

In what way does practising Welsh orally improve the understanding of the language in Key Stage 2 Pupils?

Word count: 5123

	Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn. What I have done in this assignment.
Targed/Target 1	Ensure you reflect	I have reflected on completing the research and the findings.
Targed/Target 2	Be specific and detailed when making possible recommendations	I have made specific recommendations about what I would do when undertaking this research again.
Targed/Target 3	Proof read your work	I have asked a friend to proof read my work to pick up on any typos as I struggled to see my own mistakes.

The aim of this research was to see if speaking Welsh is the best way to improve the understanding of the language. Welsh Government (2017a) have created a strategy named 'Cymraeg 2050' with the aim of reaching 1 million Welsh speakers by the year 2050. As a student teacher I am encouraged to not only develop my understanding of the Welsh language but also to develop the language of the pupils I teach. Therefore, I am motivated to find the best way to improve the understanding of the language, which will then tell me the best way I can teach it.

The school where I completed my research is an English-medium primary school, where Welsh is taught as a second language and incidental Welsh is encouraged throughout the school day. As English is the primary language spoken in the school, my research partner and I looked at how best to improve the understanding of the Welsh language. We discussed a number of different literacy methods including reading, writing and oracy and came to the hypothesis that oracy is the best way to develop a language. We then constructed a research question which was; *In what way does practising Welsh orally improve the understanding of the language in Key Stage 2 pupils?* We chose to focus on Key Stage 2 (KS2) pupils as we were both completing our placement in a KS2 classroom.

Cooper (1970) explains that we teach a lesson by our own concepts of how children learn. When teaching a language, a teacher decides what method to use according to their primary views on the language system. My research partner and I chose to look at learning Welsh through oral methods as this is our concept of the best way to gather an understanding of the language. This notion is based on how we learn our native language. There has been a long argument between theorists Skinner and Chomsky about how children learn a language. Harries (1992) examines this debate, explaining that Skinner's theory of learning a language links with his positive reinforcement theory. In the early years of language development, a child will say a single word such as doll and will receive the doll from an adult. Once this has been repeated, the association between word and object is formed, therefore language is being developed. However, Chomsky argues with Skinner's theory and questions how children gain syntactic knowledge of a language. He agrees that positive reinforcement is a factor in the learning of words but questions how children then learn to form phrases and sentences. Chomsky believes that humans have the unique ability to acquire a language. These theories do not give us a clear explanation on how children learn a language but indicate that speech is important in developing language skills.

O'Grady (2005) echoes Chomsky's question as he considers how children know where sentences begin and end as adults do not pause when speaking their native language. He also looks at the age at which language develops and that children begin by forming improper sentences such as "That mine" (O'Grady, 2005, p.3) but then progress to adding connective words in sentences. O'Grady (2005, p.3) continues, "The fact of the matter is we still don't understand how children learn language". If we do not understand how children learn a language, how can we teach a language? The bigger question is do we learn a second language the same way we learn our first language?

Cooper (1970, p.304) suggests that language teachers have many assumptions about learning a second language. Firstly, we assume that first language learning and second language learning are very different in that we cannot just grasp a second language from our environment. The second assumption is that as children learn to speak before they can read it follows that the second language should be learnt by speaking it rather than reading it. Cooper (1970) goes on to discuss the importance of syntactic competencies when learning a language. Therefore, reading and writing play an important role when learning a language. He then goes on to say that not one aspect of learning a language is more important than another, but they must all interlink. Lightbrown and Spada emphasise the importance of reading when learning a language, stating that reading gives a "major boost" (2006, pp. 8-9) to development and arguing that from a young age vocabulary increases depending on how widely children read. Although reading enhances language acquisition, Jones and McLachlan (2009) state that language acquisition in a classroom setting is at its best when there is a blend of language

competences, creating a “whole language experience.” (Jones & McLachlan, 2009, p.60) As this research project is examining oracy in a classroom setting, it will be interesting to see if the results support the arguments of theorists such as Jones, Mclachlan and Cooper.

As mentioned previously Welsh Government have set a goal of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Their aim is for young people to leave education “ready and proud to use the language in all contexts” (Welsh Government, 2017a, p.2). The intention is to significantly increase the number of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools. Bilingual education has previously been considered to have a negative effect in education. Mitchell (1937, p.29) declared bilingualism to be a “serious educational problem,” arguing that children who think in their native language have a disadvantage when speaking in the language of the school. He also argued that if children were given a test in their native language the result would differ from the results of a test in their second language. Baker (1949, p.69) also discusses this after looking at research undertaken stating that bilingual children are disadvantaged. However, he then concludes that the research is flawed as other factors such as IQ and socio-economic class were not considered. Baker (1949) finalises his chapter by stating that there is a lack of research about bilingualism in the UK, but that his research findings are that bilingualism is not detrimental to development in education.

More research has been carried out on bilingualism since then and Bialystok (2016) found that when children enter the schooling system their language scores are higher if they enter in the English programme rather than the bilingual programme. However, this changes within one or two years in education and it actually reverses with bilingual children ultimately out-performing monolingual children. The new concern about bilingualism is the purity of the language. Morris (2010, p.64) expresses concerns about language blending such as ‘Wenglish’ when children are studying in a bilingual setting, suggesting that the minority language starts losing its purity. Despite this, it could be argued that if children do not have the opportunity of a bilingual education then the minority language may dissipate. Welsh Government (2012) assert that bilingual language skills are best developed if used daily and that bilingual education provides children with these daily opportunities to develop their language acquisition and confidence. Although, this is apparently not consistent across all schools in Wales as Estyn (2018) found that schools in some local authorities provided a wide range of opportunities to develop their Welsh language skills, but that this was not the case for all local authorities. Therefore, further advancement is needed to reach the national mission of Cymraeg 2050. The new curriculum for Wales is set to come into effect in 2022 with a strong commitment to support the aim of Cymraeg 2050. Donaldson (2015) plans to do this by including a “Welsh dimension in the education of all children and young people” (Donaldson, 2015, p.15) which will include Welsh language development and Welsh culture.

The method used for this small-scale research project was a lesson study, which is a teacher-led research tool where teachers collaborate to identify an area of development in their pupils' learning. This approach is used worldwide to help pupils learn more effectively. A lesson study uses a particular methodology which encourages joint reflections on both teaching and learning. According to Dudley (2015) researchers gather together to create a lesson on an area that causes concern for the teacher or is an area that could be developed even further. They choose around three case pupils and predict the learning (or lack of) from these case pupils prior to teaching the lesson. The lesson is then taught by one of the researchers to test out their hypotheses and observational notes are taken of the learning of the case pupils, rather than the teaching. Interviews with the pupils are undertaken immediately after the lesson to gather their opinion on the lesson and their own learning. Using the data collated from the lesson study the teachers reflect upon the teaching and learning and refine the lesson plan to improve attainment. The process is then repeated to test and evaluate the results of the refinement. A lesson study is a form of action research with a simple sequence that is repeated but it allows educationalists to self-reflect and draw on all their experience and knowledge to try to enhance learning and improve their practice.

When creating a lesson study, I considered which methods of data collection to use and how to gather the data efficiently. To achieve this an observation schedule was created so that both research partners knew exactly what to look for when observing the case pupils (Appendix 4 and 6). McNiff (2002, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.308) acknowledges the importance in setting evaluative criteria. The observation schedule was mapped out prior to the lesson study and provided criteria for the observation. Having an observation schedule keeps constancy through the research but when completing the research, we need to be open-minded and not completely reliant on the areas in the tick boxes. The observation notes will create qualitative data, but we must be aware when observing to not let the data become quantitative by tallying in the tick box section without additional comments. Holliday (2007, p.5) claims that qualitative studies "lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery" so adding notes to the observation schedule may help with findings in an unanticipated area. The observation itself was non-participant, meaning that the observer does not get directly involved with any aspect of the lesson, they just take notes in the background. Even though the researcher is not participating in the lesson, they need to be aware that their presence can have an effect on behaviour, known as the Hawthorne effect, where the children modify their behaviour when being observed (AQR, 2018).

For the observation a focus group was chosen with three case-pupils of different attainment levels. Pupils were chosen from lower, middle and higher attaining levels to evaluate if the attainment within a classroom setting was considerably different when orally practicing the

Welsh language. The implications of English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils learning Welsh in primary schools were also considered, because as previously mentioned, children may think in their native language (Mitchell, 1937) and then may need to translate to English and then again to Welsh. However, 'Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RHAG)' (cited in Donaldson, 2015) believe that bilingualism helps with further development of additional languages. Out of the 3 case-pupils in each classroom one was an EAL pupil, this allows us to see if having an additional language had implications on learning and understanding the Welsh language.

To gather further information the focus group participated in a semi-structured interview straight after the lesson. Interview questions were planned out (appendix 3) which would probe the case-pupils' attitudes and opinions on the lesson and teaching style. Clark et al. (2014, p.70) write that "Children should be offered authentic choices and opportunities to express their views." They suggest further that children are concerned about what is going on around them and want to get involved by expressing their views and opinions. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, (2007, p. 349) says that interviews allow interviewees to express how they see situations from their point of view. The interviews were undertaken within the classroom, so that the pupils were in a comfortable, familiar setting where they were relaxed when answering the questions. They were audio-recorded to make it more formal without note taking. Although interviews allow a more in-depth view on the research, there also have several limitations. The audio-recording ensured that nothing was missed during the interview but transcribing the interview can be time-consuming. Interviewers may also give unconscious signals which may affect the pupil's answers or confidence when answering the questions. One should also consider the findings of the Stanley Milgram experiment that people obey authority figures regardless of their own opinions or feelings (Milgram, 2014). The pupils will see us as authority figures so may answer the questions in the way they think we want them to be answered.

An important part of action research is self-reflection so that learning and own practice can be improved. To help gain a critical and detailed reflection we used Gibbs' reflective cycle (appendices 5 and 7). Gibbs' (1988) 'Reflective Cycle' has six distinct stages that allow reflection on both positives and negatives of the experience. Our reflective model was loosely based on this but our six stages became 'Description of the lesson; Feelings and emotional responses; Evaluation on good and bad points; Analysis with links to literature; Conclusion about what was learnt and Action Plan discussing what would be done differently next time.'

There are a number of ethical considerations to be considered when undertaking a research project within a classroom setting and these were fully explored in a pre-research ethics form. The ethics form was assessed by the University ethics committee prior to any work being completed on this research. As part of the BERA (2018, p.18) guidelines, consent must be given before conducting any research. Consent letters were sent out to all parents of children

in the classroom in advance to the research taking place, and case-pupils were selected from those where consent was given. The consent form was accompanied by an information sheet with an explanation of the data to be collected, what the data would be used for and who would have access to the information gathered from the research. Consent was also given by the school to allow the research to be collated in that setting. When gaining permission from the school it was made clear that either the school or parents would be able to access the findings if requested and that the case-pupils and school would be kept anonymous in these. Before completing the research, it was important to gain assent from the children. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2020, p.5) states that children have the right to have their voices heard and views taken into account. The BERA guidelines (2018, p.15) make specific reference to this, mentioning that researchers should explore all ways in which they can receive assent. The children were able to opt in or out of the research at any time as part of their right to have their voice heard. A range of data was collected during the research from notes to voice recordings. All data was stored securely and will be destroyed securely after the research has been completed and graded.

The first lesson was implemented in a classroom of 29 pupils. The aim of the lesson was for all pupils to work collaboratively in asking and answering questions in Welsh. The lesson was set in three parts (Appendix 10) to allow the children opportunities to speak Welsh without getting overwhelmed by too much information. During the opening phase the children were engaged and responded well to the teacher's instructions. As the teacher, I worked on prior knowledge and used a strategy that the class teacher uses in all her Welsh lessons to maintain consistency of approach. This strategy is '*I say, you say*', so the children repeat after me which encourages correct pronunciation. The children had an opportunity to answer the questions and ask their peers the questions whilst on the carpet which allowed me to assess the learning and understanding of the sentences.

The children then went to work in groups to ask their peers all the questions and gather the information on a worksheet. The worksheets encouraged the children to jot down what they had discovered, however, some children were concerned about spelling on the worksheet, especially child A who was higher-attaining. Due to this I spent much of the lesson writing words in Welsh on the board which made it very difficult to observe. The observations were planned to be non-participant observations but during the course of the lesson they became participant observations. This is a recognised transition and Creswell and Poth write that "a good qualitative researcher may change their role during the observations (2018, p.168)". The pupils were engaged in the lesson however some lacked confidence when asking and answering the questions. Child C struggled to find people to ask as she was not as confident as the other children in approaching people, so she asked my research partner. The

case-pupils were very reliant on the sentences and translations on the board when communicating with each other. The lower attaining pupil (Child B) needed additional support with the pronunciation of the words and would have benefitted from having an additional member of staff sitting alongside him for guidance. The children were moving around the classroom to ask each other the questions which increased the noise level in the classroom and possibly affected the concentration of the pupils. This was difficult to manage as the main aspect of the lesson was speaking.

The last part of the lesson was to speak about their peers in Welsh by saying what they had found out about each other. The children brought their worksheets to the carpet and I introduced the second slide of the PowerPoint (appendix 8) by using the strategy of 'I say, you say'. When asked 'who would like to have a go at talking about their friends?' almost every hand went up. This showed us how engaged the children were in the lesson as they were enthusiastic about sharing their findings. The children were able to pronounce the words in Welsh and were confident when talking about their friends.

The children were engaged throughout the lesson and had a good grasp of the Welsh language overall, despite this, some slight improvements were made to develop the learning even further (appendix 11). There was some confusion with the worksheet as it had the word 'Teimlo' for feelings and the question the children were using was 'Sut wyt ti?' to ask 'How are you?' So, to prevent further confusion in the next lesson the question on the PowerPoint was changed to 'Sut wyt ti'n teimlo?' meaning 'How are you feeling?' in the hope that the children would make a link between the worksheet and the question (appendix 9). The rest of the PowerPoint stayed the same as we felt that it worked well in supporting the children's oral skills. We noticed that it was difficult to observe and teach at the same time, especially when the children were asking about spellings. In the next lesson emphasis was put on speaking instead of spelling and the Welsh words required were placed on the board prior to the main body of the lesson. As the layout of the classrooms are different, the children were not walking around, so that helped to reduce the noise level. The second class were fortunate enough to have a full-time teaching assistant so she was allocated to work with the lower attaining pupils to give guidance if needed. Overall, the lesson itself went smoothly so further changes to the lesson plan were not necessary.

The learning was assessed via the interview questions (appendix 3), which was completed straight after the lesson. We found that the children could not remember all the sentences used in the lesson. Child A who was higher attaining as well as having EAL remembered most of the questions and answers. She was confident during the lesson and confident when answering the questions during the interview. She also expressed that she would feel comfortable using these sentences outside the classroom. This may support the assertion of RHAG (in Donaldson, 2015) mentioned earlier that having additional languages helps with

learning a new language. Child A's confidence with using the Welsh language relates to this but we must also consider that she is also a higher attainer and it may be that the lesson itself was too easy for her. Child C who was the middle attaining pupil remembered most of the answers but not the questions and Child B, the lower attaining, remembered one or two questions and recognised the questions when someone else mentioned them. Both Child B and C said that they would not feel confident using these sentences outside the classroom and said that they would like more practise. At the end of the interview the children were asked what they think is the best way to learn welsh. Child A and C said speaking whilst Child B said reading as he found reading the PowerPoint helpful. It was an interesting discovery from the lesson and all three pupils relied on reading from the PowerPoint to help with their oral skills. McLeod (2011) states that reading words out loud make them more memorable, so when reading from the PowerPoint it should help the children with remembering the language. This has altered our thinking slightly from oracy being the best way to learn a language to having a blend of techniques, as through observations we noticed the children were reading the PowerPoint. We were interested to see if the same would happen in the next lesson.

The second lesson took place the following day. The lesson was introduced in the same way but when the children answered the questions in the opening phase the words they used were placed onto the whiteboard. The three case-pupils relied on the PowerPoint for this part of the lesson, but this was expected as the sentences were being introduced. For the main part of the lesson the children were moved into groups with the higher attaining group using the tables in the wet room. When observing Child C in the wet room I noticed that she was leaning over to look at the PowerPoint in the classroom to help her ask and answer the questions. To help this group the teacher wrote the questions on the whiteboard in the wet room. This showed us again that reading played an important role when trying to remember the sentences. It was noted (appendix 6) that Child C often missed out words such as 'Hoffi' when asking questions and answered some questions with a one-word answer rather than the full sentence. It is important to note that Child C's first language is not English. When observing Child B, I noticed that she was very confident when asking and answering the questions. A few times she would turn to look at the PowerPoint but after a bit of practice she began to look at the board less. At one point during the lesson Child B asked a peer a question and the response was "What does that mean?". Child B instantly translated it to English for her peer without reading the translation from the board. Child A who is lower attaining completely relied on reading from the board. He was confident with asking his peers but instead of looking at who he was talking to he read directly from the board. The engagement in the lesson was evident as all three case-pupils were eager to ask their peers the questions and complete the worksheets.

If we were to prepare a similar lesson to this in the future, we would possibly have a time slot planned in where we would turn the interactive board off so that the children would have to ask the questions from memory rather than relying on the PowerPoint. The PowerPoint is a great tool to guide the children in what they are expected to do. However, to deepen the research regarding oracy when understanding a language, turning the PowerPoint off would allow us to observe if the sentences have moved to the memory which is critical when learning a language.

The interviews after this lesson were extremely interesting and gave us clear insight into the children's thoughts. When asked if they could remember the questions Child B remembered a lot but mixed up certain words such as 'Ble' and 'Beth'. Child A remembered the final part of the lesson when talking about someone else and after some thought could recall one or two questions. Child C remembered one question but struggled to remember any more. All three pupils expressed individually that they were not confident using Welsh. In both lessons the children with EAL were higher attaining children, however the confidence level when speaking Welsh was completely different. This could be due to personality or how much English is spoken in their homes as the Welsh sentences were translated into English on the board. Until further research is completed on a larger scale, we will be unable to assess the impact that having EAL has when learning Welsh. At the end of the interview the same question was asked which was which method do they think is best when learning Welsh? Interestingly, all three case pupils said that they think reading is the best method with Child A saying, "it is easier when you can see it" and Child B mentioning using a Welsh dictionary because it has translations in, and the translations help with learning.

Our initial hypothesis was that speaking a language is the best way to understand it, but this was disproved as 4/5 of the case pupils said that they think that reading is the best method. Nevertheless, more research needs to be completed on a broader scale to expand on our findings and the research needs to look at all aspects of learning a language to see if they are better standing alone or blended together. Kirsch (cited in Jones and McLachlan, 2009,) argues that reading and listening is essential to second language acquisition. McCaul (2016) expands on this by adding that learners need to be exposed to interesting reading materials that are suited to their reading levels. In future lessons I could use a variety of reading materials in Welsh to help with the children's development of the Welsh language. However, it has been recognised in a Welsh Government document (2017b, p.2.) that there is a lack of Welsh resources for education which will hinder them in achieving Cymraeg 2050. To help children with their understanding of the Welsh language, educationalists need support from the Government to provide appropriate resources which will enhance the learning of the Welsh language.

When looking at English as an additional language and the connection to bilingualism helping with learning a new language, we did not find enough solid evidence to prove or disprove this hypothesis. As mentioned previously Donaldson (2015) adds to 'Successful Futures' that bilingualism supports development of further languages, but as our research was small scale and only observing two children with EAL response to the Welsh language I feel that we could not gather enough information on this topic. I also believe that there are other factors that affect learning of a language such as confidence and attainment levels. Brown (2000) explains that confidence levels may alter language learning capabilities. If we assume that children of lower attainment levels will not do better than children with higher attainment levels, then we also assume that children with EAL and lower attainment will find learning a language more difficult than their higher attaining peers. I am aware that regardless of attainment levels children will flourish in different areas of the education system and I believe that some children may be better at learning a language than other children. There is also the argument that girls learn a language better than boys do and both EAL pupils in this research project were female. Heinzman (2009) writes that girls learn a language better than boys because they are more motivated in learning foreign language. If this research was completed again it would be good to have a mix of gender of children with English as an additional language.

To conclude, the research undertaken for this study is beneficial to me as a teacher and has changed my thinking when it comes to teaching a language. When teaching Welsh in the future I will ensure that I use a blend of approaches to enhance the children's learning and will look for a range of materials that will support the process such as Welsh books. I feel that I need to explore further into second language learning and bilingualism to discover the new practices that have been proven to support learning and understanding of a language to gain a deeper insight. There needs to be more research investigating additional languages in helping with learning a new language, but I would not complete this research in a lesson study method. I believe that action research is a great method to discover areas that you would not find through quantitative research as it allows the researcher to be involved with the participants and look at the wider picture, but I would just observe a lesson rather than do a lesson study. I would use the method of a lesson study again to develop my own practice, but I think it would work better with possibly three or four researcher as teaching and observing at the same time was very difficult and observing three pupils on your own does not allow a full view on the learning overall. Also only observing six pupils altogether does not provide a picture of the whole class learning and the researcher is only gaining a small snapshot of the learning. The topic is too broad to get tangible evidence on the hypothesis with a lesson study and learning a language takes longer than just one lesson. This research has reinforced my

belief that repetition is important when learning a language. When completing the research and discussing the findings I have focused on the learning of a language rather than the understanding of a language which is what my research question asked. I appreciate that understanding is a key part of learning a language but my findings lead me to conclude that I would change the wording of a future research question to '*In what way does practising Welsh orally help with learning the language in Key Stage 2 pupils,*' to fully explore the relationship between the two.

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