

Schools in Wales must deliver a range of activities which are designed to promote Welsh language, culture and history, starting from early years, all the way through to secondary education. Many of the resources and methods will be similar in every school in Wales, however others may vary. It is crucial that all children are introduced to basic Welsh vocabulary, and are familiarised with their Nationality and what that means to them.

Schools in Wales generally have weather charts through the medium of Welsh placed visibly inside the classrooms to encourage Welsh language, normally at a convenient location for it to be taught as either a whole class, or group activity. The idea behind this is to encourage children to develop their knowledge for Welsh terminology for different kinds of weather. Often, the educator might ask the children in Welsh “how is the weather today?” (Sut mae'r tywydd heddiw?). Children can then use a weather chart to help them respond using the Welsh language. Children are normally encouraged to use the answer in a sentence as opposed to the singular word. In early year classes especially, sometimes a weather related Welsh song may be sung as a class or group to help promote the effectiveness of the activity.

Having the weather charts always available to children within a school setting is also highly effective, because as they become more familiar with how to describe the weather using the Welsh language, the hope is that they may begin to practice these skills independently or maybe by conversing with friends. The weather charts typically displayed will tend to be colourful and contain an element of fun, making them appear more appealing to young children, also improving their memorability. Similar charts are also often used to accommodate the teaching of the days of the week, months/seasons of the year and the daily routine timeline. The aim is to submerge classrooms in regularly communicated Welsh vocabulary, in useful subjects.

Welsh people and schools in Wales take part in the National (adult competition) and Urdd (youth competition) Eisteddfod. The Eisteddfod is a festival which celebrates Welsh culture, through encouraging children and grown ups to take part in activities such as performing through singing, dancing, reciting poetry, acting, playing musical instruments, or other skills including creativity in producing artwork, cooking, writing poetry or writing creatively and sporting/leisure activities. The Eisteddfod has been a significant event in Wales, taking place since the year of 1176 (Library Wales). The Eisteddfod plays a crucial role in celebrating Welsh culture, ensuring an exciting and enjoyable experience for all who attend, focusing on every aspect that shapes Wales into the country that it is, ensuring that heritage is not lost.

The Eisteddfod has grown so prominently, that it now attracts up to 170,000 visitors per year, making it the largest cultural festival in Europe. Although the National Eisteddfod is the largest to take place in Wales, many smaller eisteddfodau take place throughout communities across Wales, making it accessible and welcoming to all, old or young who wish to embrace the beauty of being Welsh. The Urdd Eisteddfod, the competition for children and young people generally consists of over 15,000 competitors per year (Wales.com).

Schools in Wales play a significant part in ensuring children today and future generations continue to get involved with the wonderful ceremony, and uphold its popularity, cherishing Welsh culture and language, in a way that is lively and intriguing. If it wasn't for schools in Wales spreading the word about the Eisteddfod, or sometimes even hosting their own smaller scale Eisteddfod within a setting, some children may not ever hear of the event, therefore running the risk of losing its significance. Thankfully when the time of year comes around where competitions are being held, teachers and

school staff will likely describe the various events that are taking place and encourage students to take part in either an activity that they enjoy, or one that they have a talent for. The children who wish to take part can then perform at the rounds of each competition, and those who do not wish to compete may also get involved by attending to support their peers. The Eisteddfod also fits in with the new curriculum as it encourages ambitious and capable learners.

The only slight downside to the Eisteddfod is that it takes place in either the North or South of Wales (alternating yearly). Therefore on the year where it is further away from children/people wishing to compete, transportation may become a small issue for some, in comparison to when it is held locally, it would be far easier to get to. Understandably, it changes location every year as an aim to improve its accessibility. It would be impossible to set the Eisteddfod in close proximity to everyone, yet ultimately this could still be seen as a downside. This is also arguably overcome by the idea that the main Eisteddfodau are also shown on television, therefore those who cannot attend in person, do not have to miss out entirely, and can tune in to the event through the screens at the comfort of their own home, which is definitely a big plus. Altogether, I think that the Eisteddfod does a fantastic job at promoting Welsh language and culture, and it is a valuable aspect of Wales, and there is very little room for improvement providing that it keeps adapting and growing with the demands of the future.

Another way in which educational institutions in Wales teach the Welsh language is often through Welsh singing sessions. These could take place daily or weekly across schools in Wales, and will consist of children coming together as a group, sometimes in their class/classes or as a whole school. During the singing sessions, solely Welsh language songs/nursery rhymes will be sang by all as a means of developing Welsh language knowledge. Even without singing immediately, simply listening to songs in a second language as a starting point drastically improves listening skills as at times, lyrics aren't always as easy to hear, therefore children may be required to listen more carefully, however this is a positive as it likely means that their brain is more engaged in the activity.

Listening to, and joining in on cultural music is proven to be a great way to advance ones pronunciation, as children will likely remember words that they hear, especially in songs that they like, and singing along allows them to practice pronouncing the words themselves. In addition to pronunciation, song lyrics are a brilliant way to pick up new, sometimes unheard vocabulary meaning that young children can begin to broaden their literacy skills, especially as songs directed at very young children are generally more simple to understand and contain new words relating to familiar topics they will likely facilitate in speech.

Moreover, another benefit of singing in a second language, is improved memory due to the composition of many song lyrics, often repeating some of the same words numerous times, to a fun and melodic tune. Research shows that repetition and background music allows the brain to remember things better. It also goes without saying that learning language through music may be far more enjoyable, especially to young people, as opposed to simply conversing/writing in a second language, therefore they are far more likely to want to take part and give it their best effort (Kalyani). Often, to make singing sessions even more exciting, many schools may also interpret a cheerful, simple dance to go along with the tune, or simply add in some actions/movements which represent the terminology heard in the songs. Schools that really want to go the extra mile could also use props such as toys/stuffed animals, printed photographs, videos, instruments, or costumes that coincide with the music, and give children the opportunity to use these during singing sessions. Singing in schools fits in to the new curriculum by encouraging enterprising and creative learners. A barrier to

this, however, could potentially be that schools that are underfunded may not be able to implement the purchase of additional equipment into the budget solely for singing lessons, so schools may be required to make do with what they have already.

On the whole, I think that singing sessions in schools is an immense method of improving and rehearsing the Welsh language, and the children also definitely seem to enjoy it. The only negative I would state is that although the repetition of songs is necessary in learning to an extent, sometimes throughout school years there may be a lack of variety of different songs that are sang, as there are only so many available, and singing the same medley day in, day out, may eventually come boring over time so the only thing lacking is variation. This however could also depend on the school itself, in my setting new songs are rarely introduced, it is preferred to remain with the same ones, however this could be different within other schools.

In a similar sense to how music may be used to promote Welsh language in an educational setting, Welsh TV programmes are also a very useful tool to familiarise children with spoken Welsh language, in a way that grasps their attention. There are many Welsh TV programmes available for those of all ages via the S4C Clic website which can be streamed at any time. There are specific channels within S4C; Cyw and stwnsh, which have a wide variety of Welsh language programmes made specifically for children. The characters and storyline are very memorable and enjoyable, therefore it is a fantastic method for children to absorb more of the language, and normally new vocabulary will be easier to grasp as in this case it is accompanied by acting and scenery on the screen.

In the modern day, the rapid developments in technology, however, have been viewed as rather worrying and possibly harmful to younger generations. Due to the prominence of technology at the present, children spend far too much time sitting down, limiting movement, with their eyes glued to a screen. Excessive screen time has been linked with obesity, sleep problems, depression, anxiety, reduced attention span/behaviour issues and neck, back and eye strain in children (Cureus). All of which are damaging to their wellbeing. Therefore it is crucial that all screen time is monitored carefully by a responsible adult (parents or staff) to ensure that children are using technology in moderation, therefore caring for their health, happiness and capability to succeed. Providing that technology is used responsibly, its possibilities are endless, however there is a very fine line before it becomes consuming and runs the risk of impairment.

Schools in Wales are also required to provide education regarding the history and culture of Wales. A popular lesson that is often taught, especially due to its significance, is the history of the 'Welsh Not'. During the 19th century and early 20th century, children who went to school in Wales were commanded not to speak Welsh. The rule was that English should be the only spoken language in every school in Wales. If a child should be caught speaking Welsh, they would then be forced to wear a piece of wood around their neck, with the words 'Welsh Not' or 'WN'. They would have to wear this until another child would be caught speaking Welsh in school, then the piece of wood would be passed to the next child. The idea at the time was that the child who was still wearing the 'Welsh Not' at the end of the day may face further punishment, sometimes a beating. The Welsh Not was created in a time where the Welsh language was discouraged and there was an aim to promote the English language as the language of progress. Fortunately, the 'Welsh Not' no longer exists, and the focus is back onto increasing the number of Welsh speakers, although the damage that was done affected the country for many years (FelinFach). The teaching of the 'Welsh Not' fits in to the curriculum by encouraging ethical and informed citizens.

Thankfully, children's rights today would never allow the Welsh Not to exist in schools due to its horrible nature, and how it would belittle, humiliate and install fear into children. Some of the many children's rights which have now been put in place include the right to life, privacy, freedom, safety, education, identity, health and others (UNICEF).

Another common attempt among Welsh schools to keep the Welsh history and culture alive is by organising trips to historical facilities, or museums. St. Fagans is a well-known museum, and often children are taken there to learn more about their heritage, and it is suitable for young children from primary age. There are many interactive experiences available which put an enjoyable and memorable twist on the learning journey. In St Fagans children learn about farming and old cooking methods, which also fits into the new curriculum by encouraging healthy and confident individuals.

Estyn have always highlighted the importance of immersing children in their native language since a very early age, as their brains are especially good at absorbing information in the very early years. In Wales, the foundation phase focused on ensuring that small children were in contact with the Welsh language so much that they were able to speak confidently and independently, whether it be with adults such as a parent or carer, members of staff at school or simply with friends (Estyn). However that is just one example out of many who are now pushing more than ever for support of the Welsh language, throughout school.

The Welsh Language Charter (Y Siarter Iaith) has also been a revolutionary introduction to assist schools across Wales in ensuring more children are in contact with the Welsh language. As part of the charter, there is a framework in place where every school will be assessed in order to establish how well the Welsh language is already being used within the setting. This is presented as a gold, silver or bronze award. Once this has been determined, an action plan will be put in place in order to improve the score obtained, to meet new targets and push the children, with the support of staff members to reach their full potential and use Welsh both socially and academically.

Seren and Sbarc are the mascots who represent the Language Charter, and occasionally they may visit the children in different schools to spread a positive attitude to learning Welsh. Since the Charter was put in place, Seren and Sbarc have become widely recognised and associated with the importance of keeping the language alive, and they even have their own song encouraging children that they should use their bilingual skillset to their advantage, and take every opportunity to practise, especially communicating to friends through the language in social settings (Welsh Government).

In 2022, the new Curriculum for Wales was introduced. The aim of the new curriculum is to ensure that education evolves alongside the ever changing world. The new curriculum was set out to provide children with the knowledge, skills and experiences required to achieve a successful future. The new curriculum is designed by teachers, meets specific needs of every individual, and is suitable for the fast paced development of the world.

The new Curriculum for Wales also sets out specific areas of learning; literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing in Welsh and English), numeracy skills (using numbers in all aspects of daily life), and digital skills (the use of technology and equipment). Learning is then split into six categories; expressive arts, health and well-being, humanities, languages, literacy and communication, maths and numeracy and science and technology (Hwb).

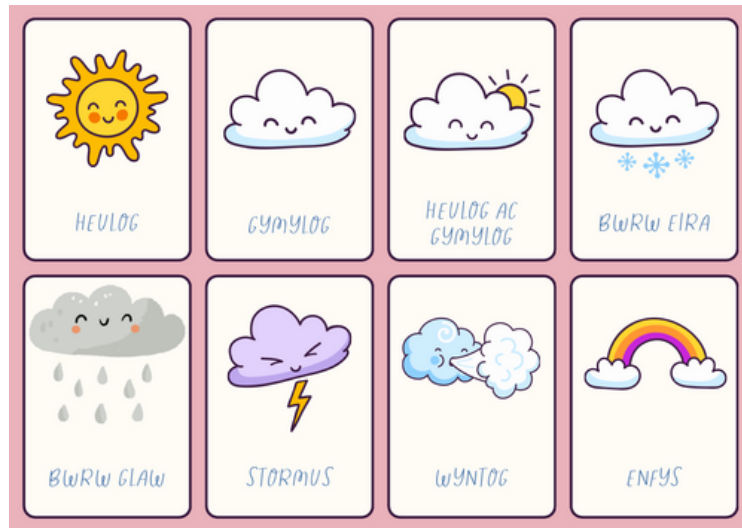
The new Curriculum was put in place in accordance with Donaldson's Successful Futures Report. Professor Donaldson and his team began their research in schools across Wales, obtaining information and opinions from children, young people, carers, business and community groups and others across Wales. The research concluded that it was time for a change to be made to the education system, primarily the curriculum, which is why Donaldson went on to lay out the purposes and structure of the curriculum as previously mentioned.

The Donaldson report also takes a greater look at the Welsh language, and how that should be embedded into the curriculum. The report suggests that everyone in Wales should learn Welsh up to the age of 16; making it a compulsory subject. There needs to be a greater focus within educational settings to enhance conversation and understanding ability through the medium of Welsh. Donaldson felt that it was crucial to set these standards in place after discovering that the majority of Welsh people see the Native language as a strength and advantage, not only during education, but throughout life, highlighting its rising importance in the workplace (Successful Futures - gov).

A Welsh Government Bill, put in place by Jeremy Miles MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, also reiterates how crucial it is that future generations are equipped with the ability to converse and write through the Welsh language, regardless of the level. The Bill's main objectives include the previously established bid to reach one million Welsh speakers by the year of 2050, alongside other Government targets in relation to Welsh language. The bid also places a duty on Welsh ministers to review Welsh language standards. It is also stated that a standard method for determining and assessing Welsh language ability must also be established, and that statutory language categories for schools, with related learning goals, based off a minimum Welsh language education deemed compulsory will be created. This results in a relation of accountability between planning carried out by schools, local authority and also at National level (Senedd Cymru).

In conclusion, times have changed drastically over many years in Wales, and so have the principles of teaching, especially with regards to language, culture and history. There have been events in history which negatively impacted Wales and its heritage, however the focus has now been steered back to the importance of keeping the language and sense of belonging alive, which is why the government are also increasing the funding of education in Wales, in hopes to achieve one million Welsh speakers by 2050. I think that the positive perspective on the Welsh language is a great step in the right direction for Wales as a country, and hope that it will make a drastic difference to the attitude of young people towards the language, allowing it to hereby live on.

Appenices



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