

**CELEBRATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
BELONGING TO WALES.**



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Many years ago, Welsh was the dominant language of the United Kingdom. According to The Welsh Language – Historic UK (2020) “It originated from a Celtic language spoken by ancient Britons. The history of the language faced lots of challenges to its existence” The Welsh language started to suffer from 1536 with the Act of Union. This act made Wales subject to England. The Welsh language was banned, and its status was removed. This meant people in Wales, in their work or out in public places, were expected to communicate in English. This also extended to an education setting, therefore putting a stop to the language from an early age. In the 1800s, children were expected to go to school, but Welsh was not part of the curriculum, and therefore the community did not benefit in increasing the literacy levels. In 1942 The Welsh Courts Act was established and made Welsh a valid language to use in all legal proceedings. This was a turning point for bringing back the Welsh language. From then on, some of the Acts that followed, for example, the Welsh language Act 1967, which gave the Welsh language validity but not equal status, and the Welsh language Act 1994 which came in and said, “in the course of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the Welsh and English languages are to be treated on the basis of equality” These Acts were important and crucial legislation for the Welsh language. As well as the Welsh language Acts, there have been several policies and acts to support the learning of the Welsh language in education. The 1967 Plowden Report was an important Act which promoted new ways of teaching. It states, “at the heart of the educational process lies the child”.

“Then in 1988 The Education Reform Act introduced a compulsory National Curriculum, which consisted of 14 subjects and Welsh was a core of subject in Welsh-medium schools and it was a foundation subject in the rest of the schools in Wales. By the year 1999 all pupils in Wales studied Welsh” (Mercator, 2020).

In 2008 the National Curriculum for 3-7-year olds had been replaced by the Foundation Phase programme. “in the Foundation Phase all school settings implement a Welsh-language educational programme for children” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a).

Schools today have an important role to play in maintaining the Welsh language. Through all the Acts and policies that surround the Welsh language and education, it is vital that the profile and identity of Wales and the Welsh language is maintained.

“Our national mission of education reform seeks to raise standards and reduce the attainment gap, The Welsh language is integral to those reforms, as it is to the Government-wide objectives of building resilient communities, culture and language and promoting Wales’ place in the world” (Welsh in education, 2017-2020).

This quote suggests that teaching Welsh across the curriculum from an early age would be beneficial to not just raising standards of Welsh language but also to promote Welsh, culturally, historically, geographically. According to the supplementary curriculum planning guidance (2008) “opportunities for progression in numeracy elements across the curriculum year 4 summer term” this would include, learning in geography “where I live” and in art “Welsh landscapes”. One can link these lessons to setting A. Setting As class has been able to experience going out and about in their community to find out where they live and to match them to pictures as well as visiting local historical places such as the Swansea Jack, for the children to look at the identity of Wales. This also builds the children's confidence of using the Welsh language and to develop them to their full potential. At setting A, there is a strong feeling of proud to be Welsh. It is important for children to be proud of their heritage and identity which can be linked to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 8 which states “Protection and preservation of identity” Unicef (*UN Convention on the rights of the child 1989*) This means that all children have a right to a name, nationality, race, culture, religion and language, and to flourish their identity. Setting A does this by holding a designated Welsh week, where the focus is on Welsh places and famous Welsh people, St David's day celebrations, enthusiastically promoting the Welsh language, by singing songs, reading poems and listening to stories and celebrating Welsh sporting success.

The 2019 Siarter laith framework (initial guidance for schools 2019) was introduced to support and increase learners’ use of welsh in schools. It aims to

“implement the Welsh Language Charter in all Welsh-medium primary schools in Wales, to support English –medium schools to provide informal opportunities to use the language and intensive Welsh learning opportunities through the Urdd's Cymraeg

Bob Dydd project and to support Welsh –medium secondary schools to develop activities to encourage learners informal use of Welsh” (Siarter-laith framework: initial guidance for schools 2019).

It is a framework to ensure that schools have the correct guidance on teaching Welsh and to implement Welsh cross curricular. The Curriculum for Wales guidance “promotes collaboration and cross disciplinary planning, learning and teaching, both within and across areas. This will enable learners to build connections across their learning and combine different experiences, knowledge and skills” (Curriculum for Wales, 2020). Curriculum Cymreig supports Siarter laith in helping pupils to understand and celebrate living and learning in Wales. Curriculum Cymreig provides opportunities in the National Curriculum subjects to make sure Welsh is developed throughout every subject by suggesting symbols are placed on display boards and in books. This coincides with Donaldson successful futures that wants pupils to be “ethnic, informed citizens who, are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world now and in the past” (Donaldson, 2015). Today in schools there is emphasis on the Welsh language and culture.

One's setting is situated in the Foundation Phase which supports Curriculum 6, as it helps children develop an understanding of the cultural identity of Wales, which can be accessed across all the areas of learning, through an integrated approach. Children will be able to explore and experience the different language, landmarks, images, objects, sounds and tastes that all are important to identify Wales and gain a sense of belonging to their country.

Setting A provides several opportunities for the pupils to explore and experience the different Welsh culture and the language. Every morning when the pupils arrive in school, they sing the register, say how they are feeling and describe what the weather is like all in Welsh. (See appendix 1). The purpose of this activity is to help to develop the pupil's oracy skills, which can be linked to the literacy strand in the Foundation Phase Framework. The Framework (2015) states “Children are immersed in language experiences and activities. Their skills develop through talking, signing, communicating and listening. They should be encouraged to communicate their needs, feelings and thoughts”. Throughout this activity the pupils are learning Welsh words, how to communicate their feelings, and to listen to each

other while waiting for their turn. This activity is then extended to Seren yr Wythnos (see appendix 2). This activity occurs weekly in one's setting and the aim of this activity is that pupils ask or say something in Welsh during the school day. It is to encourage the pupils to speak welsh while communicating their needs and wants by using welsh words and welsh simple phrases. They are rewarded with a badge or certificate and their photo is displayed on the Seren yr Wythnos display board. Both these activities can be supported by Skinner's behaviourism theory of operant conditioning. "A theory of supposed behaviour is determined by consequences, such as positive and negative reinforcers, and the application of these will increase the possibility of the behaviour occurring again" (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Skinner believed that repetition of learning means that because you repeat it daily or several times a day. One is learning it over and over again, therefore experiencing the words and language constantly. Skinner also believed in reinforcing a good behaviour with a reward, so in this activity, the reward would be the badge and then one will see that good behaviour reoccurring. The good behaviour in this activity was the speaking of Welsh.

Another activity which occurs in one's setting is taking Tedi Twt home (see appendix 3). This activity involves taking home Tedi Twt with his suitcase and some stories that remind the children of their feelings, the weather, clothes and different type of food. Tedi Twt then spends time with the family and the children either write, draw a picture or send photos into school of what they have done over the weekend. The purpose of this activity is when the children bring Tedi Twt back into school, we have catch up time, where all the children listen to each other, look at the pictures and either repeat welsh key words or they have remembered them which tell us what they have experienced over the weekend. Piaget's theory of constructivism and cognitive development can be associated with this activity. He believes learning happens by making meaning of experiences for oneself. So, by taking Tedi Twt home, the child is exploring how to dress Tedi Twt to the weather, what food to feed him and how he is feeling, while learning Welsh key vocabulary. the child is interacting with the

environment. According to Piaget “I hear: I forget, I see: I remember, I do: I understand” (Blakemore and Frith, 2009). When the children have practical activities, they have direct experience. Piaget believes that there are four stages of developing learning. Stage one, sensory motor period. Stage two, pre-operation period. Stage 3, period of concrete operations and stage four, period of formal operations. The stage where the children in one’s setting is developing at the moment is stage two, as they are exploring their physical environment and beginning to relate it to themselves.

During the ST David’s day celebrations, the children become active learners. According to Vygotsky “learners actively make meaning and their social world is fundamental to this process” (Wray, 2006). One can link this to an occasion that happens every year before St David’s day takes place. The pupils have an opportunity to visit different places around their community, to experience the Welsh culture and therefore developing their learning of the Welsh language. The first place is Swansea Market where the children can buy Welsh food and artefacts children collaboratively talk to one another about these products and for the children who are not sure of what these are, the older children help them by scaffolding. This process can be called the zone of proximal development, which is associated with Vygotsky, who says this is a stage of development where the pupils have some knowledge and understanding but can gain more with the help of a peer or an adult to develop them further. When the pupils get back to school, they taste and smell the different products that they have bought in the Market. This helps the children to develop an awareness of Wales as a country.

When reviewing the activities that one has been involved in, one recognised that not all the activities are suitable for each individual child. This is because, some of our pupils are non-verbal, while others have little speech and a couple are fully verbal. Most of the activities were suitable for the children who were verbal, as they could repeat the words and therefore learn how to say them. For the other children, the activities needed to be adapted and differentiated. For the activity of describing the weather and your feelings and *Seren yr Wythnos*, one decided to use Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding. This was done by using a visual aid of pictures to help the children understand what is being said and what is being asked of them. The children then could see- the picture, hear- the word, and do- by putting their picture in a pot of happy or sad and putting pictures on the weather chart. To reinforce the word or words, one says it in English first for the children to repeat and then in Welsh.

This can be underpinned by the Foundation Phase Framework (2015) “language skills learnt in one language should support the development of knowledge and skills in another language”. From doing this scaffolding one can see the children progressing, even if they cannot say the words, they are beginning to understand the pictures and link them to the word or words. The Foundation Phase Framework also states that all children should be included. “Schools should provide material that is appropriate to their ability, previous education and experience, which extends their language development” (2015). This is shown in our setting, for the children who are non-verbal, we use sign language. This is all reinforcing their language development, as they have a picture, a sign, an English word and sometimes a Welsh word, if it is a key vocabulary word that is used in our class.

The other two activities we do in school to promote the Welsh language – St Davids day and taking Tedi Twt home, one believes that these activities are beneficial to the children. For one, the children have a hands on learning. The learning is all around the child, what their likes are, what their dislikes are, what they believe and what they don’t believe in. They are being themselves and experiencing and exploring different strategies of how to problem solve, socialise and to find out about themselves. They learn new experiences, from being out in their environment. Most of our children remember these outings and therefore will remember what they have learnt and why we went there.

Overall, one believes that one's setting really supports and helps their pupils to learn about the Welsh language and culture, and to develop their pupils to be ethnical, informed citizens of their country, Wales.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Appendix 3



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