Welsh Second Language in the National Curriculum - the case of teaching Welsh in English-medium schools

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It is widely recognised within the educational community in Wales that the teaching and learning of Welsh second language, in many cases, is not effective and that limited time allocations make it difficult for most pupils to make good progress

in English-medium schools.

A number of reports over the last decade have raised concerns about levels of achievement in Welsh second language; one of the strategic objectives of the

developing a Welsh-medium Education Strategy is to raise standards in the teaching of Welsh second language so that

(WAG, 2009: 12)

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in Wales in recent years have constantly referred to the problematic area of Welsh second language. The 2004-2005 annual report summarised the situation thus:

In October 2007, Estyn published an evaluation of the GCSE Welsh second language short course (Estyn, 2007a) and came to the conclusion that

(Estyn, 2007a:15). It was reported that only a few pupils who follow the short GCSE Welsh second language

second language (37%) was amongst the lowest in the National Curriculum (Estyn, 2002: 7 and National Assembly for Wales, 2002: 15.27); the proportion of classes where the standard of teaching was good or very good (45%) was lower than any other in the National Curriculum, and the standard of teaching was unsatisfactory in 12% of the classes (Estyn, 2002: 7). Based on inspection reports in 2001-2002, it was deemed that there was still more unsatisfactory work in Welsh second language than in any other subject, especially in key stage 3 (Estyn, 2003:17).

By 2006, across all the foundation subjects, Welsh second language had the lowest percentage of pupils attaining level 5 or above in teacher assessments at the end of key stage 3 [49% compared with Art, which had the highest percentage, at 76%] (WAG, 2006: Chapter 1, Table 1.6). With reference to the differences between the attainment of boys and girls, it is significant that the greatest gap between them was in Welsh second language: whilst 59% of girls attained level 5 or higher, only 39% of boys succeeded in achieving this.

It is a statutory requirement that all pupils are taught Welsh to the end of key stage 4, either as a first or second language. Within the GCSE Welsh second language

course, with the short course being equivalent to half a full GCSE qualification. Over the three year period between 2004 and 2006, there has been a decrease in the proportion of pupils entered for the full GCSE course (from around 12,000 in 2004 to just over 9,500 in 2006) and a corresponding increase in those entered for the short course. In 2006, for the first time, the number of pupils who were entered for the short course was higher than the number on the full course (Estyn, 2007a); percentages for 2008 were: full course 47% short course 53% (WAG, 2009). Such was the concern of the Welsh Assembly Government for this increase in 2006 that Estyn was commissioned to

learning Welsh, with these three contributory factors being cited as being pivotal in increasing their proficiency: the nature of the language provision in schools; language background (parents and family); and opportunities and motivation to use Welsh outside of the Welsh lesson and/or outside of school surroundings (National Assembly for Wales, 2002, 15.28).

Another key issue that became apparent in the evidence of secondary pupils to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee (National Assembly for WAhe6t t

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Colin Baker: (4th edition in 2006 and 3rd Edition in 2001). Clevedon / Bristol, Multilingual Matters. http://www.multilingual-matters.com/

The various overlapping purposes why children or adults may acquire a second or a third language can be clustered under five headings: ideological, international, individual, language value and language survival.

1. Ideological Reasons

For language minority children, the aim of second language instruction may be assimilationist and subtractive. For example, the teaching of English as a second language in England often aims at rapidly integrating minority language groups into mainstream society. Assimilationist ideology tends to work for the dominance of the second language, even the repression of the home, minority language. In contrast, when children learn a minority language as their second language, maintenance and preservation of that minority language may be the societal aim.

Third, languages provide access to information and hence power. Whether the information is in technical journals, on large computer databases, on the World Wide Web, on satellite television or in international e-mail lists, a repertoire of languages gives wider access to social, cultural, political, economic and educational information. For the business person and the bureaucrat, for the scholar and the sports person, access to multilingual international information opens doors to new knowledge, new skills and new understanding.

3. Individual Reasons

There are reasons frequently given why the individual child or adult should acquire or learn a second or third language. One reason is for cultural awareness. To break down national, ethnic and language stereotypes, one motive in second language learning has become intercultural sensitivity and awareness, to encourage sensitivity towards other cultures and creeds. While cultural awareness may be conveyed in the first language, the inseparability of culture and language means that such awareness may best be achieved through second language learning.

The second `individual' reason for second language learning has traditionally been for cognitive development. The learning of foreign languages has been for general educational and academic value. Just as history and geography, physics and chemistry, mathematics and music have traditionally been taught to increase intellectual fitness and stamina, so modern language learning has been defended as a way of sharpening the mind and developing the intellect. Given the memorization, analysis (e.g. of grammar and sentence structure) and the need to negotiate in communication, language learning has been regarded as a valuable academic activity in itself.

The third reason for an individual to acquire a language is for social, emotional and moral personal development, self-awareness, self-confidence, and social and ethical values. Such affective goals include the possibility of incipient bilinguals being able to create a larger number and more effective relationships with target language speakers. Bilinguals can potentially build social bridges with those who speak the second language. Self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem may result from being able to operate socially or vocationally with those who speak the second or third language. The addition of a second language skill can boost an individual's self-confidence as a learner, a liaisor and a linguist.

The fourth `individual' reason for acquiring a language is for careers and employment, opening up possibilities of a wider variety of careers, or gaining promotion in a career. Potential individual careers include becoming translators and interpreters, buying and selling goods and services, exchanging information with local, regional, national and international organizations, migrating across national frontiers to find work, gaining promotion in neighboring countries, becoming part of an international team

or company, as well as working from home or from the local village and using multilingual telecommunications to spread a product.

4. Language Value Reasons

There are currently popular arguments why retaining language diversity is essential and why language planning is needed. (1) It is widely agreed that retaining ecological diversity is essential. Evolution has been aided by genetic diversity, with species genetically adapting in order to survive in different environments. Diversity contains the potential for adaptation. Uniformity holds dangers for the long-term survival of the species by providing inflexibility and inadaptability. The range of cross-fertilization becomes less as languages and cultures die and the testimony of human intellectual achievement is lessened. In the language of ecology, the strongest ecosystems are those that are the most diverse.

- (2) Languages express identity. Identity concerns the shared characteristics of members of a group, community or region. Identity helps provide the security and status of a shared existence. Sometimes identity is via dress, religious beliefs, rituals, but language is almost always present in identity formation and identity display. Language is an index, symbol and marker of identity.
- (3) Languages are repositories of history. Languages provide a link to the past, a means to reach an archive of knowledge, ideas and beliefs from our heritage. Every language is a living museum and library. The range, richness and wealth of cultures, homelands and histories are lost when a language dies. The Sicilian poet, Ignazio Buttitta (1972), expressed it thus:

However, the Latin language died, but some of its culture and the Roman influence continued although in a diminished form (Edwards, 2002; Adams, 2003). The stored knowledge and understandings in oral languages (without literacies) may die with the death of that language. Yet written text may store accumulated meanings after language death, although translations will often lose a degree of stored insight and nuance.

(4) Languages contribute to the sum of present human knowledge. Inside each

primary and secondary schools. These findings need to be discussed in greater detail at the meetings of the Steering Groups.

- 1. How effective are the Programmes of Study in promoting the development of language, and progression in speaking skills in particular?
 - 1.1 In general, there is evidence that the PoS contribute towards language development across the key stages, especially the Oracy PoS and the weighting given to it. More concern is expressed about the Reading and Writing PoS. Primary headteachers and secondary heads of department express a grave concern about the time that is needed to meet the requirements especially as the pupils progress to KS2 and KS3.

Evidence from fieldwork

Acceptable: Too ambitious: 38%

62%

Requirements of PoS at KS3 in general Acceptable: 57%
Too ambitious: 43%

following a more modular type of course (75% of teachers and 64% of pupils in favour). There was also support for considering more vocational and entry level qualifications (79% of teachers and 67% of pupils in favour).

2.3 Weighting

The weighting given to the different components was welcomed in general, especially at KS1. At KS2, however, 45% of respondents felt that too much weighting is given to the readingd Welsh/bilingually, 95% of the pupils interviewed stated that they do not study any other subject through the medium of Welsh, and 75% of them said that they would not wish to do so if they were given the choice.

- 4.4 At KS4, the time allocated to the GCSE short course varies from 30 minutes a week, i.e. 1 hour every fortnight (at its lowest) to 1½ hours a week (3 hours every fortnight) at its highest. There was great dissatisfaction with this situation amongst the teachers who responded, with 72% feeling it was impossible to do justice to the GCSE specification in such circumstances.
- 4.5 With reference to the full GCSE course, the time allocated varies from 1 hour a week to 3½ hours a week (7 hours on a fortnightly timetable); 59% of the respondents felt that it was possible to meet the requirements within the time allocated to them. Again,
 - through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, and only 8% of pupils interviewed followed any subjects through the medium of Welsh (77% of children interviewed said they would not choose to do so).
- 4.6 At secondary school level in general, headteachers gave the following reasons for not developing Welsh-medium or bilingual provision (in WSL schools): no demand (81%), pare

- 6. How effective are the INSET and other Continuing Professional Development opportunities in helping teachers to raise standards in Welsh second language?
 - 6.1 <u>Primary</u>

A structured second language course (with tapes, CD-Roms etc), together with guidelines on methodology (teaching materials and teacher materials)

Resources that are colourful, contemporary, and appealing.

- 8. How effective are the current methodologies and models of delivery in raising standards?
 - 8.1 From some of the above findings, it is evident that the main issues that need to be add

motivation.

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