

Hello, my name is Stephanie Barrett, Student number 2306819 and I am going to talk to you about Bilingualism and Multilingualism within the Early Years.

I am going to begin by defining bilingualism and multilingualism and identifying the benefits as well as the positive effects learning additional languages has on brain development and the growth of executive skills and divergent thinking. Lastly, identifying ways to support children with English as a Second Language (EAL).

Definition

Bilingualism according to DCELLS, (2008, p. 11. Cited in Siencyn, 2019) is the ability to, speak, read and write in two languages". Bialystok and Werker (2018) believe that over half the world's population is bilingual.

Baker (2011) and Waterford (2019) identifies two different types of bilingualism, simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. They state simultaneous is where two languages are learnt at the same time, before the age of 3. Gort (2019) and Cornelius (2022) emphasise children will mix between them; this is known as 'code switching' and is normal, a form of processing. Whereas Lightbrown and Spada, (2013) suggests there could be a minor language delay.

Additionally sequential bilingualism, according to Baker (2011) and Waterford (2019) when a second language is learnt later on. Hickey and de Mejia (2014) support stating alongside developing their 'mother tongue' in the early years, immersing the additional language brings benefits, especially if the additional language is native, creating a dual language.

Benefits

A benefit of being bilingual or multilingual offers greater social experiences, according to Bright and Filippi (2019) and Booton *et al.* (2021) it enables the expansion who you can communicate with and offering such a unique opportunity to embrace and understand where the language derives from, revealing the history, culture, and opportunities. Moreover, Mc Tavish (2021) suggest identifying children from all backgrounds and providing experiences such as viewing art, visiting the theatre, museums and offering opportunities to listen to cultural music.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government (2019) states the importance of their curriculum as it is to provide the best possible start for every child and is to offer experiences to deepen knowledge and develop skills in this forever changing society and supporting learners to become ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world.

Additionally, Schmid (2016) stresses a language due to the lack of use can become dormant. Smith (2015) identifies that Wales created the Curriculum Cymreig, with the emphasis on keeping the Welsh culture alive as well as the language, additionally The WG (2021) stated they have invested £2.2million to provide immersion support throughout Wales and with a goal of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Furthermore, another benefit of learning an additional language according to Bialystok and Werker (2018) and Booton *et al.* (2021) bilingualism increases the cognitive processes of the brain and language acquisition, enabling connections to others, and longer lasting benefits including greater memory, attention, and learning. Additionally, Antonio (2018) identifies the benefit of learning at least two languages throughout life may delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Moreover, Waterford (2019) suggests an additional language strengthens working memory and attention span which can benefit academically.

My activity supports young children learning an additional language as I introduced the children to naming facial parts of the body, adding to what they have learnt previously, supporting preserving the Welsh Language.

Brain development/healthy mind – how it effects it

Moving forward on to brain development, Chomsky (1959, cited in Smidt, 2016) believed children were born ready to learn language, a concept he called Language Acquisition, whereas Skinner (1957) believed children acquire a language solely through listening and repeating adults.

Moreover, Brandt, Gebrian and Slevc (2012) highlight the ability that newborns and young children can learn new languages through song and music, capturing the child's attention, providing the child with an incite of how the language sounds before grasping the understanding, therefore the child is able to hear different features of speech and reduces confusion.

Antoniou (2018, cited Skibba, 2018) states the brain is made up of grey matter that consists of neurons, providing a role in processing information, muscle control as well as sensory perception and decision-making. The brain is also made up of white matter, which sends messages, the brain then grows becoming more specific.

During a study between a monolingual brain and a bilingual brain, it appears a bilingual brain performs differently than a monolingual brain. Seeing an increase in grey matter, creating more cells. **Furthermore, Cornelius (2022) states bilingualism influences the brain flexibility, suggesting the ability to effectively plan, retain and retrieve information due to exercising the brain when switching between languages.**

Divergent Thinking

Moving forward, divergent thinking according to Guilford (1968, cited in Greenway and Hutchings, 2022) is having original ideas, thinking creatively and problem solving. Booton *et al.* (2021) suggests there are cognitive benefits growing up bilingual, for example, diverse cultural experiences can foster divergent thinking, but also states from studies showing that there is no evidence of divergent thinking advantages for bilingual children than monolingual.

Furthermore, Robinson (2010), believes divergent thinking is more than just thinking creatively, he emphasises originality, exploration and thinking in multiple ways. A study of kindergarten children with a high level of divergent thinking, over time the level decreased, he also suggested this is to be from overstructured childhood in education. Moreover, Vygotsky (cited in Gray and McBlain, 2015) believed children through pretend play develops divergent thinking, as it provides the opportunity for the children to make sense of their world around them, as play is influenced by social and cultural behaviours.

Add in a might

Chomsky – LAD – rules – convergent thinking – more possible solutions

How to support EAL / WAL

According to Hickey, Lewis and Baker (2013) using the immersion method to support children learning an additional language, children can make linguistic connections, when the mother tongue is referred to constantly. Furthermore, Hickey and de Mejia (2014) and the WG (2022) state within the early years' children are keen learners, with adults providing hands on experiences, props, simplification, and repetition and providing playful activities, children are more likely to experiment and become less self-conscious about errors. Kotkov (2021) from Montessori, identifies 'The Sandwich Method' using the additional language around the 'mother tongue'. Additionally, Cornelius (2022) suggests adding visual aids to support children with language delay

In my activity, you could see I used physical props that the children could identify in their 'mother tongue' for some children it is an additional language, but they were able to identify the items and building on what they know, then I used Welsh in addition to the English word, using the 'sandwich technique'. I also provided time for the children to explore in a scavenger hunt repeating the language in an active way, as well as seeing the written form.

Conclusion

To conclude the effect of bilingualism/multilingualism within the early years, suggests the child should be fluent in their mother tongue, before sequential learning begins, unless language is developed simultaneously.

The impacts brain development by enhancing grey matter in specific areas of the brain, developing linguistic awareness, increasing cognitive skills, attention span, multi-tasking and potentially delaying Alzheimer's disease.

To reflect on the future, offering children an additional language, especially in Wales, Welsh, it enables the culture, language and history to stay alive and offering the children more opportunities in the future.

Although there does not appear to be a direct link with divergent thinking and being bilingual, providing children time, authentic resources, and play can support this development and grow creatively.

Thank you for listening.