QUESTIONS OF (FOR & ABOUT) RESEARCH

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Big picture considerations

- Deep sense associated with infant classes in primary school that there is such change happening that there is little capacity to engage with anything else.
- What would be the purpose (from the school perspective) of research that focuses on the alignment of pre-primary & the early years of primary schooling? To create a demand by demonstrating the need? To demonstrate relevance and usefulness to practice in infant classes?
- What would be relevant? A starting point could be to ask this question in the various contexts.
Big picture considerations

- We need to explore and air the range of attitudes within the pre-primary and school context each towards the other, however uncomfortable that might be.
- Practitioner perspectives should be the starting point.
- BUT should this be a purpose of research? Or should research be detached from (small p) politics?
- *Síolta* (*CECDE, 2006*) & *Aistear* (*NCCA, 2009*)
  - *Síolta* – no systemic presence in primary schools.
  - *Aistear* – having positive impact on practice in infant classes by authorising play in the classroom. But learning & development in infant classes still conceptualised/operationalised via the subject based Primary School Curriculum rather than thematically conceptualised as in *Aistear*.
  - Little evidence that these national policy frameworks (while having positive impact in other ways) are contributing to continuity between pre-primary and primary contexts. Plan B??
- Can a research network/consortium contribute to Plan B?
Questions?

- Caveat – I am interested in research that focuses on practice and this is the context for the following.
- How to manage limited funding opportunities?
- As an academic, how to maximise the impact of research when individual capacity is limited by time and workload constraints?
- Are there particular approaches and research topics which might be particularly useful in supporting a continuum across pre-primary and the early years of primary school?
Suggestions: Academic engagement

- Supervision of research with students along the continuum from undergrad to doctoral research.
- A research group could advise on principles and ethical values to contextualise academic supervision of undergraduate and post-grad research in the ‘borderlands’! E.g. avoiding reinforcing mutual misunderstanding.
- Practitioner action research promoting change processes through reflection » attitude change.
- Topics chosen to broaden student’s perspective on the sphere in which s/he operates.
- Good, old fashioned ‘Consciousness raising’ among both students and academics about the rationale for attention to the space(s) children occupy between 3 – 8 years.
Suggestions: Research in the field

• How to approach collaborative research work? A research group would need to articulate how different research paradigms and research methods would connect with practice.

• Some suggestions for starters:
  • Researching the roots:
    • Attitudes & values
    • Local partnerships across pre-primary/primary
  
Researching practice:
  • Affordance of a range of open-ended play resources.
  • Progression in children’s play.
  • Adult interactive strategies
Do we know enough already?

• Or do we need local stories?
• How can we share what we know and how can we make it relevant enough to get attention? Dissemination?
• Or is a recognition of relevance on the part of practitioners/teachers dependent on a degree of knowledge and understanding of ECE pedagogy that is not currently universal? Training?
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