

Celebrating
Language and
Culture – belonging
to Wales
ECIE5004

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Rationale

Welsh (Cymraeg) is the oldest language in Britain dating back possibly 4,000 years (BBC, Yr Iaith, 2024). The Welsh language has survived through the centuries to still be spoken today in Wales and Welsh speaking communities around the world including Patagonia. It has survived time but now faces a decline in Welsh speakers over several decades. The Welsh Government have made several pledges and initiatives to encourage, promote and develop the strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers. It has currently deployed the latest initiative of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050. In order to understand the context both historical, political, social and geographical there has to be an overview and understanding of what has happened to the language over the centuries. The history of the Welsh language is vast and complicated with historical and political context playing its part. For example, the Acts of Union joining England and Wales in 1536 banned Welsh from being spoken. This is an example of the difficulties facing Welsh speakers and how they kept their language and culture alive in the face of adversity.

At the beginning of the 20th century English was the dominant language in Wales. The Welsh Language Act of 1967 gave Welsh the same status as English. Further Acts were passed in 1993 and 2011 unifying and giving the Welsh Language its rightful place and its citizens the right to freely speak their native tongue. During this time many campaigned for the right to speak Welsh and in 1993 the Welsh Language Board was formed to promote and facilitate the Welsh Language. This was replaced in 2012 by the Welsh Language Service. To support the language the Welsh Language Standards came into operation in March 2015 which created a legal framework for promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language. To encourage the speaking and learning of the Welsh language the National Curriculum in Wales in 1995 made Welsh a compulsory subject up to GCSE level for all learners.

Here is a language spoken and written since the sixth century, still a native language for a significant minority, and to want to keep it, to insist on keeping it, is then as natural as breathing (Williams, 2021). Understanding our language, it could be argued is an integral and binding part of our culture. The Welsh language is hundreds of years old and as most research would suggest needs to be preserved as part of the Welsh culture and heritage. The Welsh words of ‘Hiraeth’ and ‘Cynefin’ sense the belonging of the Welsh language and the importance of community and culture in being able to speak your own language. The ‘belonging’ aspect is the sense of being part of something or a community. The biggest reform in Welsh education came from the Donaldson Review in 2015. ‘The teaching and learning of Welsh is a priority for the Welsh government (Donaldson et al, 2015). These changes again reinforced the government’s priority to increase and promote the Welsh language this time using the education system.

The Donaldson Review led to the new Curriculum in Wales which was launched in 2022 and is currently still being embedding within our school settings. The 2021 Census results show that 17.8% of the population in Wales can speak Welsh. That's 538,000 people aged three or older. However, the biggest decrease in the percentage of Welsh speakers was seen in the 5-15 age category, from 40.3% in 2011 to 34.8% in 2021 (ONS, 2022). It could be argued that even though the educational reforms have placed greater emphasis on speaking Welsh and learning about your culture the statistics tell a different story and could suggest a lack of engagement from the targeted age group. It is clear that the Welsh government need to revisit and re-evaluate the 2050 strategy in order for the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 being met.

Learning a language is a key skill and certainly transferable in today's economy. 'Learning other languages introduces children and young people to other cultures. There is also evidence that successful learning of another language can influence the capacity to learn subsequent languages and may have wider cognitive benefits. (Donaldson et al, 2015). This demonstrates the theory and benefits of learning languages and the skills that can be developed and used in the wider economy. From the recent statistics provided by the ONS in 2021 it is clear that the Welsh government need to invest heavily in the 5-15 age bracket when it comes to learning the Welsh language. It also is important to consider that 'Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live'. (UNICEF, 2024). Everyone including children have the right to learn their language and culture and this is another part of the Welsh Curriculum that has been embedded so that all learners have that opportunity. 'Pupils should be given opportunities, where appropriate, to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, environmental, historical and linguistic characteristics of Wales.' (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, 2003).

Overview of Activities

There are many ways in which schools in particular are significant in facilitating the Welsh Government agenda of one million Welsh speakers in 2050. In fact, it could be argued that they almost pay an integral part of the government being able to achieve that target. Schools provide an environment that is facilitated and enabled for learners to grow and develop these skills. In a school setting one initiative that can be used to promote the Welsh language is the Siarter Iaith framework. This framework lends itself to schools and allows them to be assessed at different levels in order to see how embedded the use of Welsh is. It also encourages the use of Welsh and for children to speak it freely and not to hesitate or be concerned if they get it wrong. It is for all children regardless of age. It is vitally important that we encourage active participation in speaking the language which will benefit and give confidence to those learning the language. 'The 'Siarter Iaith' (Welsh Language Charter) is a

national framework for all settings and schools to provide a holistic basis for planning experiences across the curriculum in order to increase learners' use of Welsh and develop their confidence in language from an early age'. (Welsh Government, 2023). Schools in Wales can participate in this scheme which aims to practice and promote the Welsh language in the school setting across all ages. Use of the Welsh language and incidental phrases during registration, assembly, break and lunchtimes as well as having a designated Welsh 'Working Wall'. Schools are assessed for a Bronze, Silver and Gold Award depending on if they have achieved all the goals set out for that level. School A, 2025 has achieved the silver award (Appendix 3). The goals focus on the learners curiosity and engagement to learn and be part of the wider community, The 'Cryw Cymraeg' is a vital part of this activity as this gives the learners responsibility and initiative for learning and promoting the Welsh Language in their school and the wider community (Appendix 4). School A has supported days of celebrating Welshness (Appendix 2) as well as actively encouraging their peers to engage (Appendix 1). 'The most valuable emphasis in Welsh culture is that everybody should speak and have the right to speak.' (Williams, 2021).

'The Welsh Language Charter programme contributes to Cymraeg 2050 by aiming to inspire children and young people to use and enjoy Welsh in all aspects of their lives.' (Crown, 2017). These initiatives are key to practicing the language and ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to use the language either as a first language or as a second language. Promoting bi-lingualism is a key part of the government's strategy to increase the number of Welsh speakers. 'It is vital that the link between the economy and the viability of Welsh -speaking communities is recognised and discussed.' (Huws, 2013). It provides transferable skills for all learners and enables them to move forwards and work in different areas of the economy and develop careers. These activities also promote the learning of the historical and geographical features of Wales for the learners. Schools are advised that their curricula should involve "a strong sense of place" (Davidson, 2020, p. 85) and be tailored to the needs of their local context (Education Wales, 2017). Curriculum Cymraeg can be used a unifying principle that fosters the sense of belonging for all pupils and increasing their understanding of the country in which they live It could be argued that this approach with the new curriculum supports and lends itself to promoting and using Welsh within our communities. It is clear from recent Welsh government publications and research reports that there is a definite focus to increase the number of Welsh speakers by 2050 and the school environment is a vital and key part of developing and engaging this strategy.

Evaluation

Smith (2016) states that the Curriculum Cymreig can be an important feature of schooling in Wales. Wales and Welshness, like all cultures have distinctive features that should be experienced and

celebrated. This evidence reinforces the Curriculum Cymreig and its purpose within a school setting. However, there are elements of the programme that need to be improved, and it could be argued that the bureaucracy surrounding trying to get more Welsh speakers almost disadvantages its goal and purpose in the first place. For example, The Welsh Government, The Welsh Language Commission, various consortia, schools all need to be provided with a holistic approach to learning the language and learning about what it is to be Welsh. There needs a clear directive and strategy as well as providing all the training and support to those teaching the language and culture and those who are engaged to learn about it. All organisations concerned with the preservation and legacy of the Welsh language and culture should be united in their approach to promoting knowledge, information, support and training, in order to increase the numbers of Welsh speakers. Whilst it is abundantly clear of the various initiatives launched and programmes delivered that there is certainly a drive to increase the number of Welsh speakers, we must question how effective are these programmes are and how can these be improved to see an increase in young people and adults learning Welsh?

The Welsh Government state that ‘Meaningful language learning experiences go hand in hand with learning about one’s own cultural identity as well as the cultural identities of others. Engagement with this Area can therefore foster in learners’ pride in their sense of identity and belonging to Wales as well as the world’ (Welsh, Government, 2019). This also support the learner’s curiosity and drive for information as developed by the theorist Piaget (1896) where he believed that the most effective way to enable learning was to provide an environment promoted by curiosity and challenge for the learner. This supports the New Welsh curriculum, and the skills learners can develop such as ‘Ambitious, Capable Learners, and ‘Ethically Informed Citizens’. In terms of the Siarter Iaith programme this encompasses and promotes the skills of the new curriculum, and the learners drive and curiosity to learn and be active in their own learning.

The Siarter Iaith programme definitely encourages learners to engage and practice the language of Welsh as well as celebrating all things Welsh including St. David’s Day, Shwmae Day and the Urdd Jabori as School A, 2025 demonstrates (Appendix 2). School A has recently achieved the silver award for Siarter Iaith (Appendix 3) and whilst that was an amazing achievement it is important to consider that School A, 2025 has less than 100 pupils, workload is heavy in all areas due to less staff members, funding is not available to support these initiatives and nor do staff members receive any planning time to complete tasks. This can be evidenced by a recent study that states ‘no specific funding has been allocated ‘and ‘it is not possible to identify what proportion of funding is used to support the Cymraeg Campus’ (Duggan et al, (2020) pp70-79). In conclusion, it was found that ‘More structured arrangements for sharing resources, activities and sharing good practice are required to support programme delivery’ and ‘Welsh language coordinators face challenges in finding time to organise activities and work towards the criteria for each target’ (Duggan et al, (2020) pp70-79). This illustrates

the time and resources needed to implement such a programme of activities when there is a backdrop of no resources, no funding and no support for schools.

Whilst the Siarter Iaith – Cymraeg Campus programme has engaged the pupils and does provide a framework for all learners to use the Welsh language and celebrate their culture it appears to fail in term of providing resources, training, time to plan and develop lessons for the learners, increasing the workloads for staff which is ever-growing in the current climate. Unclear goals and targets also appear to be an issue with many schools being given unrealistic expectations in terms of time and workload in order to progress to the next award. It is also important to consider that COVID stagnated a lot of programmes for up to two years which meant in turn lots of things did not get the time, money or resources invested in them due to the pandemic. Perhaps this would also explain the statistics showing a declining trend in the 2021 Census (ONS, 2022).

The Welsh government needs to remove these barriers to ensure the success of the initiative for all learners in all schools in Wales. 'Education policy, more than any other, is a crucial determinant, with the highest potential to bring about a society in which equality of opportunity, meshing with national prosperity, becomes a reality' (Jones & Roderick, 2003). It cannot be underestimated how integral these organisations and initiatives are to achieving the Welsh government target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This strategy alone requires monitoring and action plans to be drawn up and reviewed in order to monitor progression. Recent evidence would suggest that the Welsh government are not on track with this target for example the 2021 Census confirming that only 17.8% of people aged 3 and over in Wales reported are able to speak Welsh, which is about, 538,000. (ONS, 2022). The trend is declining and in 2011 only 562,000 and 2001 582,000. (ONS, 2022). It is key that the Siarter Iaith programme receives investment and the recommendations from its report are reviewed and actioned in order to show progress and more importantly achieve the target that has been set to have one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Examples of Criw Cymraeg Mascot designs for a competition



Appendix 2 – Examples of events held to support the celebration of the Welsh Language and Culture



Paid ag anghofio! Wear Welsh themed/Coloured clothes tomorrow to join in with the Urdd Jambori. #knspllc #knspcym #knspcyn @Urdd



21:52 · 09/11/2022



Add another post



Appendix 3 - Siarter Iaith Award - awarded in July 2024



Almost everyone within the school community understands why the Siarter is being implemented.

- The school has built a strong foundation and mechanism for implementing the Siarter that involves stakeholders across the school community. •

The whole staff is involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring and see the impact of the implementation in the objectives.

- Learners, with support, successfully lead actions. 7 SILVER AWARD
- The school community is able to plan suitable actions in response to the results of the questionnaires and is able to measure the success and progress of these actions.
- Almost everyone in the school community has developed a sense of pride in their Welsh identity and gained a passion for the language. • Actions are starting to have an impact on learners' leisure time, e.g. choice of apps, TV, sport and social activities etc. • There is a Welsh and Welsh language ethos within the school

Appendix 4 – Examples of Initiatives for the parents/carers. These examples have been communicated via the school newsletter.



Would you like to speak Welsh at home?

#Clwb Cwtsh Is a short, informal, fun-filled 8-week taster programme focussed on speaking Welsh with young children (and is aimed at parents to be, parents/carers, members of the extended family). Course start dates are September 2023, November 2023, February 2024 and May 2024.

You don't need any Welsh to join so what are you waiting for?!

Ah...childcare's an issue?
We've got it covered – our sessions are held on-line so you can learn from your sofa, and children are welcome to attend face to face courses with you!

The cost?
Courses are free.

Want to know more?

www.learnwelsh.cymru/clwbctsh
www.melthrin.cymru/clwbctsh
01970 639639

Mae #Clwb Cwtsh yn gwrwblu #Cymraeg sydd wedi'i anelu at ddysgwyr newydd ac sy'n canolbwyntio ar iaith magu plant yn y cartref.

Mae 'na ddewis o gyrsiau ar-lein a wyneb yn wyneb ar gael a bydd y sesiynau yn hwyliog, ysgafn ac yn defnyddio canu a gemau gydag amser am banded (wrth gwrwblu).

Scan the QR code (or e-mail us) to register your interest in attending a Clwb Cwtsh course, and you'll be in with a chance to win a Doti soft toy!

@ClwbCwtsh
clwbctsh@melthrin.cymru








Cymraeg yn y cartref
Welsh Entertainment for children

mudiad meithrin
arbenigwyr y blynyddoedd cymraeg
children's years specialists

#Welsh@home

Cyw on S4C
see the timetable on the Cyw website: www.cyw.cymru
6am - 12pm Monday to Friday
6am - 8am Saturday
6am - 9am Sunday

APPS

- Dewin a Doti 1 a 2
- Cyw ar Wyddor
- Cyfrî gyda Cyw
- Cyw Tlwb
- Byd Cyw
- Tric a Chlic
- Duolingo
- Sillafu iaith Gyntaf
- Canu Selog
- Aur am Alr
- Llyfrau Bach Magi Ann
- Magi Ann set 2
- Bys a Bawd
- Campau Cosmig
- Ar y Fferm
- Betsan a Roco
- yn y Pentref
- Llyfrau Hwyl
- Borrowbox

WEBSITES

- Miri Meithrin**
www.facebook.com/groups/mirimeithrin
- BBC Bitesize**
www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/subjects/zdm3nrd
- Twinkl Cymru**
www.twinkl.co.uk
- Booktrust**
www.booktrust.org.uk





Patrwm y Pythefnos - Welsh Patterns to share at home:



Pa ddydd ydy hi?

What day is it ...?

Dydd ...

... day.



We are looking for children who can use these patterns (and others) in school

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