

All our young people, from all backgrounds should come out of the Education System ready and proud to use the language (Welsh) in all contexts. It is a matter of equity.....

(Llywodraeth Cymru, 2017)

Introducing Welsh to Children with Additional Learning Needs

In visits to all types of Early Years settings, and in my work with families, I get asked about the value of Welsh language learning to young children and particularly young children with Additional Learning Needs. Families and Early Years practitioners are aware of the importance of equality of opportunity in language learning but are also aware of all the expectations to learn that are placed on young children. In-line with 'Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers' there is an emphasis on reducing the attainment gap in Welsh Language learning in education.

In this article I look at how one Early Years setting is working to provide equity in and access to Welsh Language learning to all members of their community.

The parent and toddler group were set up to support families with children who have a specific Additional Learning Need. The group were aware that the Additional Learning Need was a useful umbrella term, but staff and volunteers were careful to ensure that they got to know each child and family individually. Everyone comes to the group with unique strengths, areas

for development and a variety of speech, language and communication needs and many languages are spoken in the community.

The Parent and Toddler group began to promote the value of Welsh language learning to members of their community following a training session with a psychologist who identified herself as experiencing the same Additional Learning Need as the children in the group and as a Welsh learner. The psychologist became a positive role model for the group and brought an awareness of the value of Welsh

language learning, an appreciation of the value of multilingualism, a broadening of cultural and linguistic perspectives and an appreciation of Welsh as a skill for education and work.

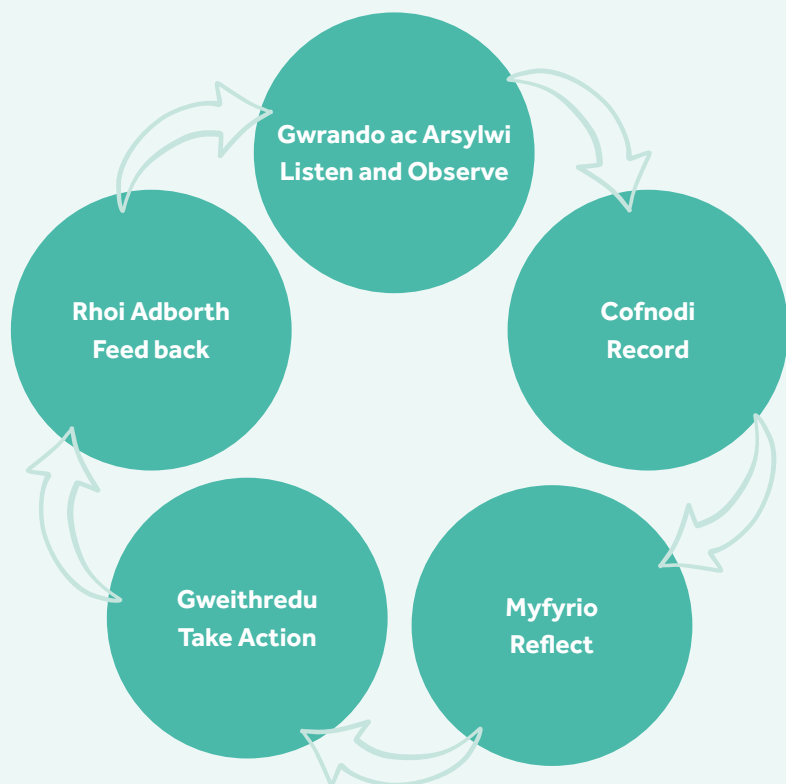
The first stage of the process of working towards equity in and access to Welsh language learning for all members of the community was to consider the barriers that prevented or made it difficult for children with Additional Learning Needs to access Welsh language provision and the learning of Welsh. Noise levels

in the environment and the positioning of activities continued to impact on all communication and staff and volunteers noted that opportunities for Welsh language learning were built into indoor focused tasks and not into environmental print, informal communication or play.

A communication friendly environment was established that made it 'easy, effective and enjoyable to communicate' (Ref: The Communication Trust) and the Welsh language was used across all provision to give everyone a variety of opportunities to speak Welsh, listen to Welsh and take part

in Welsh language play and learning. The warm welcome that was extended to the group's users had a Welsh language element added to it and families and children were provided with resources that reflected the Welsh language during the session. Posters that promoted the idea of acceptance and inclusion were also seen in the Welsh language and environmental print reflected Welsh, English and sign language, as well as, other community languages. Many of the families had lots of other professionals working with them and many were also able to promote Welsh language learning. The group found that, as in all other areas of

learning, children and adult's responses to Welsh language learning were dynamic and through observation and reflection the group became aware of how learning needs emerged and changed over time. Welsh language learning opportunities and play invitations were no longer static and could be positioned differently for individual children and family members. When verbal communication was limited the group used the Play Wales participation cycle (see below) to reflect on children's involvement in Welsh language play invitations and learning opportunities.



The need for Welsh language provision to be playful and engaging for children with Additional Learning Needs and their families was addressed. Welsh language resources for sensory stories, physical literacy and memory boxes were supported with materials from Booktrust Cymru, Sport Wales and Cymraeg i'r Teulu. Information and resources were shared with families.

A review of the effectiveness of the work is being finished and will form the basis of the next part of the process to provide equity in and access to Welsh Language learning to all members of the Parent and Toddler group's community.

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Sarah has an extensive background working in education, care and play and believes that a holistic and creative approach promotes positive outcomes for both practitioners and the young children they work with.

Further Reading:

Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language Strategy:
<http://bit.ly/2GnIPr1>

Play Wales:
<http://www.playwales.org.uk/>

The Communication Trust:
<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/>

Booktrust Cymru:
<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/booktrust-cymru/>

Sport Wales:
<http://sport.wales/>

Cymraeg i'r Teulu:
<http://bit.ly/2UXZTpJ>

You may also be interested in:

- Learning with Autism – Early years Programme, *smalltalk*, (summer 2018) pg 12 – 15
- Are you delivering an Active Offer? *smalltalk*, (winter 2017) pg 14 – 15
- Cardiff Deaf Creative Hands: Building bridges, removing barriers, *smalltalk*, (summer 2017) pg 14 – 17 <https://walesppa.org/your-early-years-news-features-and-guides-round-up-28th-10th-august-2018/>
- Family Sign; pointing you in the right direction, *smalltalk*, (autumn 2016) pg 6 – 8
- Play to Learn, active play and physical literacy, *smalltalk*, (summer 2016) pg 10 – 11
- 'A voice for life', *smalltalk*, (summer 2016) pg 15
- 'Opening doors, opening books' Bookstart Superbox Conference 2015, *smalltalk*, (spring 2016) pg 18 – 20

Ref: Play Wales training on the UNCRC and participation

A Sensory Story Session

See page 26 for our fantastic sensory giveaway.

The book 'Hooray for Fish' by Lucy Cousins can easily be modified to make a great sensory story session that uses the Welsh Language. The content, play opportunities, language and length of the story can easily be adapted to your audience and there are lots of opportunities to add sensory elements.

The premise is that a little fish is looking for his mum in an ocean full of other fish. The fish come in all sorts of colours and quantities, have different emotions and feelings, and have lots of different actions.

When creating sensory stories, think about adding sensory play opportunities that can be seen, heard, felt and smelt (maybe taste too if appropriate to the story). Also think about offering opportunities for individual responses, opportunities for active play, opportunities for relaxation, closeness and making connections and opportunities for listening, talk and communication.

The following story session has been developed for individual children, small groups of children and with families. Each element can be adapted for the children and families in your groups.

Introduce the idea of the sea:

Wave sounds, water sprays, a blue sheet to move in wave-like shapes, sea or seaweed smells (opportunities for active play and connectedness with the sheet play and opportunities to relax and to listen to the sound of the waves and smell)

Nofio	To swim
Y mor	The Sea
Mae syniad da gyda fi!	I have a good idea
Beth am nofio?	What about swimming?
Beth am nofio yn y mor?	What about swimming in the sea?
Dyma ein cyfle!	Here's our opportunity!

Introduce the idea that Pysgodyn Bach is looking for his mum:

Play a hide and seek game under the sheet that you used for the sea. Pretend to look for Pysgodyn Bach's mummy (Opportunities for active play, listening and talk and two-way responses.)

Ble mae Mam?	Where is mum?
Pi-po	Peepo
Yw hi yma?	Is she here?
Nac ydy!	No she's not!

Introduce the mum character:

Plan where you are going to find Mummy Fish. Will she appear from behind your back, or be under the sheet or perhaps be another puppet that you have drawn on your other hand? (Opportunities for active play, listening and talk and two-way responses)

Pwy sy' na?	Who is there?
Helo, Mam	Hello, mummy
Cwtch	Hug
Sws	Kiss

Introduce the main character:

Use a glove, or face paints to make a fish puppet on your hand. Offer opportunities for the child and/or their significant adult to make a fish puppet. (Opportunities for play and talking, observation and two-way responses)

Pysgodyn/ Pysgod Bach	Fish(es) Little
Helo Pysgodyn!	Hello Fish!
Helo Pysgodyn Bach	Hello Little Fish!
Sut wyt ti, Pysgodyn Bach?	How are you Little Fish?!

Introduce one or more of the other fishes:

Choose the theme that you want to work with (e.g. numbers, colours, feeling states) and introduce Pysgodyn Bach to other fish puppets (Opportunities for play, listening and talk and for two-way responses)

Beth wyt ti'n weld, Pysgodyn Bach?	What do you see, Little Fish?
(Dw i'n weld/ Helô) Pysgodyn Glas/ Coch/ Melyn	(I see a/ Hello) Blue/ Red/ Yellow

Create a relaxing end to the sensory story session

Perhaps you could turn the lights down, put on the wave music on and gently lay the sheet over the child(ren).

Nos da, Pysgodyn Bach
Nos da, Mam

Reference:
Cousins, L. (2016). Hooray for Fish, London, Walker Books Ltd

Don't forget

Early Years Wales members can download back issues of *smalltalk* for free:

earlyyears.wales/shop