

2025

Welsh Language and Cultural Identity in Education



Figure 1: Welsh Flag (FreeP!k ND)

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this portfolio is to critically examine three educational activities that were delivered in the writers school setting. These activities are designed to promote Welsh language and cultural identity within the writers secondary school setting.

Schools play a pivotal role in embedding Welsh language and culture into everyday learning experiences, ensuring that learners develop a strong sense of belonging and pride in their heritage (Crick et al 2023; Hodges & Jones, 2022). Promoting the Welsh language and Welsh identity is an essential responsibility of secondary schools in Wales. Wales has a rich linguistic and cultural heritage and sustaining this identity is a key priority for the Welsh Government, as outlined in policies such as Cymraeg 2050 (Welsh Government 2017) and the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government 2022).

The importance of this work is further contextualised by the historical repression of the Welsh language, which for centuries was marginalised through legal, educational and cultural policies imposed by the English and later British state. The Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542 excluded Welsh from public administration and the legal system, while nineteenth-century influences such as the 1847 Blue Books and practices like the “Welsh Not” in schools contributed to the stigmatisation of the language. Although significant progress has been made through legislation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the Welsh Language Acts and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, the legacy of suppression continues to shape contemporary debates around linguistic equality and cultural identity. This historical context highlights the importance of schools as key sites for language revitalisation and cultural affirmation (Khleif, 2023).

Secondary age learners are developing a deeper understanding of their identity, heritage and place in the wider world. The curriculum for Wales and national Welsh Government strategies place strong emphasis on ensuring that young people leave school as confident Welsh speakers, culturally aware individuals and informed citizens (Morris & Jones, 2020).

This portfolio presents three activities delivered within the writers secondary school setting. Each activity aims to promote Welsh language use or explore Welsh cultural, historical or geographical features in meaningful ways suitable for young adolescents.

The activities address the linguistic needs of KS3 and KS4 learners, utilising interactive and inquiry- based pedagogy, and are fully aligned with Welsh policy expectations.

This portfolio also examines theoretical perspectives, evaluates the impact of the activities and reflects critically on areas for development.

2. Rationale

Why Promote Welsh Language and Culture in Secondary Education?

By secondary level, learners often begin to form stronger opinions about their identity and may either embrace or disengage from the Welsh language depending on how it is presented. Research and inspection evidence highlight that engagement is more likely when learning experiences are authentic, relevant and age-appropriate, enabling learners see Welsh as a living, meaningful language rather than a purely academic subject (Andrews & Lewis, 2017). Estyn emphasises the importance of promoting a strong Welsh culture through purposeful and motivating activities that reflect learners' real-life experiences and interests, particularly in secondary education (Estyn 2021; Morris & Jones, 2020).

The rationale behind choosing these activities stems from four core priorities:

1. Strengthening the Welsh Language

Welsh is a statutory subject up to the age of 16. However, many learners lack confidence speaking Welsh, even if they can read or write it. Authentic real-world activities help bridge this gap (Lewis et.al 2012).

2. Deepening Cultural Understanding

Teenagers benefit from critical engagement with Welsh history, rather than simplified narratives. Exploring events such as the life of Owain Glyndwr develops analytical and evaluative thinking (Welsh Government 2022).

3. Appreciation of Welsh Geography

Young people should understand the landscape, industries and places that shape modern Wales, particularly as they begin to consider careers, travel and civic participation (Roberts 2013).

4. Meeting Policy Requirements (WAG Framework)

The activities reflect the aims of the Curriculum for Wales and Wales' bilingual agenda, ensuring compliance with national expectations (Welsh Government 2022).

2.1 WAG Policies and Framework Links

Curriculum for Wales 2022

Curriculum for Wales emphasises embedding Welsh across the curriculum and ensuring learners become “ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world” (Welsh Government, 2022; Smith, 2021).

Secondary Schools must ensure:

- Learners become “ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the World”
- Welsh is embedded across Languages, Literacy and Communication, not just in Welsh lessons.
- Humanities AoLE deeply explores Welsh history, culture and geography.
- Learning is contextualised within local community (Welsh Government 2022).

Donaldson's Successful Futures

Donaldson's Successful Futures highlights the importance of authentic, real-life learning experiences rooted in Welsh identity. Recent research reinforces that bilingual education must be integrated across subjects to be effective (Hodges & Jones, 2022).

Donaldson recommends:

- A curriculum deeply rooted in Wales' identity and culture.
- A shift towards authentic, real-life learning experiences.
- Interdisciplinary approaches, such as combining geography with language or history with drama.

Curriculum Cymraeg

Secondary Schools must ensure:

- Welsh cultural identity is embedded throughout subjects e.g. exploring Welsh authors in English, Welsh landscapes in geography and Welsh historical events in humanities.
- Learners develop pride and understanding of Welshness in a modern global context.

Cymraeg 2050

Secondary schools contribute significantly to Wales' ambition of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Teenagers require:

- Regular opportunities for conversational Welsh.
- Confidence-building experiences
- Understanding of why the language matters for future employment and culture.

2.2 Significance of Secondary Schools in Sustaining Welsh Language, Culture, History and Geography.

Secondary schools play a crucial role in the continuity of Welsh identity by shaping attitudes, providing deeper historical knowledge and preparing learners for bilingual futures (Thomas & Williams, 2018). Teenagers require meaningful, confidence-building opportunities to use Welsh socially and academically (Hodges, 2016).

Secondary schools contribution also includes:

1. Maintaining Welsh Language Progression.

Learners build on primary-level Welsh and refine their skills through structured lessons, group work, debate and written tasks.

2. Shaping Attitudes Towards Welsh.

Teenagers often decide whether they see Welsh as relevant, Schools must provide meaningful reasons to value the language e.g. careers in public services requiring Welsh.

3. Teaching Deeper Historical Knowledge.

Secondary education allows a more nuanced understanding of historical figures such as Owain Glyndwr, the industrial revolution in Wales, mining communities and political devolution.

4. Developing National and Global Awareness

Learners Explore:

- Welsh geography
- Local environmental issues
- Welsh contributions to science, literature and politics.

5. Preparing Students for Bilingual Careers.

Many future jobs in Wales (education, health, government, media) increasingly require Welsh language skills.

6. Embedding Welsh Culture into Adolescents' Lives

At secondary age, learners can engage with:

- Welsh music (contemporary and traditional)
- Welsh literature
- National events such as Dydd Miwsig Cymru or Eisteddfod yr Urdd.
- Welsh political identity and devolution.

3. Activities Delivered (Secondary School Setting)

The following activities were planned and delivered with KS3 and KS4 learners in mind.

3.1 Activity 1: “ Ar Daith o Gymru” – Geography Project (KS3)

This activity aligns with inquiry-based learning approaches recommended in contemporary geography education (Roberts, 2019). It supports bilingual development by embedding Welsh vocabulary in authentic research tasks (Hammond & Gibbons, 2015).

Purpose

To deepen learners' understanding of Welsh geography while increasing functional use of Welsh language in a cross-curricular context.

Description

Learners undertook a research-based project exploring different Welsh regions. In groups, they were assigned regions such as:

- Gogledd Cymru (North Wales)
- De Cymru (South Wales)
- Ceredigion
- Powys
- Sir Benfro

They researched:

- Major towns
- Welsh place-names origins
- Key geographical features (rivers, mountains, national parks)
- Economic activities (tourism, farming, industry)

(See Appendices A)

Students produced a bilingual digital presentation including Welsh sentences such as:

- Mae Gogledd Cymru yn enwog am...
- Yn y rhesnbarth hwn, mae...
- Rydyn ni'n argymhell I dwristiaid ymweld a...

Why this Works for Secondary Learners

- Encourages independent inquiry skills
- Integrates ICT and literacy6w
- Builds authentic Welsh vocabulary
- Connects to Humanities AoEL expectations

3.2 Activity 2: “Owain Glyndwr – A Historical Investigation” (KS3/KS4)

Exploring Glyndŵr through source analysis reflects best practice in history education, which encourages critical thinking and multiple interpretations (Evans, 2016). Using

bilingual scaffolds supports learners' linguistic and analytical development (Mercer & Littleton, 2017).

Purpose

To explore Owain Glyndwr's rebellion using higher-order thinking skills while incorporating Welsh language phrases for analysis and discussion.

Description

Students examined primary and secondary sources, including:

- Medieval illustrations (See Appendices B)
- Extracts from Welsh chronicles
- Historical interpretation
- Maps of Glyndwr's territories

They completed tasks such as:

- A role-play debate: "Owain Glyndwr: Hero or Rebel?"
- A bilingual essay paragraph using scaffolded phrases:
 - Yn fy marn i...
 - Mae'r dystiolaeth yn dangos...
 - Fodd bynnag...(See Appendices C)
- A timeline using both English and Welsh Terminology (See Appendices D)

This is Appropriate for Secondary Student Because:

- Encourages critical thinking
- Involves source analysis – a core KS3/KS4 skill
- Supports GCSE – level expectations for constructing arguments

3.3 Activity 3: “Blad o Gymru” – Secondary Cultural Event (KS3/KS4)

Cultural events strengthen identity and belonging, particularly when they incorporate contemporary Welsh culture (Smith, 2021). Digital elements and modern music also align with current recommendations for engaging teenage learners (Morris, 2023).

Purpose

To expose students to modern and traditional Welsh culture and encourage conversational Welsh in informal contexts (See Appendices E)

Description

A school-wide cultural event was held where students created stalls related to:

- Welsh cuisine (cawl, pic ear y maen, Welsh rarebit)
- Welsh music (Dydd Miwsig Cymru; modern artists like Alffa, Mellt, Gwenno)
- Welsh sports
- Welsh film (e.g. Yr Ymadawiad, Patagonia)
- Welsh literature and poetry (RS Thomas, Kate Roberts, Caryl Lewis)

Students presented their stalls partly in Welsh. Short Welsh dialogues were encouraged:

- Croeso i'n stondin ni!
- Wyt ti eisiau blasu'r cawl?
- Dyma wybodaeth am ein cantorion Cymraeg.

Why this Works for Secondary Students

- Appeals to teenagers' interests (music, food, identity)
- Builds confidence through peer-led learning
- Provides a real reason to speak Welsh socially
- Strengthens cultural pride

4. Learning Theory and Application to the Activities

Vygotsky – Social constructivism (1978)

Vygotsky's social constructivism is evident in group tasks that promote collaborative Welsh language use (Mercer & Littleton, 2017). Group projects in Activity 1 and collaborative stalls in Activity 3 support learning within the Zone of Proximal Development. Peer dialogue in Welsh is a powerful language learning tool at this age.

Bruner – Scaffolding (1976)

Teachers provided sentence starters, modelled pronunciation and offered step-by-step research guidance. This scaffolding enabled students to work independently after initial support (Hammond & Gibbons, 2015).

Kolb – Experiential Learning (1984)

Kolb's experiential learning cycle is embedded in the cultural event and debate they both require learners to:

1. Experience
2. Reflect
3. Conceptualise
4. Apply

- For example, using Welsh phrases authentically in front of peers (Hodges, 2016).

Bandura – Social Learning Theory (1977)

Bandura's social learning theory explains how peer modelling increases Welsh language confidence. Teenagers learn language through observation, imitation and modelling. Seeing peers confidently use Welsh encourages others to try (Hodges, 2016).

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985)

Self-Determination Theory highlights the importance of autonomy and relevance, both of which were central to the activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Teenagers are motivated when activities support:

- Autonomy- Choosing research topics or stall themes
- Competence- scaffolded language structures
- Relatedness- cultural connections strengthen belonging

5. Evaluation of the Activities

5.1 What Worked Well

1. Engagement

Secondary students responded well because the activities felt relevant and modern, especially the cultural event. Cultural relevance supports identity formation in adolescence (Morris & Jones, 2020).

2. Improved Welsh Confidence

Students used more spontaneous Welsh phrases, particularly during informal conversations at the event. Increased Welsh confidence aligns with research showing that low-pressure, social contexts improve language use (Hodges, 2016).

3. Cultural and Historical Understanding

Students developed deeper awareness of Welsh identity, especially in discussions on Glyndwr.

4. Skills Development

Activities Supported critical thinking, research, ICT, communication and collaboration.

5. Inclusion and Differentiation

Learners of varying Welsh ability accessed tasks through scaffolding, visuals and group roles (Hammond & Gibbons, 2015).

5.2 What could be Improved and How

1. More Speaking Opportunities

Some students avoided speaking Welsh.

Improvement:

Introduce structured paired-speaking tasks each lesson, such as “2-minute Welsh conversations.” More structured speaking tasks would support oral proficiency (Hodges & Jones, 2022).

2. Addresses Mixed Welsh Proficiency

High achievers found some tasks too easy; others struggled.

Improvement:

Tiered tasks sheets with differentiated Welsh structures.

3. Time Constraints

Depth of research was limited

Improvement:

Extended activity timescales or set flipped-learning homework.

4. Need for More Digital Resources

Students expected high-quality media.

Improvement:

Use GIS mapping tools, VR tours of Wales historical sites, or digital Welsh dictionaries. Digital enhancements align with recent findings on technology-supported Welsh learning (Morris, 2023).

5. Cultural Event Logistics

Noise and crowding made Welsh conversation difficult.

Improvement:

Stagger group visits or use outdoor areas.

5.3 Elements That Require No Change

1. Cultural Relevance

Exploring modern Welsh music and food was highly motivating, Cultural authenticity and modern Welsh content align with current recommendations for teenage engagement (Smith, 2021)..

2. Role-play and Debate

Teenagers enjoyed expressing strong opinions about history. This method supports GCSE analytical skills (Evans, 2016)

3. Inquiry-Based Research

Independent research aligns with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales and prepares learners for KS4 coursework (Welsh Government 2022).

4. Scaffolding Approach

Sentence starters and bilingual glossaries were essential and effective.

6. Conclusion

This portfolio demonstrates how secondary school can successfully promote Welsh language, culture, history and geography through engaging, age-appropriate activities aligned with Welsh Government policies and curricular expectations.

The activities provided meaningful opportunities for KS3 and KS4 learners to develop functional Welsh language skills, deepen cultural understanding and critically analyse historical narratives. Learning theories support the pedagogical approach taken and evaluation shows substantial positive impact on learners' engagement and identity development.

Although improvements could enhance future delivery - such as more speaking opportunities and better digital resources – the core activities were successful, culturally rich and developmentally appropriate for secondary-aged learners.

Secondary schools remain vital in shaping bilingual, culturally informed young people who can contribute to Wales' future as outlined in Cymraeg 2050. By embedding

Welshness across subjects, experiences and daily school life, secondary educators help sustain and celebrate Wales' unique heritage.

7. Appendices

A- KS3 bilingual research project template.

B- Comic book of the life of Owain Glyndwr.



C-Welsh sentence starter sheet for debate “Owain Glyndwr, Hero or Rebel?”

D- Time line of Owain Glyndwr's life.



E- Assessment checklist for spoken Welsh.

Assessment Checklist for Spoken Welsh
Rhestr Wrio Aseu ar gyfer Cymraeg Llafar

Student Name / Enw'r Dyddio: _____

Date / Dyddiad: _____

Assessment Criteria / Meini Prawf Aseu:

Criteria / Meini Prawf Aseu	Rating 1 to 5 (1-5)	Comments / Sylwadau
Grammar / Gramer		
Vocabulary / Ffwrddfa		
Fluency / Ffwrddfa		
Comprehension / Deallusrwydd		
Overall Comments / Sylwadau Cyffwrddol		

F- Cultural event Plan/ Order of the day.

Bla o Gymru- Wales Today and Yesterday

Objectives / Amcanion

- Enhance students' understanding of Welsh culture and heritage.
- Develop students' communication skills in Welsh.
- Promote students' understanding of Welsh history and traditions.

Event Structure / Strwythur Digwyddiad (3 Awd)

1. Welcome & Introduction / Croeso a Chwilio (15 munud)
Guests will be welcomed by the host and given a brief overview of the day's activities.
2. Welsh Culture Experience / Trefnadau Cymraeg (45 munud)
Guests will participate in a series of activities designed to enhance their understanding of Welsh culture and heritage.
3. Music & Dance Showcase / Sioed Ddawns a Chwilio (45 munud)
Guests will be treated to a performance by a group of talented Welsh musicians and dancers.
4. Language Challenge Zones / Heriau (30 munud)
Guests will participate in a series of language challenges designed to test their Welsh skills.
5. Cultural Quiz & Reflection / Cwiliad a Phlynydd (30 munud)
Guests will participate in a quiz on Welsh culture and history, followed by a reflection on the day's activities.

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