

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.

According to the Welsh Government (2015b), one of the main goals within our country should be to become a country of vibrant culture, in which the Welsh language can thrive. This is because the Welsh language has been stated as ‘one of the treasures of Wales’ (Welsh Government, 2017a, p. 2). However, the statistics from the 2011 census show that only 19% of the Welsh population can speak Welsh, including several counties with less than 10% of their population being able to speak the language (StatsWales, 2012). This has been recognized by Estyn throughout previous school inspections which demonstrated that learners have low attainment levels in Welsh as a second language, therefore, a real change of direction in the teaching and learning of Welsh needs to be achieved if the standard of Welsh and the number of Welsh speakers in the country is to improve (Welsh Government, 2013).

Therefore, if English is the main language of communication within certain schools in Wales, all learners should be provided with ample opportunities to develop their Welsh language oracy, reading and writing skills to the best of their ability (Welsh Government 2015a). This is supported by Donaldson (2015, p. 26) within the new curriculum which suggests that children should be able to communicate effectively in both the Welsh and English language and therefore, develop ‘confidence and pride in Wales as a bilingual nation with the strength and assurance to nurture both languages’. However, according to Welsh Government (2017a), although children should be able to communicate or speak the Welsh language effectively, there are a variety of definitions of a Welsh speaker including those who are fluent, those who are reluctant to speak the language and those who are new speakers of the Welsh language, all of which should be able to play their part in contributing to reaching Wales’ ambition of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Nevertheless, Bernardo and Gaerlan (2011) portray that to achieve successful outcomes within children’s development of speaking and communicating through a second language, it is the primary goal and responsibility of the children’s teachers to achieve this through different psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic perspectives that are related to the teaching of a second language. Firstly, practitioners should be able to recognise the children’s cognitive psychological processes, their language-related behaviours and primarily, the factors and themes that affect these processes and behaviours such as the teacher, the environment they teach in and the learning tasks that they set (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). Secondly,

practitioners should be able to identify different aspects within the children's learning experiences that can affect the way they learn Welsh in an English-medium setting, similarly to what aspects affect how Filipino children learn English, such as how their second language relates to their identity, experiences and relationships with others (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). The ACCAC (2003) highlights the importance that one's identity has on the teaching and learning on the Welsh language as it indicates that when teaching the language, practitioners should incorporate the children's community, values and traditions to motivate the children to develop their Welsh skills to their best potential.

One of the main themes highlighted within the psycholinguistic perspectives towards teaching a second language is the practitioner's ability to provide learning experiences that motivate the learners and have an effect 'on the students' learning and performance' (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011, p. 2). For example, practitioners should be able to plan experiences that allow the children to develop different behaviours and processes towards learning the Welsh language by exploring the creative and expressive arts from in and around Wales and through creating exciting learning experiences based around the Welsh language being used within different religions and countries, such as in Patagonia (ACCAC, 2003). These vital learning experiences should therefore provide the learners with the motivation to extend their Welsh language skills, which has been identified as one of the most important themes within the teaching of Welsh, and as a result, these high levels of motivation should speed up the process of learning a second language (Baker, 2014).

However, currently, teachers are lacking in the knowledge and skills that are required to teach and create these learning experiences and meet the high-quality needs of Wales now and in the future (Furlong, 2015). This is strongly supported by the BBC (2019) who have agreed that the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools has been 'ineffective in giving young people who do not speak the language at home the skills to use Welsh in everyday life'. Therefore, to improve the quality of teaching of the Welsh language, schools and local authorities should provide training for Welsh Language Development for headteachers, phase leads and practitioners, that should provide them with opportunities to improve their language teaching skills and Welsh language skills (Estyn, 2013).

Nevertheless, the learning experiences that the practitioners are able to provide link strongly towards another theme within the teaching of Welsh within an English-medium school which is supporting the children's social or personal goals, such as dreams of travelling, qualifying

for jobs or for professional advancements (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). A prime example of teaching Welsh to encourage children to become ethical and informed citizens who have the potential to qualify for a variety of jobs in the future is actually within the teaching profession, as Wales' aim is to abolish Welsh as a second language and therefore equip all teachers, now and in the future, to teach children through the medium of Welsh (BBC, 2019; Donaldson, 2015). Therefore, it is the responsibility of current teachers to provide their learners with the Welsh skills and knowledge they will need to qualify for certain jobs within the future, especially for jobs, such as teaching, that have already identified the Welsh language as a compulsory requirement (BBC, 2019).

Furthermore, Bernardo and Gaerlan (2011) found that when studying the sociolinguistic perspectives within the teaching and learning of a second language, one of the most important and frequently mentioned themes that can also have a negative impact on the children's future opportunities, was children's language exposure at home, such as the use of the language and availability of resources. This lack of language use within the home has a strong impact on the opportunities that children have to speak the Welsh language on a regular basis and can often limit the children's choice to speak the language from day-to-day based on the lack of understanding from those around them (Baker, 2011). This has been emphasised by the Welsh Government (2017b, p. 6) who state that the 'National mission does not stop at the school gates', thus encouraging and recognising the need for student support within all aspects of a child's education, including in school, at home and within society.

The article also provides the reader with the student's own opinions towards language exposure at home, which portrayed that learner's view family-related factors crucial to their learning experiences, as their home environment is the only other place except for school that they felt impacted on their development of a second language (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). This is supported by Baker (2014) who emphasises the importance of the quality of language interaction being used within the home, although he also indicates that in some homes, there is an evident lack in communication between children and parents. Yet, in other homes, parents bombard their children with a second language, such as English or Welsh, which can also have a negative impact on their learning of Welsh as a second language as children lose their motivation towards learning the language (Baker, 2014).

However, the 2011 census indicates that within Wales, it is more likely for there to be a lack of communication in the use of the Welsh language between children and their parents rather

than parents bombarding their children with the Welsh language, as statistics show that roughly half of Wales' population have a 30% or lower percentage in the amount of people who are able to speak the Welsh language (Welsh Government, 2017a) (appendix one). This is supported by Cairns (2015) who recognised that family and community are central for the future of the Welsh language, therefore it is the responsibility of parents and families to provide the younger generation with the confidence to use the skills and language they are taught in school when they are at home, especially those from non-Welsh speaking homes or communities. Furthermore, the Welsh Government (2017c) imply that for this barrier to be overcome and to prevent further negative impacts on the teaching of Welsh as a second language, parents need to feel a sense of connection and ownership towards the Welsh language which can be provided through funding schemes, that support families in encouraging their children to use their Welsh language and skills outside of school.

A prime example of a lack in children's exposure to language at home is within the county of Pembrokeshire, whose statistics show that only 21.5% of their population can speak Welsh, thus providing limitations in the support that children learning Welsh within English-medium schools receive within their home environment or even within their community (National Assembly for Wales, 2008). From the practitioner's own experience in a school situated in Pembrokeshire, it became even more apparent that there was a shortage in the number of parents or families that could speak the Welsh language at home, as also clarified by Estyn, as it was having a negative impact of the teaching of Welsh in the English-medium classrooms (Estyn, 2018). For example, during professional teaching practise, the practitioner was able to identify that the 'school was developing the use of the Welsh language successfully across the English stream' within lessons, however, due to the inability and lack of support and encouragement to use the Welsh language at home, the children were forgetting a lot of their knowledge by the next lesson and were often spending large amounts of time recapping what they had learnt in the previous lesson, rather than learning new Welsh language knowledge and skills (Estyn, 2018, p. 2).

However, as portrayed throughout the article, Filipino students were able to learn and use the English language successfully due to their teachers being fine models of good English use, and therefore immersing the children in the English language by using it within all classroom related tasks, rather than just in English lessons (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). Therefore, this suggests that to overcome the issue of children forgetting the language, teachers within the English stream could extend their use of incidental Welsh in order to provide the access to the

Welsh language for all of their learners, and act as a constant reminder of the Welsh that the children have previously learnt (ACCAC, 2003). To extend this further, practitioners within English-medium schools could also prevent children from forgetting their Welsh language and skills by using the language through immersion education. This allows practitioners to provide their learners with constant exposure to the Welsh language by using the language to set instructions, support the first language, encourage additive bilingualism and motivate learners to use similar levels of Welsh within the school grounds (Estyn, 2006). Although this could currently be difficult to achieve due to the number of teachers who speak the Welsh language, this is a possible theme which could improve the teaching of Welsh in the future and thus achieve significant gains in the children's spoken Welsh, as well as their knowledge and understanding of the Welsh language (Estyn, 2006; Welsh Government, 2017a).

In conclusion, there are many themes within the article, alongside sub-themes, that relate to the teaching of Welsh in the English-medium sector. Therefore, it is evident that there is a strong correlation in the way that a second language is taught within different countries, in relation to Filipino students learning English and students within Wales learning Welsh, based on the general learning experiences that are encountered by bilingual learners (Bernardo and Gaerlan, 2011). These themes have been identified by the Welsh Government (2013) as a means of improving Welsh language throughout English-medium schools by providing positive learning experience for all learners, developing the learner's and family's transferable Welsh language skills and lastly, overcoming the teacher's own barriers to the teaching of the Welsh language. Overall, this coincides with the intention that all learners will become, ambitious, capable and healthy individuals who can become increasingly bilingual with a strong grasp of the English language, Welsh language and possibly other languages that have been taught successfully throughout the English medium sector (Donaldson, 2015; Welsh Government, 2017b).

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