



Supporting teachers to adopt plurilingual approaches in languages education in Wales



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As International Languages teachers in Wales report on their experiences of plurilingual approaches in teaching, our research uncovers major challenges yet to be addressed before the Curriculum for Wales' plurilingual vision can become a reality.

Introduction

This briefing is intended to inform constructive discussions on ways forward for plurilingual approaches in learning and teaching languages in the 3 to 16-year-old **Curriculum for Wales** from 2022, given that a 'multilingual and plurilingual approach' is explicitly promoted within the curriculum area for Welsh, English and International Languages: **The Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience** (Welsh Government, 2021a).

Plurilingual approaches to language learning and teaching afford learners opportunities to use their linguistic and cultural repertoires for learning as well as promoting connections between languages and cultures. In the Curriculum for Wales, synergies are encouraged between Welsh, Welsh in English-medium settings/schools/streams, English and International Languages as subjects within the same curriculum area.^{1,2}

The briefing paper draws on findings from a study that explored International Languages secondary school teachers' beliefs about these plurilingual approaches during the preparatory stages of the Curriculum for Wales in 2021. Interviews were held with 37 secondary school International Languages teachers in Wales working in schools of different language categories (see Welsh Government (2021b) for the different school language categories) and across 20 of the 22 local authorities in Wales. This research was jointly funded by the **Welsh Government** and the **ESRC Wales Doctoral Training Partnership** and sponsored by **British Council Wales**.

¹In the Curriculum for Wales, International Languages include languages learnt at school beyond Welsh and English including British Sign Language, classical languages, community languages and modern languages (Welsh Government, 2021a).

²In this briefing paper, Welsh and Welsh in English-medium settings/schools/streams as subjects are primarily referred to as Welsh.

Main Findings

1

The change in terminology is a challenge for teachers.

Teachers' beliefs indicate little or insufficient awareness of *plurilingualism* as a term, which led to confusion as to what plurilingual approaches would entail in practice. That said, teachers' beliefs also suggest the teachers' implicit use of plurilingual approaches in teaching, with teachers more accustomed to the terms *multilingualism* and *multilingual literacy/triple literacy*. The latter term was used in a previous Welsh Government Triple Literacy initiative to promote pedagogical connections between the subjects of Welsh, English, Welsh Second Language and Modern Foreign Languages, as they were known at the time (Welsh Government, 2011).

2

Connections are being made between different languages in the International Languages classroom, but with a focus on specific languages.

Most teachers recounted drawing attention to Welsh and English—curriculum languages—for comparison with the taught language in the International Languages classroom. Other languages were less visible in the International Languages classroom, due to:

- The focus on comparing languages that are similar.
- The misconception that teachers needed skills in a particular language before being able to draw attention to that language in the classroom.
- The uncertainty around whose responsibility it was to include learners' community languages in learning and teaching at school.
- The legacy of the previous Welsh Government Triple Literacy initiative and thus the aim of building pedagogical connections between the taught International Language(s) and Welsh and English exclusively.

3

There is collaboration between Welsh, English and International Languages teachers, but the wide variation in learners' linguistic skills and different teaching approaches hinder further collaborative work.

International Languages teachers shared that they collaborated to varying degrees with Welsh and English teachers when thinking about opportunities to align elements of teaching Welsh, English and International Languages. However, some teachers reported key obstacles that hindered further collaborative working across Welsh, English and International Languages as subjects, including the following reasons:

- Given that learners have varying degrees of linguistic skills across Welsh, English and International Languages, it was sometimes difficult to find appropriate collaboration opportunities across subjects.
- Given that Welsh, English and International Languages are often taught using different approaches, these differences made it difficult for teachers to find meaningful collaboration opportunities across subjects.

Some teachers also believed that some learners lacked an awareness of their existing linguistic skills in and knowledge of Welsh and English (especially as first language subjects). This in turn impeded learners from using their Welsh and English for the benefit of learning International Languages.

4

Despite a willingness to trial plurilingual approaches, GCSE examinations remain a primary concern.

While most teachers confirmed that they were trialling elements of plurilingual approaches in teaching International Languages, end of secondary schooling GCSE examinations at age 16 remained a key driver for most teachers when planning International Languages teaching in general.

5

Conclusion: Interconnected factors hinder the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales' plurilingual vision.

Teachers' beliefs in the study suggest that the main obstacle for teachers in not being able to carry out fully curriculum-driven plurilingualism is the intersection between teachers' confusion around plurilingualism as a term, the absence of clear guidance and professional learning for using plurilingual approaches in teaching, and the role of examinations.

Recommendations

1

A key area for policy development

The Welsh Government should provide further written guidance to schools in Wales regarding how plurilingual approaches in teaching Welsh, English and International Languages can be implemented via the Curriculum for Wales. This should be widely communicated to teachers as well as Senior Leadership Teams in schools to further inform them of the role of plurilingualism within the Curriculum for Wales.

A quick reference guide for educators regarding translanguaging, funded by the Welsh Government, has already been published (Thomas *et al.* 2022). Published written guidance also remains from the time of the Welsh Government's Triple Literacy initiative (e.g. *Supporting Triple Literacy* (Welsh Government, 2011)). These documents could serve as an inspiration to develop similar guidance for plurilingual approaches via the Curriculum for Wales.

2

A key area for practice development

Regular professional learning opportunities supporting plurilingual approaches in teaching should be provided to educators in Wales, supported by Senior Leadership Teams in schools, local authorities, and other relevant authorities and institutions.

Professional learning activities should prioritise opportunities where educators working across different languages come together for collaborative working. Opportunities should be provided to:

- Primary school practitioners.
- Secondary school practitioners of Welsh, Welsh in English-medium settings/schools/streams, English and International Languages.
- Practitioners of Welsh as an additional language (WAL) and English as an additional language (EAL).
- Student teachers.
- Teacher educators.

3

A key area for research development

Further research should examine how plurilingual approaches could be embedded across Welsh, English and International Languages, identifying areas of future development.

- Research on plurilingual education is already being conducted in the Basque, Canadian and Catalan education systems to name only a few contexts (e.g. Cenoz, Leonet & Gorter, 2022; Cummins, 2021; Wilson & González-Davies, 2017), and potential lessons could be learnt from these education systems.
- Future British Council Wales' [Language Trends Wales](#) questionnaires could ask International Languages teachers about their implementation of plurilingual approaches in the International Languages classroom and collaborative work with English and Welsh teachers. This survey data would enable us to track reported practices over time as the curriculum continues to be implemented.
- Researchers working across Welsh, English and International Languages could seek out collaboration opportunities to research plurilingual approaches in learning, teaching and assessment from a joint perspective of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience in the Curriculum for Wales.

If you would like to provide your comments on the points raised in this briefing paper, or if you would like to receive more information about research developments in this area, please complete a brief form via the link or scan the QR code, which will be live until the end of 2025.



Link: https://qualtrics.ucl.ac.uk/jfe/form/SV_cBk0nicmizjPyd0

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