

Methodological Considerations in Consulting with Children as Part of the Redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum

This short article discusses key methodological considerations in consulting with children about the current primary school curriculum redevelopment in Ireland. Speaking to the literature on student voice (Kiely et al, 2022; Lodge, 2005; Ring et al, 2018; Ruddock, 2007), it is based on two projects conducted by a team of researchers in Marino Institute of Education, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Informed theoretically by Laura Lundy's (2007) model of child participation and methodologically by Clark and Moss's (2011) Mosaic approach, the consultations aimed at gaining children's experiences of curriculum to inform the redevelopment work. They did so using different methodologies. The first consultation was carried out by classroom teachers on behalf of the research team (Kiely et al., 2022).

The second consultation was conducted by the researchers themselves through a two-pronged approach: class interviews, and a case study design involving a method chosen by the children from a suite of methods designed by the researchers (Kiely et al., 2024). The child-chosen methods included themed drawings (likes and dislikes in a subject area), conversation and mind maps, emoji stickers on aspects of the physical learning environment, and tours around the school.

Key findings focus on the suitability and efficacy of research methodologies and design used in the projects as meaningful forms of consultation with primary school children. Our findings suggest the following:

- » Meaningful consultation with very young children is complex and requires extensive engagement by researchers and teacher-researchers over time to build rapport.



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This article discusses key methodological considerations in consulting with children about the current primary school curriculum redevelopment in Ireland. It is based on projects conducted by researchers in Marino Institute of Education and commissioned by the NCCA. It outlines the main findings from the consultations with children, and their implications for primary school curriculum redevelopment.

- » Teachers-as-researchers are valuable in consulting children when integrated with a wider approach, where lead researchers also engage with the children.
- » Best practices for engaging teacher-researchers in their classrooms include online training, support sessions, and a clearly structured research protocol.
- » Online questionnaires can be used successfully with students in the senior end of primary school, who can give honest, insightful answers about their experiences. It is important that teachers are trained on answering students' queries and that students are seated apart so as not to 'parrot' answers or feel peer pressure.
- » Interview-based methods must be supplemented with methods that mirror active learning strategies, to prod children's memories and reflection on experiences of content and pedagogies.
- » Class-based interviews must be supplemented with more individual methods so that children who may experience peer pressure or be influenced by what they expect the teacher, peers, or researchers to want to know can express their views in private where such pressures are not felt. Such methods include themed drawings, mind maps, short stories, and use of emojis on physical aspects of the learning environment.
- » Non-classroom-based methods are effective in helping students feel at ease and reflect on more embodied aspects of their curriculum experiences.

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