

Critical response to an article that provides evidence of sound knowledge and understanding of themes related to the teaching of Welsh in the English-medium sector.

Curriculum Council of Wales (1989:25) stated that all children in Wales should have the opportunity to be bilingual. Currently there are three methods of teaching Welsh in primary schools in Wales, there is the heritage method where children from Welsh speaking homes embark on Welsh medium learning, immersion where children from English speaking homes are immersed in the Welsh language and taught through the medium of Welsh and you have the more commonly found method of mainstream where children are taught through the medium of English and are taught Welsh as a subject (Morgan, 2018). One factor in the decrease of the Welsh language between the 2001 and 2011 census could be the decrease in the amount of Welsh medium teaching (Baker, 2003). There is a drive by the Welsh Government to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050 and they propose to do this by increasing the number of early years Welsh medium places, including families, providing more opportunities in the workplace for Welsh speakers and statutory education (WAG, 2017). This is a great undertaking but the plan is in action and it can be seen that there are more and more Welsh medium schools available for this to aid the development of our Welsh speakers by 2050 (<http://cymraeg.gov.wales>).

In the article they promote the idea of teaching a second language through the use of other topics such as mathematics. This is content and language integrated learning (CLIL) where

‘Content and language integrated learning’ (CLIL) is a generic term and refers to any educational situation in which an additional language and therefore not the most widely used language of the environment is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself’ (Marsh & Langé 2000: iii).

This method is not currently being used in Wales, we focus more on teaching children their second language as a subject when in English medium schools. Some parents who have moved to Wales from English speaking countries choose to place their child in a Welsh medium school where they are immersed in the language and acquire their language through everyday interaction. This article shows that there is a higher attainment when the children were taught through the medium of their second language as the concentration is on the content not the language, therefore the language is then acquired and this is supported by other research such as Coyle, 2007.

There are many who think that children should be taught in one language. Huw Lewis (2012) states that children who are taught through the medium of English have better attainment levels in mathematics than their counterparts who are taught through the medium of Welsh. This contradicts the research carried out within the article for example ‘Filipino bilinguals seemed to perform better when the mathematical problem solving task was in English’. (Bernado & Gaerlan, 2011). Baker (2011) suggests that children who learn in their first language have the equipment to answer questions while in the classroom. If you set tasks in their second language this decreases the child’s thinking power. When the curriculum content is demanding then using both the first language and the second language together can prove to be successful and even develop their second language.

Estyn (2014) has reported that children who finish their Welsh GCSE cannot be regarded as bilingual as they are not able to communicate in the language in their everyday lives. The Welsh Assembly Government (2017) have issued an action plan for 2017-2021 and within this have recommended that children need to be inspired by teachers and learning experiences to be able to use the Welsh language within their everyday lives. The drive to keep the Welsh language alive has influenced all areas not only education. There are more jobs requiring the Welsh language to be spoken allowing for the children who are learning now to have more opportunities within Wales to gain employment and possible careers. If children are leaving school without the use of the Welsh language then we have to review the way Welsh is taught as a second language.

In the article it states that using another subject to teach a second language enhances cognitive learning. This in turn enables the children to learn about the subject and develop their second language. Although it is noted that the children who have questions posed to them in their first language from the knowledge learned in the second language find this more difficult to do (Bernado & Gaerlan, 2011). The Welsh Government, Donaldson, Estyn and most consortia agree that the way we teach Welsh second language needs to be improved and altered to achieve the one millions speakers in Wales that the government wish to have by 2050. Donaldson (2015) has made Welsh second language an important and prominent part of Success Futures, wishing to ensure that the goal is achieved. He wants our children to be bilingual, knowledgeable and proud to be able to speak their country's language.

The research shows that children who learn through the use of both languages have higher attainment. (Bernado & Gaerlan, 2011). The article shows both sides of the argument but they are critically reviewing many pieces of research. As the article continues the argument for the teaching of the second language through another subject becomes stronger. In Wales this strategy would be difficult to implement in Wales as we do not have enough confident Welsh speaking teachers. It is felt that a more immersive way of teaching would allow children to acquire the language quicker and at a higher standard. (Knutzen & Kennedy, 2012). Having moved from England to Wales at the age of six and having a good grounding in the English language prior to moving to Wales an immersive form of learning Welsh enabled my Welsh second language to become on the same level as a Welsh first language child and therefore was sent a Welsh first language school where the majority of the GSCE's were conducted through the medium of Welsh. Siblings of the writer had a more difficult time in learning Welsh as second language and as a result of the way Welsh second language is taught they did not learn the language and cannot speak Welsh. Children who are taught through the medium of Welsh have all of their lessons in Welsh throughout the foundation phase, meaning that they have a good grounding in their first language before attempting to learn a second language. This is supported by Ab Rashid et al (2016) who believe that there must be a certain amount of grounding in a first language to be able to learn a second language to be confident to speak the language.

In New Zealand the development of a second language comes through learning about the country, speaking, listening, reading, writing, accuracy and fluency. Through the use of these children expected to interact with each other in the second language to make meaning and practice the language. (NZCurriculum). This may be a way forward for Wales, to have more input on a more regular basis with the opportunity to be able to converse with their peers in a lesson and on the playground. Donaldson (2015) suggests that Welsh should be incorporated

into each lesson to enable the children to hear the language and practice their conversational aspect of the language. This article supports the Donaldson view through the use of 'Content and language integrated learning'. (Bernado & Gaerlan, 2011). With the implantation of the new curriculum the development of Welsh second language will hopefully allow the children in education have the confidence to use the language in everyday situation. The problem faced is that there are many homes where Welsh is not spoken and therefore the children do not have the opportunity to practice their language skills in everyday settings. It would be suggested that children are given more opportunity in school and in the local area to use their second language to develop their skills further.

It has been noted by Estyn (2014) that there is good provision for the foundation phase but then the development of Welsh second language however when the children reach key stage two and three there is very little provision for the development of the Welsh second language. In New Zealand many of the parents have learnt the second language their child has learnt and can therefore help to develop their child's second language through practice. In Wales the children have one lesson a week if at all and these are simple sentence structures that are not developed to their full potential, where to date it has not been witnessed that the children do not get the opportunity to converse with each other and practice their language skills needed to develop their second language further. It is also noted with Estyn (2014) that teachers do not have the confidence themselves as their Welsh language skills are minimal or non existent. As a result of the new curriculum and the Welsh Government plan for more Welsh speaker in Wales there has been a large number of teachers going on sabbatical to learn Welsh to allow them to be able to develop their learners language more effectively. Migration has also had an impact on the development of the Welsh language as parents who are from another country speaking only their mother tongue have difficulty with learning English without learning Welsh as a third language.

Within the article it can be seen that the content and language integrated learning way of teaching Welsh as a second language could work and is supported by the review of the Welsh Curriculum, Successful Future (2015). Immersion is also recommended as a way of teaching Welsh second language, many children who speak English at home have been sent to Welsh medium schools and they acquire the language to a first language level. This shows that the method of teaching a second language that we have in Wales currently is not working and produces some of the worst results, therefore the hope for the future would be that we change our method and use a method that has proven to work. Welsh second language is a very important part of the Welsh curriculum and this has been identified and a plan has been implemented to enhance and increase the number of Welsh speakers in Wales. We should be proud of our heritage and language, and be wanting to learn our native language. It should be a want not I have to. It is hoped that the Welsh language does not die out and that the people of Wales hold on to their heritage and language.

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