

Hello, my name is Stephanie Barrett, Student number 2306819 and I am going to talk to you about Bilingualism within the Early Years and the lifelong affect.

I am going to begin by defining bilingualism and identifying the benefits as well as the positive effects learning additional languages has on brain development and the growth of cognitive skills and divergent thinking. Lastly, identifying ways to support children with English or Welsh as a Second Language (EAL/WAL).

According to DCELLS, (2008, p. 11. Cited in Siencyn, 2019) bilingual is the ability to, speak, read, and write in two languages". Bialystok and Werker (2018) believe that over half the world's population is bilingual.

Benefits

Many studies show benefit of being bilingual or multilingual, according to Bright and Filippi (2019) and Booton *et al.* (2021) it offers greater social experiences, enables the expansion who you can communicate with and offering such a unique opportunity to embrace and understand where the language derives from, revealing the history, culture, and opportunities. Furthermore, the Welsh Government (2019) supports this and identifies the importance of their curriculum, being holistic and is to provide the best possible start for every child and is to offer experiences to deepen knowledge and develop skills in this forever changing society and supporting learners to become ethically informed citizens of Wales and the world. Moreover, Lindon (2012) and Mc Tavish (2021) suggest providing experiences promote cultural capital such as viewing art, visiting the theatre, museums and offering opportunities to listen to cultural music.

Another benefit of increasing the importance of Welsh in the curriculum of achieving a dual language, along with Curriculum Cymreig, Simth (2015) emphasises the importance of keeping the Welsh culture alive as well as the language and history. Schmid (2016) stresses a language due to the lack of use can become dormant. Moreover, the WG (2021) stated they have invested £2.2million to provide immersion support throughout Wales and with a goal of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Furthermore, another benefit according to Bialystok and Werker (2018) and Booton *et al.* (2021) bilingualism increases the cognitive processes of the brain and language acquisition, enabling longer lasting benefits including greater memory, attention, and learning. Cornelius (2022) agrees highlighting the ability to effectively plan, retain and retrieve information due to exercising the brain when switching between languages. Additionally, Antonio (2018) identifies the benefit of learning at least two languages throughout life may delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

My activity supports young children learning an additional language as I introduced the children to naming facial parts of the body, adding to what they have learnt previously, supporting preserving the Welsh Language.

Brain development/healthy mind

Moving forward on to brain development, whilst acquiring an additional language, according to Antoniou (2018, cited Skibba, 2018) the brain is made up of grey matter that consists of neurons, providing a role in processing information, muscle control as well as sensory perception and decision-making. The brain is also made up of white matter, which sends messages, the brain then grows becoming more specific. During a study between a monolingual brain and a bilingual brain, it appears a bilingual brain performs differently than a monolingual brain, seeing an increase in grey matter, creating more cells. Waterford (2019) suggests the benefits strengthens working memory and attention span which can benefit academically.

Chomsky (1959, cited in Smidt, 2016) believed children were born ready to learn language, a concept he called Language Acquisition, whereas Skinner (1957) believed children acquire a language solely through listening and repeating adults.

Lightbrown and Spada, (2013) suggests there could be a minor language delay. Whereas Gort (2019) and Cornelius (2022) emphasise children will mix between them; this is known as 'code switching' and is normal, a form of processing.

Divergent Thinking

Moving forward, divergent thinking according to Smidt (2016) is a thought process, producing creative ideas that explore numerous potential solutions. According to Guilford (1968, cited in Greenway and Hutchings, 2022) divergent thinking is having original ideas, thinking creatively and problem solving. Similarly, Kharkhurin, Concha and Charkhabi (2022) suggest being bilingual might increase divergent thinking, through a study on thinking tasks. However, Booton *et al.* (2021) states from studies, that there is no evidence of divergent thinking advantages for bilingual children than monolingual, but emphasises the cognitive benefits of growing up bilingual, for example, diverse cultural experiences that can foster divergent thinking.

Furthermore, Robinson (2010), believes divergent thinking is more than just thinking creatively, he emphasises originality, exploration and thinking in multiple ways. A study of kindergarten children with a high level of divergent thinking, over time the level decreased, he also suggested this is to be from overstructured childhood in education. According to Vygotsky (cited in Gray and McBlain, 2015) children make sense of their world around them through play, which he believes is influenced by social and cultural behaviours and therefore develops divergent thinking.

How to support EAL / WAL

Finally, I am going to discuss how schools will support English or and Welsh as an additional language. The WG (2022) emphasise children within the early years are keen learners, suggesting adults should provide hands on experiences, props, simplification, repetition and providing playful activities, therefore, children are more likely to experiment and become less self-conscious about errors and progress.

Additionally, Hickey and de Mejia (2014) emphasise the importance of the adults understanding what the child knows in their 'mother tongue', before introducing a second language. Baker (2011) and Waterford (2019) identify two ways of acquiring a second language, simultaneous from birth, and sequential, after the age of three.

Furthermore, Brandt, Gebrian and Slevc (2012) highlight the ability that newborns and young children can learn new languages through song and music, capturing the child's attention, providing the child with an incite of how the language sounds before grasping the understanding, therefore the child is able to hear the features of speech and reduces confusion.

Furthermore, Hickey, Lewis, and Baker (2013) suggest using the immersion method to support children learning an additional language, sequentially, children can make linguistic connections, when the mother tongue is referred to constantly. Moreover, Kotkov (2021) from Montessori, identifies 'The Sandwich Method' using the additional language around the 'mother tongue'. Additionally, Cornelius (2022) suggests adding visual aids or props to support children with language delay.

In my activity, you could see I used props that the children could identify in their 'mother tongue' for some children it is an additional language, but they were able to identify the items and building on what they know, then I used Welsh in addition to the English word, using the 'sandwich technique' and also offering repetition. I also provided time for the children to explore in a scavenger hunt repeating the language in an active way, as well as seeing the written form.

Conclusion

To conclude the effect of bilingualism/multilingualism within the early years, suggests the child should be fluent in their mother tongue, before sequential learning begins, unless language is developed simultaneously.

As Baker (2011) and Waterford (2019) identified acquiring a second language, can be from birth, or sequential, from three years of age, when young children's brains are the most flexible.

The impact on brain development, shows acquiring an additional language enhances grey matter in specific areas of the brain, developing linguistic awareness, increasing cognitive skills, attention span, multi-tasking, and potentially delaying Alzheimer's disease.

To reflect on the future, offering children opportunities to acquire an additional language, especially in Wales, promoting and preserving the Welsh language, it enables the culture, language, and history to stay alive and offering the children more opportunities in the future.

Immersing children with the Welsh language through song, props, and authentic resources, using the 'sandwich method' providing time, repetition, simplification and

play supports children explore and become confident, and grow creatively which can support the development of divergent thinking.

Diolch am gwranddo

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