

Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Multi-Thinking

Hello, Siwmae. I am Rhiannon Luckman-Williams, student number 2301000 over half of Europe and the world can speak 2 or more languages, therefore I would like to welcome you to my presentation that will be focusing on bilingualism and multilingualism including their benefits and challenges alongside brain development, divergent thinking and early years frameworks and programmes. For the purpose of this presentation, I have made an activity suitable for children who are learning Welsh as an additional language.

Firstly, I will be speaking about Bilingualism and Multilingualism

According to Wei (2000, cited in Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams, 2013), bilingualism notes the potential to make use of two languages in day-to-day routines and it is popular and increasing in multiple countries around the world with nearly one in three individuals being multilingual or bilingual.

Multilingualism is generally described as acquiring and utilising at least 3 languages and is the individual and social language exercise that is prominent in current societies. However, it is related to the use of languages rather than what language is being used (Aronin, 2024).

According to National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (2011), an individual might relate to themselves as bilingual by implying only having the ability to speak the language. However, others could be experienced at reading in two languages. This shows the alternative way that people develop differently. Therefore, there are 2 ways of learning many languages which are simultaneously or sequentially.

Katsos and Alexopoulou (2011) mentions children who are simultaneously bilingual are influenced by two languages from when they are born or before the age of three and therefore learnt at the same time. The quantity of effort accessible to the learner may differ and generally one of the languages will remain stronger.

Sequential bilingualism is the structure of how languages are acquired, where the first language such as the mother tongue is entirely learnt, and then followed by starting to learn the additional language usually within an educational setting (Berken *et al.*, 2017, cited in Baytar and Çakır, 2022).

There are many benefits alongside learning additional languages including:

- Success in many areas for example higher chance of employment.
- The ability to communicate and build connections within communities (Farhan, 2019).
- Improved capabilities in relation to attentiveness and changing tasks for example reduced cognitive decline in the future compared to the brain of a monolingual (Shook and Marian, 2012).

Bilingualism increases children's self-esteem and confidence because Raising Children Network (2024) highlights that when children speak more than one language growing up, they are likely to have an improved recognition of themselves, belonging and identity. These are due to many factors including having the ability to identify and communicate with other individuals within the heritage and extended family members, by learning more about them alongside enjoying music and films in multiple languages.

According to Llari, Chen-Hafteck and Crawford (2013) singing songs that are multicultural, can encourage students positive well-being, because music can start the activity of the chemicals in the brain that can help children feel good namely dopamine as this increases moods and positivity (School of Rock, 2024). An example of this was when the practitioner started the activity with a familiar song for the children to join in and enjoy it to help them feel good and welcomed at the start of the day.

Bilingualism encourages empathy and an appreciation of diverse languages, cultures and an awareness of the world around us. According to Carmarthenshire County Council (2024), the ability to speak multiple languages can help individuals be more open minded with regards to different cultures as it enhances the way in which individuals tolerate the unknown. An example of this would be, the avoidance of building connections with those from different cultures and countries. Whereas those who are bilingual and have elevated levels of tolerance, are more likely to try and learn another language and feel more comfortable building relationships and utilise the language with locals while travelling (Middlebury Language Schools, 2020).

Alongside this, being bilingual and accepting different cultures can lead to an appreciation and support of their cultural interests as Baker (n.d.) emphasises that language is accompanied by current and traditional interests and hobbies such as folk stories, poetry, music, and literature. As seen in the activity, the practitioner displayed a doll dressed up in the Welsh costume, had the Welsh flag on display in the background and had other items associated with Wales including a daffodil, leek, Welsh cakes, and a Welsh dragon.

Secondly, I will be speaking about EAL and WAL

Welsh Government (2014, p. vi) mentions that Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) indicates pupils who have “a first language which is neither Welsh nor English but is pursuing a Welsh-medium education that requires support in order to access the whole curriculum through the medium of Welsh”. Additionally, Welsh Government (n.d.) highlights that WAL and EAL students can have varied beginnings and progress at different speeds which may not always be continual or linear.

There are many challenges associated with WAL and EAL including:

- Lack of motivation for learners who do not have a tie to the country and culture.
- Limited resources
- Limited Daily Use
- Low self-esteem and confidence

(Pep Talk Radio, 2023).

Following this, Maddern (2023) mentions that it is recommended that children with additional learning needs, have equal chances to be bilingual and as an alternative to removing children from additional language classrooms, options ought to be offered enabling them to develop. However, according to Howard (2023) there are challenges associated with WAL and EAL including individuals experiencing negative emotions or feeling a failure by having interaction and or communication difficulties (Csizér *et al.*, 2010, cited in Howard, 2023).

Methods available to help learning a new language include:

- Multiagency working
- Training
- Child Centred Approach
- Good positive role model

(Texas A&M International University, 2021).

Additionally, according to the Welsh Government (2012) there was a reduction in the amount of Welsh speakers in Wales aged 3 and onwards between 2001 and 2011. Therefore, the Welsh Government (2018) has put a strategy in place for a target of 1 million individuals to enjoy using and speaking the Welsh language by 2050. This is required to assure the strength of the Welsh language for future generations.

Next, I will be speaking about the development of a bilingual brain.

The brains of children from 0-3 years are unique, flexible, wired to learn more than one language and find it easier to learn them in comparison to walking and talking (Trautner, 2019). According to Montsaye (n.d.), the theorist Chomsky agrees with Trautner because he believes that infants are born with the ability to acquire more than one language. Additionally, Brittany (2023) mentions that the part of the brain that controls the ability to understand the words and language is the Wernicke's area whereas the Broca's area enables speech. Also, Ali (2023) highlights that bilingualism positively affects the brain development by strengthening attention control, memory, cognitive development, and flexibility.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs supports children's basic needs by being able to recognise anything that is missed, namely children arriving to school hungry and receiving breakfast and water (University of Reading, n.d.) Therefore, as practitioners, it is important to consider Maslow's theory as it focuses on the child's physiological needs being met to enable development of the brain. As seen in the activity, the practitioner offered the children water before they started, used repetition, and paused to allow time for the children to think which effective for their brain development.

Lastly, I will be speaking about Divergent thinking and how it effects bilingualism

According to Dublin City University (n.d.), divergent thinking is a major part of creativity, easy to understand and can be shown in ways that are practical and basic. Divergent thinking is equal to "thinking outside the box" as it encourages children to think of multiple explanations to problems and answer questions in a flexible and suitable way which is a good skill to have for the future (Waterford.org, 2020).

Booton (2021) explains that bilingualism can be associated with a variety of skills to support divergent thinking, including cognitive and linguistic. One of these is creativity that can be elevated in bilinguals as a result of diverse cultural experiences alongside increased executive outcomes.

Conclusion

To conclude, this presentation has outlined the importance of bilingualism and multilingualism during the early years of a child's development. The practitioner has shown that there are different ways of learning multiple languages and the additional and continued benefits it can have throughout the life of individuals. This includes an appreciation of different languages and cultures, dealing with stressful situations more calmly and the positive effects on the brain.

Diolch.

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