

The Potential for Place-Based Pedagogy in Irish Primary Schools

The Teachers' Perspective

Introduction

The aim of this study was to consider the potential for place-based pedagogy in the Irish primary school context. The study focused on the teachers' perspective on this. It was felt that this was a key element in the progression of place-based pedagogy as teachers could play a key role in increasing the prevalence of place-based pedagogy. There has been no significant research on place-based pedagogy in the Irish context to date.

Methodology

This mixed-methods study comprised semi-structured qualitative interviews (n.6) and a quantitative questionnaire (n.199), and examined the potential for place-based pedagogy in the Irish primary school setting from the teachers' perspective. Teachers were asked about the barriers they face, the pressures of their curriculum and the feasibility of a place-based approach. Their responses were analysed using constant comparative methodology and a range of analytic techniques.

Key Findings

The findings of this study indicate that teachers are broadly positive in relation to place-based pedagogy, recognising the strengths of the approach and equally confirming that a local focus is currently mandated in their curriculum. Place-based pedagogy as an alternative method of curriculum delivery, which may reduce the degree of overloading reported by teachers, was considered a feasible approach. Teachers reported that additional support is necessary for teachers to fully engage with this pedagogy, particularly in relation to their confidence and content knowledge. Study participants also referenced the role that adopting a place-based pedagogy could play in developing students' sense of place and identity and consequently how important they felt that was for all students.

Interestingly the teachers who participated in the qualitative interviews had considerably more experience with place-based pedagogy, and were consequently less restrictive in their views on the potential of place-based pedagogy in their work.

The study also outlined the numerous occasions that place-based pedagogy is referenced in the Irish primary school curriculum. Challenges exist around communication and resources if the curriculum is to be addressed using local resources. However, as outlined by the teachers interviewed (who are currently using a place-based approach) the potential to address your curriculum through local examples is vast.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made in relation to policy, practice and future research. These recommendations included a curriculum review and development of guidelines outlining where a local, cross-curricular approach can be implemented; inclusion of place-based pedagogy in initial teacher education; development of resources outlining the place-based activities which teachers can undertake and how they can be used to address their curriculum; development and expansion of

training on place-based pedagogy for teachers; research around the views of students and the impact on them when engaging with a place-based approach in Ireland; and consideration of the potential for place-based pedagogy in the Irish education system more generally to include second and third level.

Conclusion

This study appears to be the first investigation of place-based pedagogy in the Irish context. It has highlighted the potential for this type of learning and teaching and equally the broadly positive feelings around this approach among Irish primary school teachers. This study will be used to inform the development of place-based pedagogical training and resources by Burrenbeo Trust.

The aim of a place-based approach is to establish connections and engage with local places and communities, and to enable active community stewardship, where local communities determine what it is they want for their place and are empowered to take action on the issues which they encounter. Irish primary schools have significant potential for reigniting communities' connections and engagement with local place; they are at the heart of the community.