

# Using creative methods to explore the Welsh concept of 'cynefin': belonging, connectedness and community

Rebecca Haycock

Sebda National Conference

July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

# Introductions...

- Who am I?
- Story in my pocket...



# Cynefin [kuh-nev-in]

- Curriculum re-form in Wales (Donaldson, 2015)
- Cynefin is a key word in the [new] curriculum for Wales
- Cynefin is a Welsh word meaning *habitat* or *place of many belongings*, it signifies attachment to place within the Welsh context (Adams 2023).
- It is a holistic concept
- Not a fixed state or place but a feeling
- The Curriculum for Wales' definition of *cynefin* provides a lens through which to explore place-based pedagogy and the school community, with a particular focus on practices that foster authentic and a meaningful sense of belonging.

‘Cynefin, the place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable. Though often translated as “habitat”, cynefin is not just a place in a physical or geographical sense: it is the historic, cultural and social place which has shaped and continues to shape the community which inhabits it.’

(Welsh Government, 2020)

# Why Cynefin matters

*Belonging isn't always clear-cut*

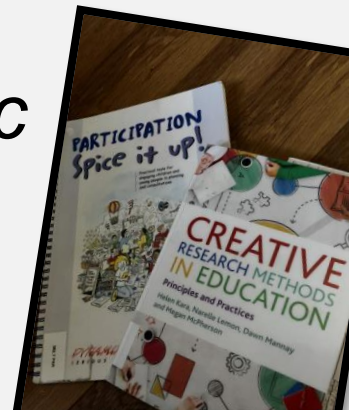
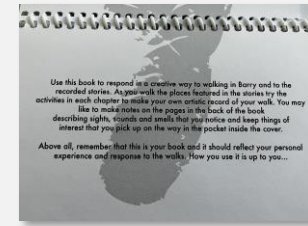
- Belonging can be experienced and understood differently depending on the **context**:
- Cynefin is the **feeling of connection** with the physical, social, cultural, spiritual and economic dimensions of a place.
- Teaching and learning are grounded in the local environment and natural surroundings.
- Cynefin helps to **hold space for multiple perspectives** and avoid forcing complex experiences into simple categories.
- Belonging emerges through relationships, stories, and interactions.

‘Learners should be grounded in an understanding of the identities, landscapes and histories that come together to form their ***cynefin***. This will not only allow them to develop a strong sense of their own identity and well-being, but to develop an understanding of others’ identities and make connections with people, places and histories elsewhere in Wales and across the world.’

[Humanities: Designing your curriculum - Hwb](#)

# Creative methods

- The concept of belonging is often explored using words like *community*, *connection*, *participation* and *values*.
- Creative methods can be used as a way in.
- [in research] creative methods can be used to step into the material world – to support exploring sensitive or harder to define topics - to address power imbalances - to be participant driven – enjoyment - to facilitate reflection and dialogue - for the more difficult to verbalize – to increase interest - to share beyond the *academic* community (Dunn *et al* 2017; Mannay *et al* 2019).



# Where do we belong in this space?

- How do we experience *this* space?

Within the confines of what we have, ask yourself...

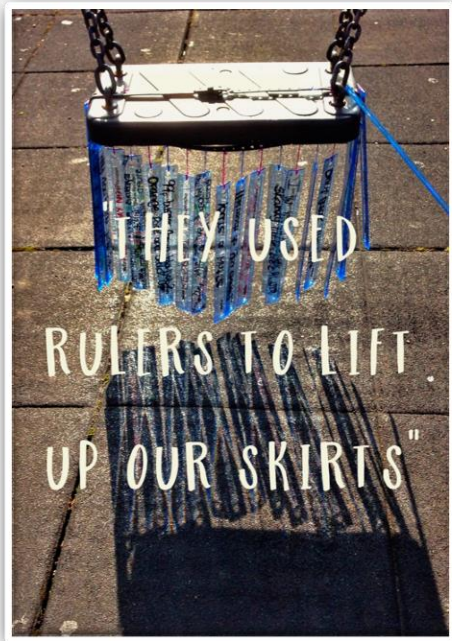
- How would you change it?
- How would you choose to place yourself in this room?
- Re-enter this space and re-position where you want to be now.



# Reflective questions...

- What do you notice about your own choice?
- How do you feel in relation to others in the room?

# Using materials that matter to communicate messages for change



[What if This is Me? - Agenda Online](#)  
(Renold 2016)



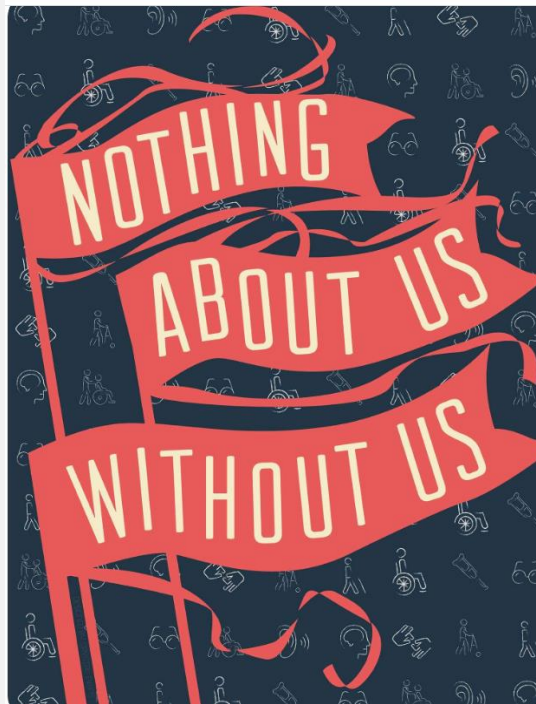
# Belonging matters – material matters – ribbons for change

- What are the things that help you feel like you belong?
- What does cynefin mean to you?
- Where is your cynefin?

Draw or write a phrase, word, symbol, picture to communicate what matters



# Participation for belonging



## Naming it...what it means:

schedule      having a voice  
respect   choice      taking part  
teamwork      confidence      have fun  
communication      feeling safe      making a project  
engagement      [part]icipation      information  
be kind      planning  
polite      being involved      voluntary  
making something      inviting people

**Three-way learning** - all parties as contributors to knowledge:

*“Our brains put together can work magic!”*



# References and links

- Adams, D. (2023). *Cynefin: Being of place*. An investigation into the perspectives of first-language Welsh speaking hill farmers into the meaning of the word *cynefin* and the significance for education in Wales and beyond. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-023-00144-2>
- [black-asian-minority-ethnic-communities-contributions-cynefin-new-curriculum-working-group-final-report.pdf](#)
- [Curriculum for Wales – Hwb](#)
- [Doing cynefin: Exploring ideas on belonging, connectedness and community in the Curriculum for Wales | BERA](#)
- Donaldson, G. (2015). *Successful futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales*. Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/successful-futures.pdf>.
- Dunn, V. and Mellor, T. (2017) 'Creative, participatory projects with young people: Reflections over five years'. *Research for All*, 1 (2): 284–99. DOI <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.01.2.05>
- [LACE – ExChange](#)
- Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., Evans, R. and Andrews, D., 2019. Enabling talk and reframing messages: Working creatively with care experienced children and young people to recount and re-represent their everyday experiences. *Child Care in Practice*, 25(1), pp.51-63.
- Renold, E. (2016) *Agenda: a young people's guide to making positive relationships matter*. Cardiff: Cardiff University, Children's commissioner for Wales, NSPCC Cymru, Welsh Government, Welsh Women's Aid. [agenda\\_english.pdf](#)
- [What if This is Me? - Agenda Online](#)
- [What is Cynefin? The Curriculum for Wales Explained - Twinkl](#)

