



Background Literature

Wales, and the UK, are currently facing what is being called a 'language learning crisis'. The latest in a series of reports by the British Council (Board & Tinsley 2017) has revealed a consistent downward trend in the uptake of MFL (modern foreign languages) across various levels of education for over a decade in Wales.

The benefits of speaking or learning more than one language are widely accepted both for individuals and for society (Kelly 2018). Furthermore, recent studies into multilingualism present languages not as autonomous entities, but as interrelated systems that support each other's use and development (Baker & Wright 2017). Certain models of language teaching, such as cross-curricular, have evolved to reflect this idea with the aim of integrating language into education (Perez et al 2018) and providing pupils' with meaningful opportunities for language use. This provides a useful basis for research into multilingualism in Wales, where MFL learning occurs alongside not one but two national languages.

The Welsh Government (2015) recently published its *Global Futures* strategy with the aim of promoting language learning and building a 'bilingual plus one' nation. It is now important to explore how this is being delivered on the ground in order to evaluate impact and share good practice. This research will produce a case study of one project running under *Global Futures* in a primary school in South Wales, and will explore:

- How the project is being delivered in practice?
- How the project is promoting multilingualism in the school?

ETHICS

This research followed the ESRC and BERA frameworks for ethics, and adopted a collaborative approach with the school.

Teachers volunteered to take part and provided informed consent. Given the young age of pupil participants, informed consent was collected from parents on their behalf, although pupils were also informed of the research. When consent was not received, pupils participated in lessons as normal, but no data on their interactions was collected.

All participants were given the right to withdraw at any time. No names or genders were used in the reporting of findings.

A reflexive approach was adopted to address the implications of identity and politics that can influence language-related research.

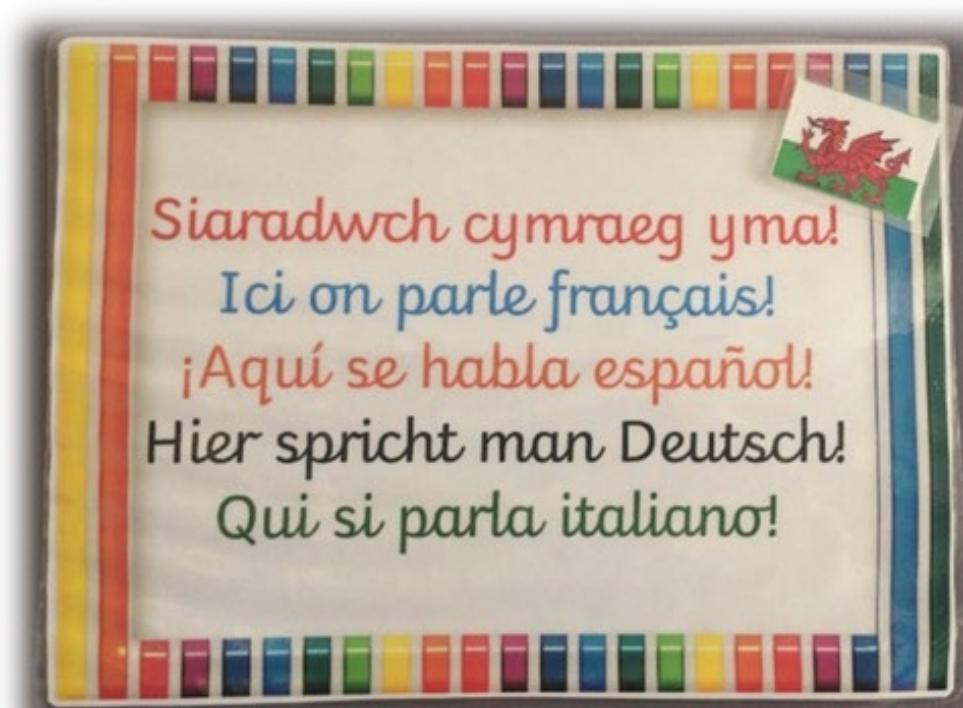


Figure 1. Multilingual sign



Figure 2. Italian colouring activity

Methods

In September 2017, Llansannor & Llanharry Primary School introduced a multilingual teaching project, part-funded through *Global Futures*, which aims to "promote and raise the profile of MFL through enhanced learning opportunities". This research adopted an ethnographic, case study design to explore how the project is being delivered in practice and how it is promoting multilingualism within the school.

Mixed methods were used including:

- participatory observations of lessons in two classes (Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2) over 6 days.
- interviews with respective class teachers and project lead
- data was analysed using a two-stage (initial and selective) thematic coding process.

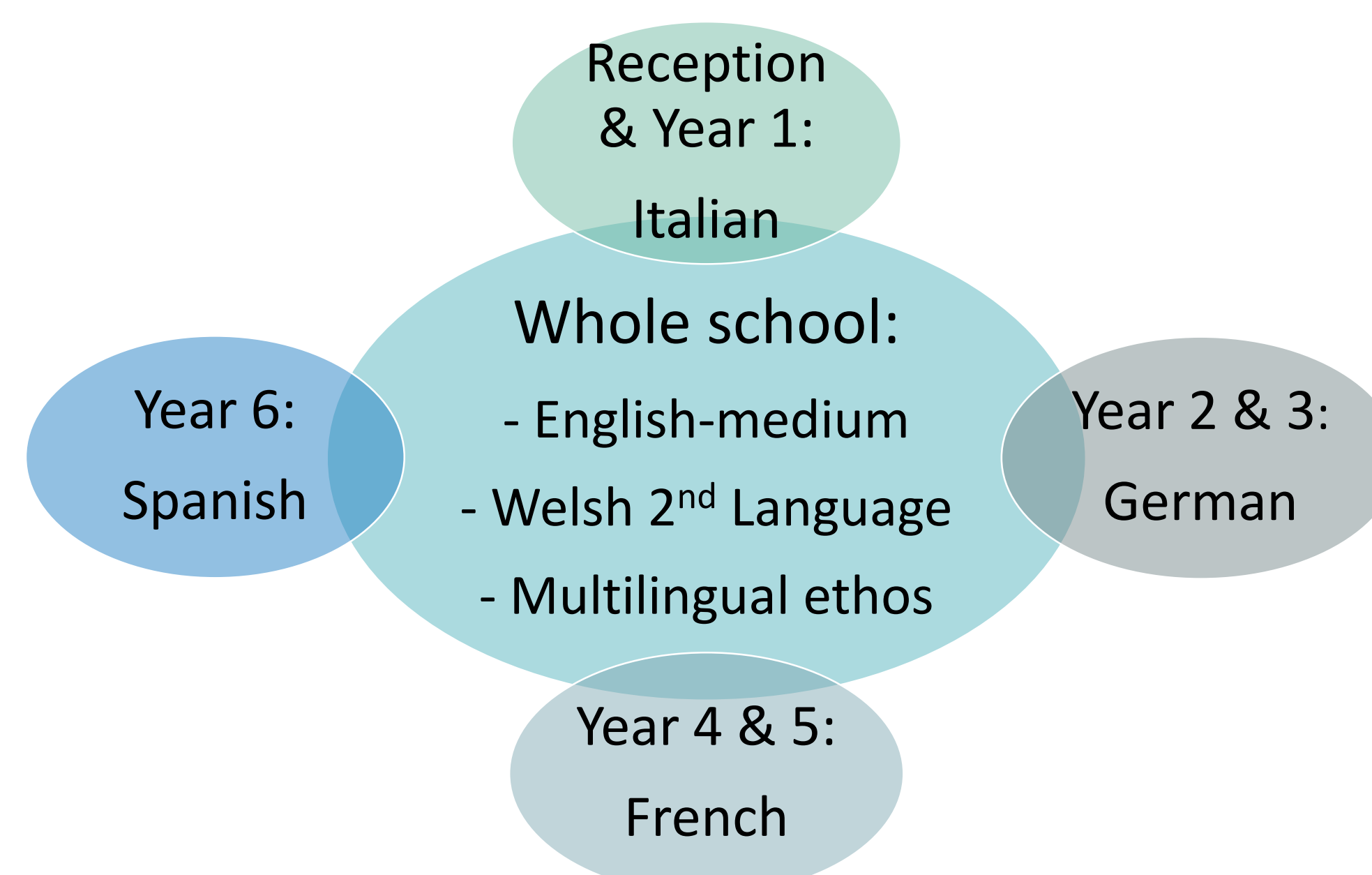


Figure 3. Linguistic profile of Llansannor Primary and the multilingual project

Results

Observations:

- Multilingual ethos embedded in the school through signs, mixed-age activities and intercultural learning.
- A balance of language lessons and early stage cross-curricular approaches used to teach languages.
- MFL and Welsh using a similar model of incidental language use.
- Digital technology provided important resources for language teaching.
- Examples of languages interacting through translanguaging or comparison, supporting mutual development.

Interviews:

- Multilingual ethos at the heart of the project.
- Teachers enjoy delivering the project - a flexible model allows them to be creative.
- Welsh is used as a model for MFL, but ideas from MFL are also fed back into Welsh.
- Teachers lack confidence in their linguistic ability – current training is insufficient.
- Finding time for MFL around other subjects can be difficult.
- Teachers concerned over progression beyond first year of the project.
- Inadequate guidelines and resources for teaching MFL at primary in Wales.

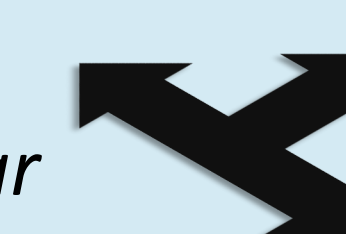
STRENGTHS

Multi-language, whole school approach



Teacher enthusiasm

Flexible, cross-curricular model

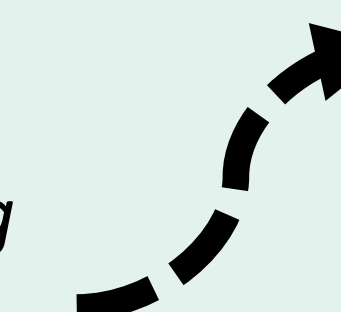


CHALLENGES



Fitting it in

Monitoring and ensuring progression



Teacher confidence

Figure 4. Main strengths and challenges of the multilingual project.

Discussion

Strengths:

- Flexible approach and its broad 'multilingual ethos' which, with the support of the whole school, is generating interest and an appetite for language learning generally.
- Primary learning environment is particularly suited to cross-curricular teaching, which allows teachers to use their adaptability and creativity.
- Languages are interrelating in the classroom and the learning process, supported by cross-curricular approach.

Challenges:

- 'Fitting it in', which could be exacerbated by moving to a model which requires closer progress monitoring.
- Teachers lack confidence in their Welsh and MFL linguistic ability, which limits what they are comfortable delivering and therefore the development of the project.
- More clarity is needed around how the project will evolve in a way that will maintain pupils' interest and ensure progress, without becoming repetitive and unchallenging.

Conclusions

This project demonstrates potential for primary education in Wales to play a role in generating an interest in language learning among pupils, and in piloting new approaches to teaching such as cross-curricular models.

In order to achieve this however, teachers would benefit from more tailored training to build their confidence and help extend their language teaching. There is also a need for more guidance and resources in general on how to incorporate MFL into primary education in Wales.

With thanks to Llansannor Primary for agreeing to let me carry out this research. Specific recommendations are being developed collaboratively with the school.

Contact

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