

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education.

Contributor :- Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

Terms of Reference :

- Providing opportunities for people of all ages to learn Welsh.
- Improving opportunities for studying Welsh as a second language.
- Developing Welsh medium education and training across a wide range of subjects and at all levels.
- Promoting equal respect for both Welsh and English.

ATL's response focused narrowly on :-

a) The Early Years

b) Primary Education - (not S.E.N.)

(1) Pre-school provision / pre-school education

"The Learning Family" - parent education - enhancing opportunities.

- ATL has always supported close links between the home, pre-school provision and education.

The young child's first experience of language is within the home environment. We therefore believe that investment of resources and enhanced opportunities for parents and guardians to learn Welsh before and during the period when their child is under five years of age is a priority.

Parents should be encouraged by the availability of classes within their own communities to learn Welsh so that they can support their child who will be introduced to the language during

the pre-school phase. Availability of programs, at local centers should be supported by incentives which would allow parents some time every week on a regular basis to attend classes. This may even mean crèche facilities if they have very young children.

Acknowledging the fact that this scheme would be expensive in the initial stages, in the longer term it would be cost effective as children and parents would be learning Welsh at the same time, resulting in generations of bilingual families. These programs could form a part of the enhanced role of the "Mentrau Iaith" and on a local basis the "Canolfannau Iaith" throughout Wales.-(ie "Popeth Cymraeg", Dinbych). Much of this structure is in place but at present is not sufficiently resourced. During the child's career from pre-school on to the primary school, opportunities should continue to be available for parents to improve their language skills through various programs. Without the "family" approach, the child will learn in isolation, with the "family" approach attitudes, interest and skill for both parent and child will grow and will be positive. The concept of "The Learning Family" is a positive and worthwhile concept to be nurtured and developed.

(2) Pre-school provision, Pre-school education,

- enhancing experiences for young learners.

The establishment of early years centers in each County in Wales is welcomed by the ATL. The EYDP'S have already established the concept of partnerships working together for the under-5's. Nevertheless in sparsely populated areas, small centers or outreach units of the main centers should be established in small towns and villages. These could be attached to schools or community centers and young children should then be offered experiential learning opportunities while being immersed in the Welsh language. The immersion concept is not new but research has proved that it does work with the very young and there are examples of success here in Wales as well as in Canada and other countries where more than one language exist side by side. Special arrangements and opportunities should be made available for parents also to be immersed in the Welsh language. Specific language programs must be devised to meet their needs. The success of

"The Learning Family" approach is dependant on developing the structure and appropriate language programs to meet the needs of children and their families. The "Desirable Outcomes" programme for the young, although recognising the experiential learning needs of young children, in the light of immersion programs for the under- 5's should be reviewed. Language programs for parents must aim at developing competency in the Welsh language, but also to develop positive attitudes towards bilingulism as well as an appreciation of the value of quality pre-school provision.

There is evidence that opportunities for parents to learn Welsh is not new. This is particularly true in connection with some Welsh medium schools. Nevertheless, this should become part of

the general pattern in future at both Welsh and English medium schools and incorporated as part of the general structure so as to achieve a true bilingual society.

(3) Primary education KS1+2 -

Building upon success:

Funding for the reduction in class size is always a welcome trend. Smaller classes are more manageable in the linguistic sense with the need for constant repetitive oral work. The discontinuation of the National Tests at age 7 is also welcome. We in ATL believe that continuous teacher assessment, based on first hand knowledge of the child's development is more effective and constructive at this stage.

We believe that based on the "Learning Family" approach, children of 3 - 8 years old should be encouraged to acquire language skills through a project or theme based programme, with special emphasis on research and experience, linked to the family, the community and the immediate environment.

In the early years first and second language must be fun, it must be experienced through play with a focus on particular themes based on the child's experience. As the child grows and develops the projects will assist in developing oral and literacy skills. In English medium schools one lesson of Welsh per day cannot achieve the success we are hoping for. Indeed a part of one day should be set aside to follow themes and projects based on subjects through the medium of Welsh.

At present the existing national curriculum is too structured for this to happen, therefore the curriculum in Wales should be reviewed so that it can be adapted to ensure that there is maximum available time to acquire mastery of the second language. Those parents who are themselves learning the language can also be encouraged to develop oral skills during theme time with the children. Practical application for "The Learning Family" is a priority. The use of Information Technology and the multiplicity of modern resources must be available to ensure assessment and monitoring on a continuous basis.

(4) How will these needs be met over the next 8 years?

- a) Early years centers to be established in the 22 counties - these will serve children and their families with units and outreach centers in rural areas - strengthening partnerships with voluntary agencies and private sector.

- b) Immersion programs for all under-5's to be developed with existing programs adapted so as to achieve the aim of a bilingual society.

- c) Programmes for parents available at schools, Early Years Centers / Units - the development of the concept of "The Learning Family".
- d) Crèche facilities for parents of the very young.
- e) Rationalisation of the National Curriculum to allow the multidisciplinary approach to learning Welsh - blocks of time set aside each day in English medium schools to follow themes through the medium of Welsh and to achieve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at the end of KS2.
- f) Influence of EYDP'S to be strengthened to encompass all interested bodies. Role of Mentrau Iaith and Canolfannau Iaith to be enhanced and to become central to much of the activity.
- g) Rationalisation of ITT programmes so that methodology embraces the concept of learning through the medium of the second language as well as the "Learning Family" approach.
- h) Enhanced investment in "Athrawon Bro", who will support these teachers already in the system who have not themselves yet achieved fluency.
- i) Availability of courses and in service training for teachers and nursery nurses, and all those working with young children so that their competency is improved and bilingualism achieved.
- j) In the community - the fostering of positive attitudes towards the language with more and more incentives offered to employers so that employees can be released for second language study.

ATL forecasts that the initial investment is very costly but it is the only way in order to achieve generations of truly bilingual citizens. It is not possible to achieve "The Learning Country" without first of all achieving the "The Learning Family".