

Celebrating Language
and
cultural belonging
to Wales
(SJIE5004)

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This portfolio will present and discuss a range of welsh activities that are delivered in a special needs school in Swansea. Throughout this portfolio the school will be referred to as school A. School A is a special education needs setting, the school has 55 pupils all with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of the pupils have serious health conditions that require 1:1 support while other pupils have severe sensory issues resulting in extreme challenging behaviours. While the school follows the National curriculum it is hugely adapted to meet the needs of the pupils, following a sensory approach. The school is also exempt from the compulsory welsh learning aspect of the national curriculum but aims to provide welsh experiences as best as possible to suit the needs of the pupils.

Some of the activities in this portfolio are carried out in the foundation phase with pupils aged between 3 and 7. While others are whole school events with all pupils aged between 3 and 19 taking part. The school thrives to be a fully inclusive school and all activities are adapted so that everyone is included.

Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive' (UNICEF, 2020).

In recent years there has been increased emphasis on welsh learning within schools in Wales. The 1988 education reform act provided excellent curricular potential for Wales. It established a separate curriculum council which resulted in the welsh curriculum for schools. Following the introduction of the education reform act, in 1990 Welsh was phased in as a compulsory subject for pupils aged 5-15 and by September 1999 onwards welsh became compulsory for pupils age 4-16.

Many years ago it was thought that introducing two languages to children could be the main cause of delayed intellectual development but according to Professor Jim Cummings 'A large number of recent studies suggest that rather than being the cause of cognitive confusion, bilingualism can positively influence both cognitive and linguistic development; (2001). Cummings also suggests that two languages can be brought together in a positive way and when combined they can prove beneficial in many ways.

There are many positive outcomes for children that learn welsh throughout school. According to PACEY (Professional association for childcare and early years) 'learning welsh provides children with an appetite for learning as adults and provides them with an additional tool for their working life' (2006).

The Education reform act paved way for Wales to be given its very own national curriculum, known as curriculum cymreig. A huge milestone for Wales with the intention of securing a curriculum that provides opportunities for schools in wales to enrich pupils by not only teaching them the welsh language but also the cultural, environmental and history of Wales.

Pupils should be given opportunities where appropriate to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, historical and linguistic characteristics of wales. (Curriculum Cymreig,2020).

Curriculum cymreig aims to provide pupils with the opportunity to celebrate welsh traditions and cultures through expressive arts while also giving them opportunities to learn about welsh history and the agricultural aspect of Wales. Reports today suggest that 16% of pupils attend a welsh medium school and study welsh as their first language with a further 10% attending bilingual-dual medium schools. (School census, 2020).

The foundation phase framework aims to give schools a guideline of how to implement welsh learning in the classroom. It suggests that welsh medium and bilingual schools should continue to apply and develop their current language policies. During the foundation phase children should be encouraged to learn to use and communicate in welsh to the best of their ability; this should be implemented through the use of play and stimuli within the classroom,

Hearing and understanding are the first important building blocks towards acquisition of any language. As a first step children should hear welsh through incidental welsh and welsh rhymes, songs, commands and simple stories in informal play situation. (Welsh language development, Welsh government, (2006).

While the introduction of curriculum cymreig was a huge development for education in wales, a review of the use of welsh second language at key stage 2 and 3 did highlight a number of issues. It was felt that allocated teaching time was insufficient with as little as one hour per fortnight in some schools. It also highlighted the fact that many teachers in primary school's lacked confidence and ability to teach welsh. In addition, in many schools there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise welsh beyond informal lessons (Welsh government, 2020). After this report, the Welsh government stated that it would ask professor Donaldson to consider the findings of the report when updating the new successful futures curriculum. Based on the findings of the review the successful futures made 10 recommendations to the welsh language in the curriculum with renewed focus on learning welsh, communication oral and understanding,

Wales is still evolving as a nation and the welsh government have a vision to see one million people speaking welsh by 2050. While there have been huge developments here in wales there is still room for improvements in schools. Schools could look at ways of enhancing provision, encouraging more staff to go on welsh courses and learn welsh in order to build their confidence, in return improving lessons and delivering welsh at a better standard within the classroom.

School A acknowledges the importance of promoting welsh learning throughout the school. While it follows the national curriculum, activities and learning experiences are widely adapted to suit the needs of each individual pupil. The school adopts a sensory approach to learning and provides opportunities for the pupils to take part in events linked to welsh culture. The Donaldson successful future report suggests that 'everyone should learn welsh up the age of 16 and there should be a focus in schools in learning welsh and communication in conversation and understanding' (Donaldson, 2015). Under section, 92 of the Education act school A was given disapplication from welsh being a compulsory subject. In some cases, the full national curriculum is not always the most appropriate route to maximising pupil's achievements and given the daily struggles these pupils face, welsh is not compulsory. However school A recognises that pupils can benefit and enjoy taking part in certain welsh experiences.

The national curriculum suggests that pupils should experience different types of play and be provided with a range of welsh activities within the classroom. The majority of pupils in school A are non-verbal and find communication difficult, so the school focuses more on the cultural and environmental aspects of the curriculum rather than having the expectation that welsh language and literacy can be developed.

There are a range of activities carried out within classrooms on a daily basis, and events are participated in by the whole school organised to celebrate welsh culture. This portfolio will include activities implemented in the foundation phase following the foundation phase framework guidelines.

One of the weekly activities the pupils participate in is Tedi Alf (see **Appendix 1**) Here the pupils get the opportunity to take home the class welsh teddy bear. Tedi alf gets to spend the weekend at home with a pupil where they can take photos and make a record of their adventures together. He has his own rucksack with a welsh book that can be read at home to pupils. Audio cd's are also provided for the pupils with visual impairments where they can listen to welsh nursery rhymes together. This is an excellent opportunity for the pupils to experience different types of play whilst also engaging the families to participate. Theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner recognised the importance of close relationships between schools and families, so this activity also helps strengthen these bonds and forms a link between home and school life.

It is always lovely for pupils to share their weekend experiences with staff. The pupils take Tedi Alf home on a Friday and he returns with them on the Monday. During the morning circle time the photos and experiences of the pupil and Tedi are shared amongst the class using key welsh words and finishing off with welsh nursery rhymes together. The pupils also take part in Tedi alf sensory worksheets,(see **appendix 2**) these worksheets are deigned to be written in by pupils to record the weather using welsh words, but staff at school A adapt them to make them more of a sensory activity as it would not be possible for the pupils to fill in worksheets themselves. Here staff can talk to the pupils about the weather using key welsh words and the pupils get to explore sensory toys like water spray for the rain, hand held fans for the wind and torches with yellow voile material for the sun. This is followed on by singing a weather song in welsh. 'The foundation phase curriculum promotes equality of opportunity and values and celebrates diversity' (Foundation phase framework, 2015). Tedi alf provides equal opportunities for these pupils and he helps celebrate diversity as he has his very own gastrostomy tube for feeding like many of the pupils and a wheelchair he can take home.

The school organises events so that that the pupils can come together and have the opportunity to understand and experience what is distinctive about Wales. Celebrations such as St David's day are an excellent way for the school to provide sensory experiences while also delivering knowledge and understanding of the welsh language. Every year the school holds an Eisteddfod on St David's day. Here the pupils are included in a wide range of activities all tailored around the national curriculum and adapted for the pupils. For the weeks' leading up to St David's day pupils are encouraged to be involved in lots of craft activities and where possible enjoy mark making as part of the early development of language. Here the pupils can enjoy making and painting daffodils (See **appendix 3**) and welsh dragons, staff will take this opportunity to talk to the pupils using welsh words, for e.g. when painting using the welsh words for the colours instead of English. The School always use a lot of visual and audio stimuli with pupils so this time of year welsh songs can be heard throughout the school, ranging from nursery rhymes in the foundation phase to welsh rugby anthems and more age appropriate music in the post 16 unit. Music is an excellent way of stimulating the pupils and over the years, it has been very apparent that many

of the pupils respond positively to welsh music. One pupil in particular with severe challenging behaviour would calm when listening to welsh songs.

On the day of the Eisteddfod all pupils come together to celebrate in the school hall. They are encouraged to wear welsh costumes or rugby jerseys as part of learning about welsh traditions. Throughout the day the pupils participate in many cultural experiences such as welsh dancing, listening to welsh stories and poems and playing welsh instruments. Staff ensure that activities are interactive, exciting and motivational to keep pupils engaged. The eisteddfod is used as a way of enriching pupils with experiences throughout the use of expressive arts, awakening their senses and encouraging them to be creative in their own unique way.

Through the expressive arts area of learning and experience, schools and teachers can encourage children to develop their creative appreciation and talent. (Donaldson, 2020).

The national curriculum suggests that pupils need to be given opportunities to express feelings, likes and dislikes. As part of the eisteddfod, each class is given the task of cooking a traditional Welsh recipe (See **appendix 4**) cooking is always an excellent sensory lesson in which pupils can explore ingredients through play, taste, smell and touch. Here they can express their feelings by indicating if they like the taste of something or not. Welsh cooking also enables pupils to learn about welsh traditions.

On evaluation of the activities provided by school A, one feels that Tedi Alf is a fantastic way of engaging pupils and providing an opportunity to learn through play 'Play is an essential element in early childhood education because it provides young children with the opportunity to express their feelings' (Saracha, 2013). The circle time that the pupils take part in seems to be an enjoyable experience for all, the pupils love to listen to staff reading out their adventures together and they respond positively when photos are shared by smiling and laughing. When a child cannot communicate verbally, it is important for staff to provide ways of engaging them in conversations and providing communication aids to help them communicate to the best of their ability. A child in mainstream can go into school after the weekend and tell their teachers and friends about all the fun they have had but this can prove difficult for a child with SEN. This is why activities such as Tedi Alf are important as they provide an opportunity for these children to have the same experience as mainstream children; just adapted slightly to suit their needs. They may not be able to tell the class verbally about their weekend but through the help of staff and their parents providing photo's these pupils get to share information with the class. The foundation phase framework suggests that children should be included in enjoyable welsh activities with lots of stimuli (Curriculum cymreig,2020). This is a fun way of introducing welsh words through the storybook and songs and all the pupils respond in a positive way to the welsh music.

While the activity is enjoyable and welsh words are introduced staff at school A could improve the follow on activities and broaden the use of welsh language within the classroom with a wall display of Tedi Alf's adventures, creating more of a bilingual environment could promote the children's familiarity with welsh

The St David's day celebrations at the school work really well in providing pupils with a sense of belonging to wales while also enriching them in cultural experiences. The pupils at the school respond so well to sensory-based activities and celebrations like this enables staff to think of new ideas that engage the pupils while linking in with the national curriculum. It is an inclusive activity that can be enjoyed by all pupils across wales and it is important that the pupils in school A are involved as much as mainstream children in celebrating being welsh. Curriculum cymreig suggests that 'pupils should be involved in celebrating distinctive cultures, languages and traditions

of Wales' (2020), St David's day gives so many opportunities for pupils to explore welsh cultures and traditions, whether its tasting some welsh cuisine or participating in traditional welsh dancing. The school always has a fantastic atmosphere on days like ST David's day and this promotes health and well-being around the school. One feels that taking into consideration the needs of the pupils at the school it is a well organised event, that caters to the ability of the pupils and lets them enjoy at their own pace and in their own unique way.

Under the united nations convention on the rights of children, children and young people must be provided with an education that develops their personality and talents to the full (UNCRC,

To conclude it is apparent that school A adopt a fully inclusive approach to welsh learning even though it is not a compulsory subject at the school. The enjoyment the pupils experience from taking part in welsh activities provides evidence that it is something that should be continued. While the language and oracy skills may never be developed there is so much more to learn about wales. Celebrating the culture and traditions and helping these pupils acquire a sense of belonging and their own identity in wales is equally as important as it is to teach the language in mainstream schools.

Appendix one

Here is Tedi Alf. The Foundation phase welsh teddy bear that is used to help promote welsh language skills.



Appendix two

Here is the Activity sheet used as a follow on activity with Tedi Alf. The weather is discussed in welsh with pupils, and then sensory items are used to help the pupils have a better understanding of the weather.

WALT: We are learning types of weather in Welsh.	
 Sut mae'r tywydd heddiw?	
1) 	2) 
3) 	4) 
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____	

Appendix Three

Here the pupils are exploring and making their own daffodils



Appendix Four

Here the pupils are exploring leeks to make a traditional welsh soup. This is a perfect sensory activity



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