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Schools and colleges in Wales play a vital role in promoting the Welsh language and will be key to the Welsh Government achieving its target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. To achieve this target, changes are being made to the curriculum followed by schools in Wales which should be fully implemented for all 3 to 16-year olds by 2021. The Welsh government action plan “Education in Wales: Our National Mission” sets out the objective of “developing a transformational approach to the learning, teaching and assessment of the Welsh language with the aim of ensuring all learners will be able to use the Welsh language when they leave school.” (Welsh Government, p.18).

It is suggested by Professor Donaldson in his review of the curriculum that “many people see the Welsh language as a real strength of the education system. However, the place of the Welsh language in the curriculum needs to be strengthened.” (Welsh Government, 2018, p.4). In order to promote and strengthen the Welsh language, increased use is made of the Welsh language in the classroom, with additional support provided for the learners’ informal use of the Welsh language outside the school environment by youth organisations such as Urdd Gobaith Cymru.

Promotion of the Welsh language is supported by the Welsh Language Charter (Siarter Iaith) and associated programmes such as Cymraeg Campus which support “English-medium secondary schools to provide informal opportunities to use the language and intensive Welsh learning opportunities through the Urdd’s Cymraeg Bob Dydd project.” (Welsh Government, 2019, p.5). The goal of such programmes is to encourage bilingualism amongst learners and the ability to communicate effectively through the medium of Welsh in the workplace. According to Donaldson, Successful Futures “All our children and young people will be able to communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English.” (Welsh Government, 2018, p.7).

Guidance is provided for schools by the ‘Qualifications, Curriculum, and Assessment Authority for Wales’ (ACCAC) to develop the ‘Curriculum Cymreig’ to enhance understanding of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century and develop a strong sense of belonging and identity. “The Welsh experience, in all its aspects, can provide an invaluable opportunity to extend the educational experience for all pupils in Wales.” (ACCAC, p.2). The use of the Welsh language needs to be extended beyond primary school age, and young adolescents need to be inspired to continue with their education in Welsh. According to Plaid Cymru’s education spokesman Simon Thomas “Using Welsh as a medium of learning rather than simply learning Welsh as a subject is the best way to develop pupils’ language skills. (Evans, 2014).

The Curriculum Cymraeg requires inclusion of five key strands comprising cultural, economic, historical, linguistic and environmental aspects, which are used to teach learners about the unique language and culture of Wales using relevant Welsh language resources. Estyn recognises the importance of this learning, as pupils “value opportunities to explore their sense of Welshness. Such work enables them to contribute to a dynamically evolving culture and to develop an informed view of the forces that are shaping Wales.” (ACCAC, p.3).

“The foundation phase aims to produce a more developmental, experiential and play based approach to teaching and learning” (OECD, p.14). Within the Foundation phase, learners are encouraged to develop basic language skills by engaging in play-based activities, using familiar words and phrases. This encourages the learner to engage in dialogue with others and describe what they are doing, thereby achieving the goal of the Siarter Iaith framework by promoting informal use of the Welsh language. In promoting the Welsh language every child has an opportunity to become bilingual. “Estyn emphasizes the importance of informing pupils and parents of the benefits of bilingualism. These

benefits include improving pupils' performance in other subjects across the curriculum." (Evans, 2014).

In the 'Foundation Phase' the focus is on the development of oral skills through play, with reading and writing skills developed at a later stage. Examples of activities undertaken include language games and using flash cards to help the children create simple sentences to match the pictures. (See Appendix 1) The activity that I have used very successfully is flash cards featuring cartoon characters such as Pepper Pig and Thomas the Tank Engine, to prompt the child's response to the question 'Pwy wyt ti?' (who are you?). The cards feature a written response in Welsh "Peppa Pinc Ydw I" thereby prompting the child to answer the question 'who are you?'

The second activity I have used is a language game include 'picture pair games' where the learner is tasked to answer a question such as 'Ble wyt ti'n byw?' (where do you live?) by selecting an appropriate card picturing different types of accommodation. The child selects the appropriate picture and provides a corresponding verbal response, such as 'Dw i'n byw mewn ty ar wahan.' (I live in a detached house.) The aim of the game is to obtain a matching pair, and after each selection the child is asked 'Oes par gyda ti' (do you have a pair) to which they reply 'oes neu nag oes' (yes or no). Such language games are effective in reinforcing language patterns and phrases.

Language games are a keyway in which the objectives set in the Siarter Iaith Framework can be achieved. For example, "one of the key aims within the 2050 Welsh Strategy is to embed positive language use practices supported by formal and informal opportunities to use Welsh socially." (Welsh government, p 3). The importance of learning through the medium of the Welsh language is reinforced in the Welsh Curriculum which set out to "understand and celebrate the distinctive quality of living and learning in Wales and to identify their own sense of Welshness." (p2, ACCAC). For example, in my learning environment, the pairing game is used in Geography lessons are used to explore where the child lives and their sense of community and identity. "Since Geography is about place, it can underpin the holistic approach to a curriculum cymrieg, but other valuable components are the creative and cultural elements." (p33, ACCAC).

In line with my setting's Welsh language policy whereby children in the Foundation phase experience the areas of learning in both languages but with greater emphasis on English the formal learning in the classroom is supplemented by the learners speaking Welsh with friends in the playground and conversational Welsh between staff and pupils. It is important that the learner is encouraged to use the Welsh language as part of everyday communication and to have the necessary skills, ability and confidence to do so reinforces learning undertaken in the classroom.

Welsh language development outcomes identified by the classroom teacher are used to evaluate the progress made by the child. For example, outcome 1 considers the child's ability to 'repeat familiar words and phrases' whilst outcome 2 assess abilities to 'converse simply, sometimes replacing English words with Welsh when involved in activities.' The development of Welsh language literacy and oracy ability across the whole curriculum is of great importance, and learners are encouraged to 'talk about things they have learnt and done' through the medium of Welsh during other subjects explored in the foundation phase. These two activities are teacher led and supported using Welsh language flash cards as prompts.

Such teacher led learning is consistent with Vygotsky theory of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' which identifies "a domain of knowledge in which the learner is as yet incapable of independent functioning, she is guided to draw upon her existing knowledge." (Allford, 2013 p.4). The teacher's role is key in enabling the learner by stimulating their use of the Welsh language and allowing them to become more independent. "The emergence of language has the potential to reshape the young child's cognitive development and lays the basis for the emergence of higher metacognitive processes." (Allford, p3).

When applying these activities I felt confident with the learning materials such as the flashcards to assist me in presenting the lesson to the pupils. It is recognised that “a number of learning materials and resources are provided for children to enhance their vocabulary learning.” (Chen & Chan, 2019). Traditional flash cards illustrate basic information such as the word and the associated image which help the child make the connection between the word and picture. Using Flash Cards helped to increase my confidence when delivering these two activities as they helped the pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh language vocabulary.

There are however limitations as to the use of flash cards, for example “the visual clues are only to the meaning of the words, and the pronunciation remains absent. Children may find it hard to associate and integrate the meaning of a word with its pronunciation.” The child’s understanding of the flash card is limited to their own perception of the image. As a result, their engagement may be limited.

The language game (Appendix 2) was used with ‘repetitive routine’ to reinforce the learning of the Welsh language. I found in my experience that the use of repetition worked very well in reinforcing key words and pronunciation. Research suggests “Language games might be viewed as every day ‘forms of life’ and ‘forms of action’ that foster the development of social understanding in group conversations. Bruner demonstrated that language proliferates when children take part in interactive situations most of which are playful.” (Grazzani & Brockmeir).

The importance of the social environment is reinforced by both Bruner and Vygotsky providing a framework within which the child’s learning is supported by the teacher or a significant peer. “They emphasise the social character of learning, citing that other people should help the child to develop their skills through the process of scaffolding.” (Revisiting Bruner). Scaffolding involves a structured interaction between the adult and child providing the child with help to attain a specific aim.