

Hello and welcome to this presentation ECEY4004 of Multilingualism and Multi-thinking. My name is Clare Brooks, Student number 2312292. This presentation will discuss the communication and social benefits of a child being bilingual or multilingual and Welsh as an additional language. Furthermore, brain development and divergent thinking will be explored in relation to multilingualism and to conclude discussing how the curriculum and Government policies support children who are multilingual.

According to Cambridge Dictionary (2024) Bilingual is defined as being able to use two languages successfully, and multilingual if fluent in more than two languages. Preply (2024) state that forty-three percent of the world's population is bilingual with seventeen percent being multilingual. Welsh language Commissioner (2024) stated that 2021 Census showed 17.8% are Welsh speakers which has reduced over centuries.

There are many benefits for a child being bilingual including social benefits such as enhanced communication. Hirsh-Pasek et al (2013) and McLeod (2015) agree that by children playing and becoming involved in social interaction they enhance their language skills by commenting and questioning while engaged in play and communicating with peers. Similarly, Cambridge University Press (2017) state that children have a social flexibility being able to adapt themselves to different social environments reading social cues and collaborating with others. This is due to bilinguals being able to switch between their own perspective and that of others.

British Sign Language (BSL) was recognised in 2003 as an official minority language by the UK Government. Baker (2011) says over 145,000 people use BSL and this means its users are bilingual but use their languages for different functions and purposes. For example, using sign to communicate and often writing in English or native language which is called bimodal bilingualism. Learning journals (2024) state the benefits of using BSL as increasing vocabulary, creating a more inclusive culture and building relationships and social skills.

In my activity I started with a greeting song to build a connection with the children and make them valued. I also included some sign language as it provides young children with a way to communicate effectively and for the benefits previously mentioned.

Pembrokeshire County Council (2024) state that Welsh as an additional language is defined as people who are born in a different country and speak a language other than Welsh and English as their first language.

Wales offers bilingual education to children starting nursery where language is exposed in both English and Welsh, not only focusing on language but also cultural appreciation and understanding through stories, songs, and activities. Frontiers (2012) state “musical hearing is essential to language acquisition.” In my activity I sang two songs as an aid for learning new vocabulary with lots of repetition. NALDIC (2011) state that learning an additional language can be social through immersion of peers communicating and socialising especially through play. This is supported by the Welsh Government (2022) implementing a play-based education for foundation age pupils.

Bruner, cited in Aubrey and Riley (2019) state that children who engage with adults develop their language through play and social interaction and Bialystok (2017) suggests children learn from their family and communities to influence their linguistic development. Rhys and Thomas (2013) agree play benefits children’s language development through incorporating many socially interactive elements known to enhance language skills. For example, items in play are often labelled by adults for children to repeat.

Additionally, The Children’s Commissioner (2023) state that children have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF (no date) states articles two, eight, twenty-eight and thirty explain that children have the right to non-discrimination whatever their language, a right to identity, education and to learn and use language of their choice.

The Welsh language is intertwined with culture and heritage. Hatt and Issa (2013) state that through interaction with peers and adults, young children develop and extend their cultural identities. Community Playthings (2012) agree that family life is most significant source of identity. Settings need to reinforce this by providing diverse activities and a culture rich environment.

Now we move on the brain. Harvard (2019) suggests that the premature auditory system develops at 33 weeks into pregnancy. The foetus can listen and respond to different sounds in language from the womb. Baker (2011) suggests that the infant immediately prefers their mother’s voice. However Live Science (2023) states that although the language network of the brain is one of the strongest, at birth these connections are weak but as children learn to speak these links are strengthened. With that in mind, Haarsten, Johnson and Jones (2016) suggest that by age six, the development of the brain is complete.

MacBlain (2018) states that after birth the cerebral cortex begins to develop which is responsible for higher order functioning, for example language development, thinking and problem solving. Kuipers and Thierry (2015) explain that the auditory cortex processes information carrying messages to the Wernicke’s area and Broca’s area, responsible for language processing and comprehension. For example, bilingual children have enhanced phonological awareness making it easier to learn an additional language.

Young children are said to learn a new language easily because of the way their brains are formed.

Nacamulli (2015) explains that a child's brain has more plasticity than an adult which allows them to learn a language through both hemispheres of the brain. According to Marian and Shook (2012) a bilingual's brain has a higher density of grey matter which contains neurones and synapses needed for language processing and executive functions.

Alzheimer's Research UK (2017) suggests a bilingual brain can also slow down signs of natural decline of cognitive function in particular the diseases Alzheimer's and Dementia by up five years later. By maintaining the brain's cognitive reserve, it enhances brain function in particular memory and executive control.

I used props and visuals to make connections to the new words aiding comprehension.

Additionally, divergent thinking is a thought process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. Robinson (2016) explains bilingual children can enhance their divergent thinking skills as switching between languages improves cognition, problem solving and attention.

Moreover, as children are exposed to multiple cultural influences this can further benefit divergent thinking as they have the ability to approach problems from different perspectives and consider diverse solutions. This is particularly beneficial for adults in the work environment and navigating relationships.

Hoffman and Russ (2012) state that play is important with the development of divergent thinking skills. In particular, imaginative play develops the cognitive processes that are linked to creativity. The use of making connections with fantasy, symbolism and divergent thinking allows children to interpret stories and make up characters. Pretend play also allows children to express themselves and divergent thinkers can access memories and associations to aid problem solving.

Chomsky, cited in Smidt (2008) suggested language acquisition is genetically determined. Infants are born pre-programmed to work out rules of speech. It was noticed that children begin saying things correctly through imitation then move on to making mistakes by applying the rules of grammar to all situations. However, Everett (2017) stated that Chomsky failed to make a reference to the influence of others which meant he ignored the importance of interaction as well as culture and context.

Bilingualism is recognised as an asset in the Early Years frameworks and promotes cultural inclusion, celebrates diversity and supports and develops language acquisition. According to Learn Welsh Cymru (2023) a range of courses are available for staff to undertake to encourage professional development opportunities in Welsh.

Welsh Language Measure (2011) gained official status of Welsh language. This created a Welsh Commissioner, who is responsible for promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh language to its full potential and securing a future for the Welsh language. This is being supported by Welsh Government (2017) as the initiative Cymraeg 2050 to preserve the language and reverse the decline in Welsh Speakers across the country. However, Future Generation Wales (2024) states concern that it is ambitious and may fall short of the expectations.

Education Development Centre (no date) suggests ways that settings can support bilingual children including embracing children to speak their home language, value their cultures, and immersing children in a language rich environment. This is also supported by Gorrara et al. (2020) who suggests this can be achieved for those who do not speak Welsh at home, can be immersed in a setting alongside other Welsh speakers. Practitioners should use open ended questions and narrate what the child is doing to help produce longer sentences and use vocabulary.

Furthermore, according to HWB (2023) the Siarter Iaith National framework is a project encouraging the use of Welsh socially in primary schools. Becoming a national programme in 2016 the framework is an integral part of the Curriculum for Wales with its principles supporting the four purposes. In addition to this the Government aims to expand Welsh-medium provision in the Early Years and support families to speak the Welsh at home.

To conclude, bilingualism and multilingualism shows many benefits to children developing their language and communication. These benefits can also give advantages into adulthood with brain functions and divergent thinking to support job opportunities and increases health benefits. Furthermore, Welsh as an additional language will keep the nations traditions and cultures going with more emphasis on early education in settings and schools. Diolch for your time today.

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