

Introduction:

Good morning, my name is Hannah Newman and my student number is 2216693 and this morning I am going to be speaking to you about the benefits of bilingualism.

What does it mean to be bilingual? Edwards (2013) asks how fluent in another language must one be in order to be defined as bilingual.

Collins (2023) definition of Bilingual states that:

Someone who is **bilingual** can speak two languages equally **well**, usually because they **learned** both languages as a child.

While The Britannica dictionary (2023) states the definition of bilingual is able to speak and understand two languages

This exemplifies the complex nature of what it is to be bilingual.

Benefits of bilingualism:

Cultural learning Alliance (2017) explores the value of children learning about their own culture and the culture of others in order to form their own set of values and beliefs. Moreover, Giannini (no date) argues that languages break down barriers between cultures and therefore improves understanding of others.

Similarly, Lewis (no date) explores the ability for home languages to provide a sense of identity which is a fundamental right as part of the UNCRC within article 30 (Unicef, no date).

That being said, Gorrara (2020) states that many young adults leave education in the UK as mono-linguists, meaning that they only use one language.

However, in contrast, Thomas (no date) suggests there are more multilinguals than monolinguals.

Furthermore, Ryan (no date) states that every 14 days a language dies and with that language there is a potential of lost knowledge.

In addition, Ryan (no date) and Thomas (no date) state that English is viewed as the global language.

In a study, Thomas-Sunesson, Hakuta, and Bialystok (2018) found that bilingual children who have one dominant language did not perform as well as their more balanced bilingual counterparts. This supports the need for practitioners to promote the use of home language so as to create a balance between development in both languages.

Welsh as additional language:

Pembrokeshire County Council (2022) explains that Welsh as an additional language describes those learning Welsh when it is not their primary language.

That being said, Welsh Government (2014) states that there is the need for a clear definition of what it is to be a WAL or EAL child as well as a need for practitioners to be aware of the support needed for WAL or EAL children. This may include help to settle in to routines and rules before curriculum development (NALDIC, 2012).

Gort (2019) explains that there are some schools of thought that learning more than one language can be detrimental to children's language progress. That is to say that it may be viewed that children lack language skills and have a limited word knowledge.

This is supported by Ryan (no date) who argues that there is opportunity for missed knowledge from a child's home language.

Such misconceptions may be viewed in settings where children's ability is assessed in the language of the setting as exemplified by the Foundation Phase Profile (Welsh Government, 2017b) whereby practitioners are advised to complete baseline assessments within six weeks of a child's arrival to a setting, and to do so within the settings language.

Weisberg *et al.* (2013) study the importance of child-led, playful interactions with children and the positive effects that these interactions have on children's language acquisition.

Additionally Kalogirou, Beauchamp and Whyte (2019) discuss the benefits of Drama to children's ability to learn and retain Welsh as an additional language. This paper shows that through drama and role play, children not only displayed an improved knowledge in the short term but also had a greater retention of words one year on.

These findings indicate a need for a more informal way of teaching additional languages through song, roleplay and a more hands on approach.

This can be seen during the previous activity where children were encouraged to interact with the Welsh language through song and were given a hands on colour mixing activity to reinforce colour names in the Welsh language.

Brain development:

Bialysok (2011) explains that brains change in response to using additional languages.

Furthermore, Bialystok (no date) expands on this by stating that through managing more than one language the brain is always operational as both languages are always being used within the brain, which aids brain development and results in an improved executive control centre.

However, Bialystok (no date) continues to state that often the bilingual brain is slower at word retrieval because it has two languages to choose from.

Chomsky (no date a) discusses a crucial time frame for language acquisition, which he states was initially thought of by Lennerberg.

That being said, Chomsky (no date b) states that the human brain is not born capable of only one language, and that language is acquired through interactions.

Giannini (no date) acknowledges the benefit of teaching children languages at a young age as the brain is more absorbent, however also states that language learning and being bilingual is beneficial in later life as it is believed to have a positive impact on dementia and Alzheimer's, delaying their effects. This is a view also argued by Bialystok (no date).

Aimin (2013) discusses how socio-cultural theory supports children's second language learning whereby children learn from a more knowledgeable other.

This can be exemplified by Giannini (no date) who discusses dual immersion schools in the USA where English speaking children were taught alongside Spanish speaking children and it was found that this technique closed the gap of learning and progress could be seen.

Contrary to this, Hickey, Lewis and Baker (2013) discuss that immersion has the potential to adversely affect those learners in a setting who are the minority language speakers.

Divergent thinking:

The National Literacy Trust (2022) supports the benefits of learning more than one language stating that this improves children's ability to think critically, a view also supported by Thomson (2015) who found that bilingual children had improved problem solving skills.

Booton *et al* (2021) investigates the effects of bilingualism on children's development of creativity and divergent thinking, in particular whether there are links between language switching and the ability to think outside the box and whether this is linked to the learning of multiple languages or having experienced life through more than one culture.

However Booton *et al* (2021) found that there were no positive effects from bilingualism on divergent thinking.

That being said, Bialystok (no date) believes that bilingualism does not hinder development and that, when word knowledge from home language as well as

setting language is added together, multilingual children often have a larger word knowledge, which is a view also supported by Gort (2019).

Bilingual children may use words from both languages in order to form their sentences, this is known as code mixing and was evidenced in the previous activity for example “lots of lliwiau”.

Gort (2019) explains that when bilingual children use code mixing, it may be viewed negatively, as a sign of a lack of knowledge, however, argues that this is in fact a normal developmental stage and a bilingual child’s way of being creative and flexible.

This view is also supported by Book Trust (2019) who state that children with more than one language may display better flexibility skills.

Furthermore, Cambridge (2023) discusses the benefits of sandwiching, that is mixing both languages together to form sentences, repeating new sentence patterns or words in both languages.

This was evident in the previous activity for example “coch, red, coch”. However Cambridge (2023) does caution that there should not be a reliance on translating every word or sentence.

Links with frameworks and programmes:

Welsh Government (2017a) indicates the importance of revitalizing the Welsh language and plan to almost double Welsh speakers by 2050 to 1 million, which is supported by Welsh language commissioner (no date) who work to provide encouragement for the use of Welsh language and to increase the numbers of the population using the Welsh

In addition Welsh Government (2021) Global Futures plan discusses the changes made to curriculum guidance regarding foreign languages as well as the development of an international language toolkit and supports the advantages to children’s later life experiences when learning international languages.

Additionally Welsh Government (2021) further explains that evidence shows that there is a lack of appreciation of the value of languages on learning.

Cymraeg (2017) states that the Welsh Government plan to create a bilingual Wales with support for Welsh speaking nurseries, schools, teachers, and public services whilst also supporting parents to include Welsh language when interacting with their children.

Such support can be found within Mudiad meithrin, who offer Welsh language childcare, parent and toddler groups as well as support for families and training for practitioners. (Mudiad Meithrin, no date).

That being said ONS (2021) states that between 2011 and 2021 there has been a 1.2% decrease in Welsh speakers.

The previous activity supports Welsh language as it introduces learners to basic Welsh greetings, colours and numbers.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it is evident that learning more than one language is beneficial to brain development, both as a child and in later life.

Languages also have the ability to connect and enable a sense of belonging, breaking down cultural divides and also fostering a sense of ones roots. It is argued that the minor impact on speed of word retrieval as a bilingual is outweighed by the flexibility and development of divergent thinking that learning multiple languages encourages.

