

Cover Sheet

Multilingual Practice in the Early Years (ECEY4010)

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Content:

AI Cover Sheet

Component 1: Video [IMG_1436.mov](#)

Component 2: Essay (word count: 1479)

Reference List

AI Cover Sheet

I confirm that I have used the AI tool Co-pilot for research purposes only. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before and after the use of any AI tool which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Introduction

Baker (2021) raises the questions of how to define bilingualism and multilingualism, how much fluency and use of additional language qualifies someone to call themselves bilingual or multilingual and who decides? Smidt (2016) defines a bilingual child as one who is learning and using an additional language on top of their mother tongue, regardless of the level of achievement attained. Grosjean (2012) defines bilingualism as regular use of two languages without measuring fluency or ability. This however could create the argument that someone is no longer bilingual or multilingual if they lack the opportunity to use the language. Whereas Valdes (2015) focuses on ability and defines it as someone who can read, write, speak and understand a second language. Although, this could raise questions about indigenous languages that may not include a written form. Mahatly's (2019) idea is based on being able to communicate in everyday normal life, similar to Kalejo and Melopfeirfer (2019) who believe multilingualism is something that is experienced and defined by the person themselves. With many different variations of the definition, both Smidt (2016) and Baker (2021) agree that a precise definition may never be attained.

For the purpose of this assignment the areas of interest of bilingualism and multilingualism in relation to Early Years raised are; Possible advantages of being bilingual or multilingual. How bilingualism and multilingualism affect brain development. How children with English/Welsh as an additional language are affected. Does bilingualism impact divergent thinking? Frameworks and policies in relation to bilingualism in Early Years.

Advantages of being bilingual/multilingual

Smidt (2016) states that learning a second language carries benefits beyond just knowing the language itself. Smidt (2016) also suggests that learning additional languages supports emotional and social advantages such as being able to fully connect with family and culture, to understand heritage and be part of a wider community by being able to communicate with more people (Booten, 2021). Which promotes the user identity and supports a sense of belonging. (Smidt, 2016). In

agreement Baker (2021) adds, being able to communicate with others in either a home language or mother tongue can give opportunity to learn and take part in cultural events, religious ceremonies, leisure activities in their home language as well as reducing barriers to returning/visiting their homeland if desired. Koch, Kersten and Greve (2024) also agree with the social benefits and emotional connections bilingual or multilingualism can offer. In addition, they believe multilingualism directly boosts emotional competence in children, enabling them to better understand, express, and regulate their emotions. This is due to the frequent switching between languages and navigating different cultural norms and values associated with each language (Green and Wei 2014).

Welsh as an addition language and English as an additional language

There is no clear best practice when transitioning from monolingual to bilingual when looking at children transitioning from their mother tongue to English as a medium for learning (Boateng, 2019). However, according to the Mother Tongue Instruction (MTI) the timing of transition is important. MTI insist that for children to fully benefit from bilingualism, they need to gain a certain level of cognitive and linguistic skills in their mother tongue before being introduced to a new language. MTI suggests that children should have at least 6 years of only their primary language before adding a second language (Boateng, 2019). However, Trautner (2019) insists the ideal age to begin introducing a second language would be before the age of three, as this is when the brain is at its most flexible and by introducing a second language early on does not have a negative impact on a child's home language/mother tongue. Trautners (2019) idea fits more appropriately with Welsh government strategies of increasing immersive Welsh medium education. Smidt (2016) suggests having bilingual teaching assistants in the classroom, recognising the benefits and impact on children for who English is an additional language as well as improving children's self-esteem and promoting a sense of belonging.

Brain development

The ability to speak more than one language has been linked to more developed cognitive skills such as linguistic skills and creativity which may be due to enhanced

executive functioning (Booten *et al* 2021). Nacamuilla (2015) suggests that bilingual brains may look and work completely differently to monolingual brains. She suggests that it may be easier to learn an additional language at a young age as research focusing on the neurological links between language and the bilingual brain shows evidence that the plasticity of the brain allows more flexibility between both hemispheres of the brain when acquiring a new skill such as language, as opposed to an adult who would generally use just the left hemisphere of the brain when learning a new language. Nacamuilla (2015) also states that research shows that when testing through cross language tests bilingual children's brain activity was increased due to the added attention and switching between two or more languages. The increase in brain activity could potentially strengthening the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain that is used for executive functions, problem solving, switching between task and focusing while filtering out irrelevant information. Research also shows being bilingualism can delay the onset of dementia in later life by up to five years. Nacamuilla (2015).

Divergent thinking

Divergent thinking is considered one of the most crucial parts of creativity (Zheng, Denervaud, Durrleman 2023). Over the last five decades, tests such as the Torrence Test have been used to measure divergent thinking. This test uses simple tasks, both verbal and figural to measure divergent thinking and other problem-solving skills (Baer, 2016). Previous studies between bilingualism/multilingualism advantages to divergent thinking have concluded bilingual children outperform monolingual children in divergent thinking (Zheng, Denervaud, Durrleman 2023). However, more recent studies conducted by Booton *et al* (2021), who after conducting three studies comparing divergent thinking between bilingual and monolingual school aged children revealed that the results showed no evidence to support bilingualism having an effect on divergent thinking. This was also the case for studies looking at bilingual/multilingual advantages to overall creativity conducted by Lange *et al* (2020) when comparing monolinguals and bilinguals in both their first and second languages, they too found no bilingual advantage.

Framework

Cymraeg 2050 is a Welsh government strategy which aims to promote the use of Welsh language by having 1,000,000 Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050. The principal method behind this strategy is to increase Welsh medium immersion education to ensure children have opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills. The Welsh government believe that using a language immersion method in education is the most effective and reliable way to ensure future generations have the necessary skills and the confidence to be able to use the Welsh language naturally and comfortably within their everyday lives.

Under the Welsh in Education strategic plan outlined by the Welsh government, Cardiff Council (2022) aims to increase numbers of Welsh medium learners by increasing Welsh medium nurseries and expanding Welsh medium schools, both primary and secondary to support the growing numbers. They plan to encourage more learners to gain qualifications in Welsh, to provide more opportunities to use Welsh language in everyday life and increase provision for students with additional learning needs with Welsh medium schools in accordance with the Additional learning needs and education tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Cardiff Council also recognise in doing the above they will need to increase and train teaching staff.

Mudiad Meithrin was established in 1971. The organisation offers Welsh medium playgroups for pre-school age children. Mudiad Meithrin promote Croesi'r Bont, a Welsh language immersion method to introduce Welsh to young children who attend Cychoedd Meithrin. They believe in giving opportunities for free play and structured play which are conducted in Welsh only. Practitioners also encourage children to communicate with adults and peers in Welsh. (Mudiad Meithrin, n.d.)

During the bilingual activity in component one, the chosen subjects of 'animal' has solely been in Welsh following the language immersion method. It also contains repetitive language throughout the story and the song to promote children's confidence to join in and practice using the language.

Underpinning these programmes and policy there are clear links to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28 which is a child's right to an education

and article 29 which describes how education needs to be fitting for all children, enabling them to reach their potential while ensuring respect for the child, their family, their culture and environment. (Unicef 2018)

Conclusion

From the information sourced for this assignment, it is clear that defining what is bilingualism/multilingualism is subjective, and a clear-cut definition may never be acquired. Through looking at conflicting research it is also difficult to list all of the benefits of learning additional languages. However, there is undoubtedly at least one benefit to speaking multiple languages and that is to be able to converse and learn with a wider scope of people and other communities.

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