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AI : No AI used in this assignment.

Part 1

https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2404369_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/ECEY4010%2010-minute%20video.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=54PnJy

Part 2

What is Bilingualism?

There is often a misconception when defining the term bilingualism, some people find that to be bilingual you must be equally fluent in two languages. However, this is not always the case, Hoffmann (2014) defines bilingualism as the use of two or more languages in everyday life, this definition is more inclusive and realistic than one based on fluency. On the other hand, NALDIC (2011) highlights how defining the term bilingualism is challenging because it involves a wide range of characteristics. Some people consider themselves to be bilingual because they have the ability to orally use two languages, while other people might be more dominant reading and writing in two languages. Therefore, the meaning of bilingual differs depending on the individual person (NALDIC, 2011).

This essay will highlight two benefits of bilingualism within the early years, whilst also exploring Welsh as an additional language in children. It will look deeper into the impact of a bilingual child's brain development and divergent thinking, analysing frameworks and programmes that underpin bilingualism within the early years. This essay will also refer to the video of a practitioner conducting a 10-minute bilingual activity, which can be seen in part one of this portfolio.

The benefits of bilingualism

Bilingual learning can have many different benefits to an individual's development. One benefit to an individual from the use of of bilingual learning is cognitive benefits. As suggested by Xia et al., (2022) bilingual learning can promote the development of creativity through stronger inhibition and cognitive flexibility, this research provides a link between bilingual learning and creativity. St Augustin College (2024) also recognises that being bilingual improves individuals problem-solving skills; this is from the constant switching between different languages which enhances cognitive flexibility. Studies have also shown that bilingual people understand word problems and math concepts, better than individuals who are non-bilingual. St Augustin College (2024) suggests other cognitive benefits of bilingualism, such as delayed

cognitive decline and increased cognitive reserve. This means that being bilingual can potentially delay the onset of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's by several years, this is down to the mental workout involved in using two languages which keeps the brain active and engaged.

Another benefit of bilingual learning is the cultural and social benefits. Being bilingual offers more than just personal benefits; it provides a significant advantage to society and culture too. Sutton (2021) discusses how bilingual individuals are much more likely to recognise cultural sensitivity, will be able to manage situations in society open-mindedly and be able to adapt easier when engaging in different communities. It is also recognised that bilingual individuals are able to engage well with new cultures and people, and adapt to their culture, this allows bilingual people to be able to cope better with changes in their lives and surroundings. Bilingual individuals might have increased social opportunities which non-bilingual individuals do not have. Watts (2025) discusses how being bilingual can open the door to social opportunities whether it is through travel, community involvement or professional circumstances. This could be things such as cultural events, engage with a wider range of people, international meetings and participating in local traditions.

Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL)

The Welsh language is now taught as a compulsory subject in schools all across Wales. With the new Welsh curriculum being introduced in English-medium schools, the use of incidental Welsh is actively encouraged by staff and children (Welsh Government, 2020). Welsh as an additional language (WAL), is when an individual whose first language is neither Welsh or English, is attending Welsh-medium education and requires support to fully engage with the curriculum taught in Welsh (Welsh Government, 2014). Children with additional learning needs (ALN) can sometimes go unnoticed when studying Welsh as an additional language. The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2023) highlights the problem which is that most local authorities cannot provide Welsh-medium provision for many different ALN and calls for a full review of Welsh-medium ALN provision.

The Welsh Government (2019) introduced the 5-stage model of WAL acquisition, which contains the five steps in becoming fluent in a second language. Focussing

on stage A and B which is New to English and Early Acquisition, where an individual has minimal or no literacy and oracy and where they need a lot of support developing the language, this is where a child needs repetition, short and quick words/phrases and encouragement from an adult. As supported in the 10-minute bilingual activity as seen in part 1, the practitioner is demonstrating how introducing lesser amounts of Welsh can have a significant impact on the child being able to recall what they are learning. The practitioner is also creating a fun and exciting atmosphere by singing a song to help the child learn the different colours of the rainbow in Welsh. The 5-stage model of WAL acquisition also relates to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory. Kurt (2020) explains how Vygotsky's theory supports children by assessing what the child can do, what can they do to help the child and what the child can not do. This is similar to the 5-stage model of WAL acquisition because when an individual is learning Welsh, practitioners are able to assess these things, in order to help the individual achieve their goal.

The effects of Bilingualism on Brain Development

It is being found that bilingualism has shown to effect brain development which influences various cognitive processes. Kuipers and Thierry (2015) highlighted the study which found that bilingual upbringing affects speech perception in one language. Monolingual and bilingual toddlers were recorded while that listened to spoken words preceded by pictures and they found that toddlers displayed an early frontal positivity when words matched up with pictures, unlike monolingual toddlers. These findings suggested that bilingualism enhances attention during speech perception.

Brain scans of bilingual individuals have found greater Gray-matter density in the inferior parietal cortex, which is an area in the brain's language-dominant left hemisphere (Perry, 2013). Perry (2013) also discusses how it has been found that individuals who are fluent in two languages enhances a person's ability to concentrate and also protects against the onset on dementia and other age-related cognitive decline. Michigan State University (2019) highlights that between the ages of 0-3, the brains of young children are suited to learn a second language as the brain is in its most flexible stage. It is seen that when a child to learns a second

language during this time, it is as easy for them as it is when they learn to walk and learn their first language.

Divergent thinking

Play has been shown to support the development of divergent thinking abilities, as divergent thinking is a key cognitive process that is involved in play. Children who show greater imagination in pretend play, often excel at divergent thinking (Hoffman and Russ, 2012).

As discussed previously, bilingualism has been linked with a range of linguistic and other cognitive skills, such as creativity, enhanced diverse cultural experiences and more social opportunities. However, Booton et al., (2021) discusses how being bilingual does not show an increase in the individuals divergent thinking skills. It was concluded that after previous studies, of monolingual and bilingual children in schools, bilingualism has numerous benefits, but it does not enhance divergent thinking in children.

However, despite these findings, Mukhija and Rajan (2025) displayed research findings from when the relationship between divergent thinking, the cognitive process of generating multiple unique solutions and multilingualism was explored. Numerous studies have found that bilingual speakers perform better than monolingual speakers, in divergent thinking.

Framework

In Wales, Welsh language development within the foundation phase is important. ... states how young children within the foundation phase in English-medium schools will be given the opportunity through play and learning, to build a sense of familiarity with Welsh, to encourage further language learning and positive attitudes towards Welsh. The Welsh Language Development Area of Learning in the Foundation Phase means learning the language gradually and naturally, praise for effort, fun and enthusiasm and a rich and lively environment.

As seen in the 10-minute bilingual activity recording, in part 1, you can see the practitioner is introducing colours of the rainbow, to the children in a fun and enthusiastic way. By encouraging the children to get involved and sing along to easy and accessible songs, in order to develop their Welsh language skills. This idea supports the framework of the Welsh Language Development within the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2018).

In Wales, it is seen as vital to introduce Welsh to young children to encourage the use of the Welsh Language. One way in which this is promoted, is the BookStart and BookTrust Cymru. This is a campaign where health visitors introduce two different packs, one called The Bookstart Baby pack which is gifted at a child's 6-month health check, which contains a bilingual book, a booklet with ideas for sharing books/stories/rhymes, a finger puppet and a leaflet with information about joining your local library (BookTrust, 2024). This supports the idea of starting Welsh language at an early age where children are more likely to retain the information, as seen above.

In Summary, it is important to embrace bilingualism during the early years, as it enhances communication skills, cognitive skills and gives a further cultural understanding. These skills are all vital for an individual's future. It has also been explored that early language exposure and bilingual education are crucial for holistic child development.

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