*

(Participant 7, Questionnaire)

*Every child has the right to learn through their experiences.*

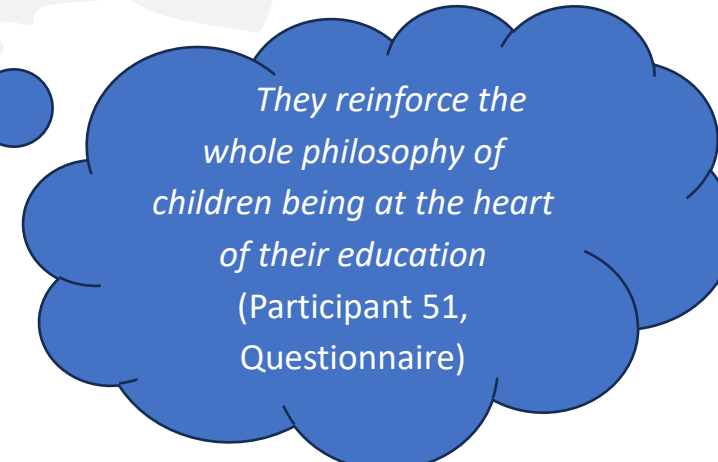
(Participant 44, Questionnaire)

*Children's rights within the new curriculum enable pupils to have a voice and to be a part of planning their learning and shaping their curriculum.*

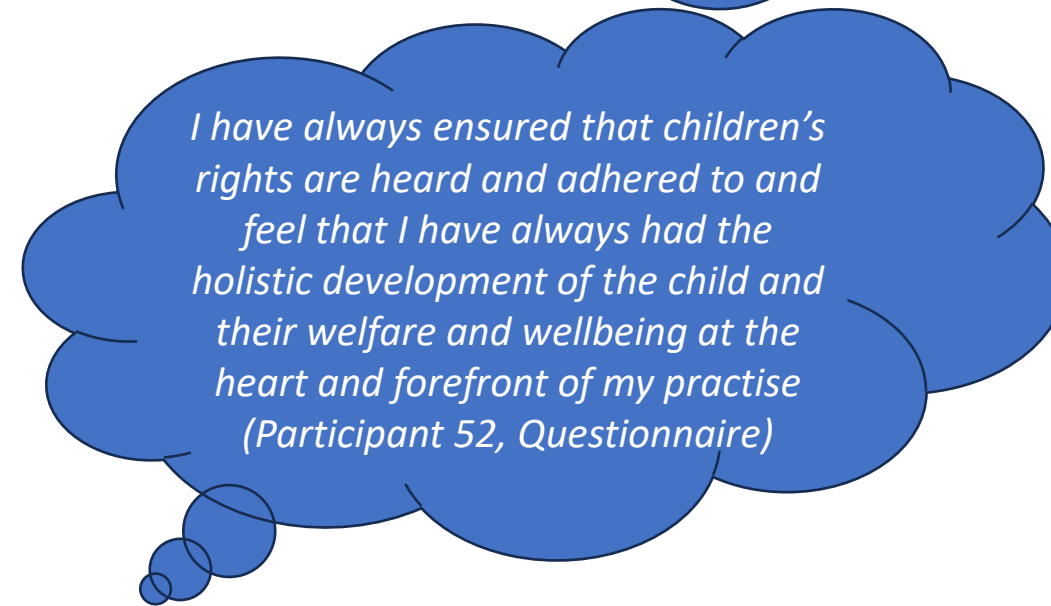
(Participant 50, Questionnaire)

*Rights is the biggest part of our job, I think at the moment.*

(Mrs. Jones, Interview 3)




*They reinforce the whole philosophy of children being at the heart of their education*  
(Participant 51, Questionnaire)



*I have always ensured that children's rights are heard and adhered to and feel that I have always had the holistic development of the child and their welfare and wellbeing at the heart and forefront of my practise*  
(Participant 52, Questionnaire)





*I think the way that nurseries, receptions, year ones are set up, where you've got all of the provision, they are able to exercise those rights of decision making and choice because they move around as they **choose** to do.*

*If they want to go outside, inside, when they have snack. Actually, in some ways it's easier for them to have those rights met and instilled in them earlier on than it is higher up because everything does kind of become a lot more driven by timetable. So, I actually think that participation...in a well-equipped environment... allowing children to develop those kind of rights is quite a strength of early years [tilts head and makes a face to indicate possible controversial comment].*

*[...] They decide what they want to do. And then as they get older, all of that kind of just gets taken away from them. It is a funny old system, isn't it?*

(Miss. Davies, Interview 2)

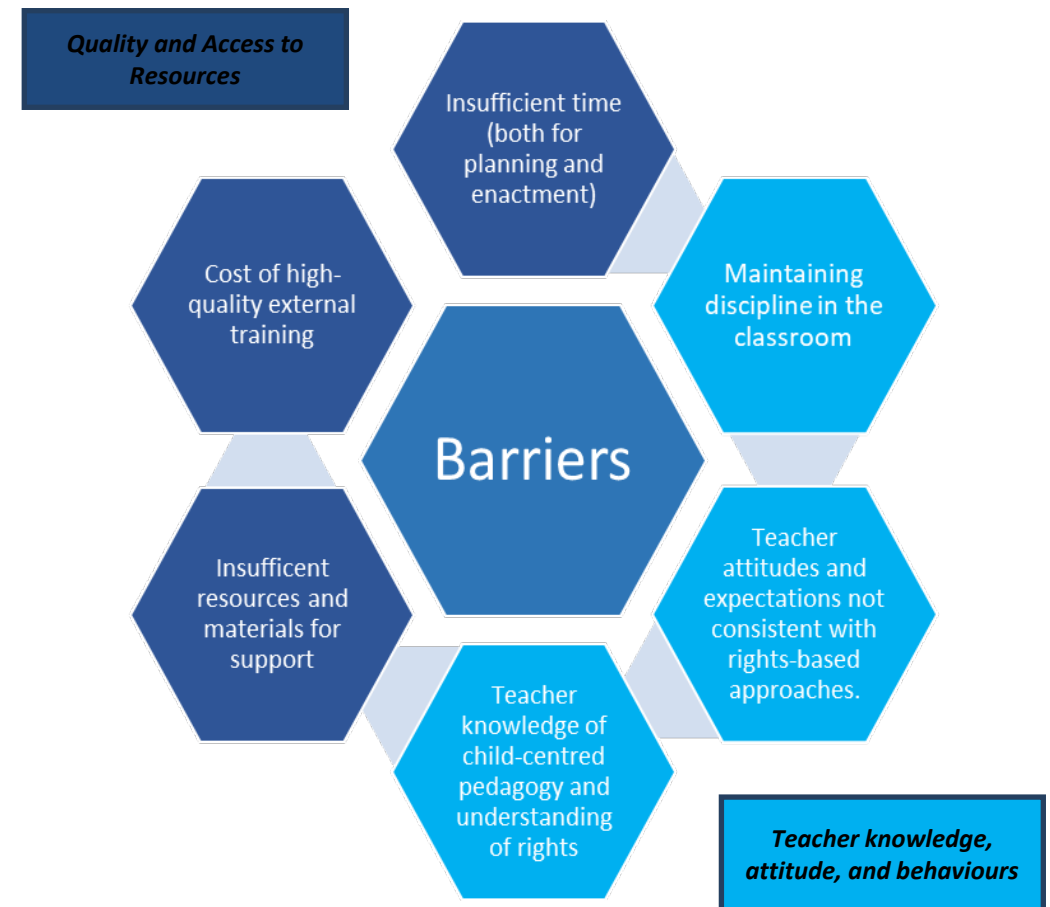
# Teacher constructions of the subject-self as enactors of rights in the CfW

*Yes, I do [think rights shapes my pedagogy]. I'm not sure that this would be explicit to teachers. If you ask teachers in school, they might not be able to explain to you how it does, but I think it does.*

(Mrs. Williams, Interview 1)

*But, I think some staff would find that hard...to know the difference. I think possibly they just think that, you know, you teach the rights and you've done the bit on, you know, on the Children's Commission and that's it done. Umm, not that it's something that you keep coming back to, that needs to drive your policy, it drives your school improvement plan, it drives your pedagogy.*

(Mrs. Jones, Interview 3)





So what?

- The curriculum framework could be argued to offer what Jerome (2016) termed a distinct ideological offer in comparison to other curricula (for example, such as those based on knowledge acquisition) and which enables a much greater focus on the interpretation and implementation of the UNCRC. However, it perhaps does not yet go as far as to offer a more radical, transformative model of rights in which teachers are agents of change actively constructing children's rights in their practice (Brantefers and Quennerstedt, 2016; Jerome, 2016).

# Recommendations



**R1:** Policy makers may wish to consider increasing calls for a reconceptualization of children's rights away from the adult perspective and possibly within a post-UNCRC framework which may be developing. This may carry implications for the wider legal framework for children's rights in policy making and require additional input from other frameworks for rights.



**R2:** Teachers' conceptualisations of rights-based pedagogy in this study was limited, as is research in this area. Further research into pedagogical approaches to teaching *through* and *for* rights may contribute to understanding and development of teachers' practice. A critical theory approach may also enable greater challenge of the policy context *status quo* and illuminate new ways of thinking about children's rights within the contemporary context.



**R3:** Teachers need further opportunities to develop their enactment of rights. Training in rights, whilst useful, has tended to focus more on raising awareness about rights. This was important as until relatively recently the UNCRC was not well known by teachers in Wales. Further professional learning opportunities need to support theorisation of practice and provide critically reflective opportunities for teachers. Opportunities for sharing effective examples of rights-enactment in school contexts may be a useful approach in developing a transformational model of rights.



So, what now?

- Practitioner focused dissemination materials
- Seminars (CRN, ArDdysg...)
- Shared with Children's Commissioner and Welsh Government
- Wales Journal of Education
- International Journal of Children's Rights
- ...more research!