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Are children and young people with additional learning needs at a systemic disadvantage regarding Welsh language opportunities?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores whether children and young people (CYP) with additional learning needs (ALN) are at a systemic disadvantage regarding Welsh language opportunities. Justification pertaining to why this should be on the radar of educational psychologists (EPs) in Wales is provided. Congruent with critical realism, quantitative and qualitative research is reviewed, examining micro, eco and macrosystems. A systemic lens illuminates the context and process factors that CYP with ALN and their families may encounter regarding Welsh language opportunities. This paper is informed by the bioecological Person Process Context Time (PPCT) model, and the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA). Limitations demarcating interpretation of identified issues are highlighted, without negating their significance. Implications for EPs are offered, contemplating their role in facilitating inclusion through supporting the development of greater cohesion between Welsh Government (WG) legislation (macrosystem), and the systemic realities of CYP with ALN in Wales.

KEYWORDS

Welsh language; additional learning needs; educational psychologists; systemic thinking; bilingualism; inclusion

Introduction

Monolingualism is what's best: this is an often heard rhetoric surrounding CYP with ALN that impact upon their language development, despite an absence of empirical foundations (Cummins, 1984; Drysdale et al., 2014; Ward & Sanoudaki, 2021; Ware et al., 2015; Wharton et al., 2000; Zhou et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the Welsh Government (WG) holds that Welsh-English bilingualism, irrespective of acquisition order, should be fostered for all CYP in Wales. Practitioners must ensure "No one [is] denied ... access [to] Welsh-medium education or learning Welsh ... because of ... disability" (*Welsh-Medium Education Strategy*, Welsh Government, 2010, p. 12). EPs in Wales are a subset of these practitioners, and are further legally bound to the spirit of this principle through statements in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, 1989), the Equality Act (2010), and the Health and Care Profession Council's (HCPC) *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* (EDI) policy (2018–20).

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It is hypothesised that CYP with ALN may encounter systemic disadvantages regarding Welsh language opportunities. The author suggests the role EPs could play in addressing this, thereby contributing towards transforming the WG's inclusive legislation into sustainable practice.

Rationale

This section sets out to justify why the aforementioned topic should be on the radar of EPs, outlining the importance of language from a cultural perspective, along with international and national legislation guiding/directing EP practice in Wales. The author delineates the underlying epistemology, before introducing the systemic thinking which is utilised to inform and structure the paper.

This paper might raise critical questions for education in other countries with co-existing dominant and minority languages, whilst remaining mindful of legislative differences. Additionally, the discussion could be informative to EPs internationally who are interested in cultural and linguistic diversity, or in developing culturally competent approaches to practice, or to those working with immigrant CYP and their families when considering facilitating the use/development of their first language. However, apart from drawing comparisons to support the argument, the author concentrates exclusively on the Welsh context to provide a focused exploration.

EPs' legislative responsibilities and the Welsh context

This paper utilises Matsumoto's conception of "culture"; that is, "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors [sic] shared by a group of people ... communicated from one generation to the next". (1996, p. 16, as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 2). Notwithstanding language-independent elements of culture, the verb "communicate" implies a potential role for language. Jiang (2000) goes further, arguing that "language and culture cannot exist without each other" (p. 328). Whether one agrees or disagrees with these views, the important place that language can hold within a culture should be recognised and respected. The author therefore adopts a cultural argument to advocate Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN in Wales, from the perspective that language can be a significant element of culture. The Welsh language is prioritised by WG language legislation, along with a commitment towards developing Welsh language opportunities for CYP (for example, *Cymraeg 2050*, WG, 2017a). This is applicable to the professional role of EPs in Wales in promoting equity of opportunity for CYP with ALN, and when considering their duties under the EDI policy (HCPC, 2018–20).

Assuming the importance of language for culture, then access and means to learning the Welsh language is a right for CYP with ALN in Wales in accordance with the UNCRC (1989). "Assistance [should be] ... designed to ensure that the disabled child ... [is] achieving the fullest possible social integration ... including ... cultural ... development" (Article 23.3, p. 8). It is a specific right for those from Welsh-speaking homes: namely, "a child belonging to ... a [linguistic] minority ... shall not be denied the right ... to use his or her own language" (Article 30, p. 10). Convergenly, WG language legislation stipulates that CYP with ALN receive equitable Welsh language opportunities to their typically-developing peers, and the role of education is emphasised (for example, *Cymraeg 2050*,

WG, 2017a). The Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal (ALNET) Wales Act places further requirements on local authorities (LAs) regarding the “consideration and securing of Alternative Learning Provision through the medium of Welsh” (*ALNET Welsh Language Impact Assessment*, WG, 2018b, p. 11).

The HCPC is the UK regulator of health and care practitioners and EPs must adhere to their codes of practice, including the EDI policy (2018–20). EPs should therefore determine where CYP may experience a disadvantage due to a protected characteristic such as disability (Equality Act, 2010). Efforts should then be directed to “advance equality ... between persons who share ... [this] characteristic and persons who do not” (EDI, HCPC, 2018–20, p. 6). Thus, EPs should address contexts where CYP with ALN may be disadvantaged and “have a responsibility to prevent such disadvantage (or ... minimise it) wherever possible” (p. 6). Moreover, EPs should “value and respect unique national perspectives” (p. 9); the policy specifically pledges commitment towards Welsh language initiatives. Hence, EPs are obliged to address any disadvantages that CYP with ALN may encounter in their Welsh language learning/usage.

The cultural matter of Welsh language learning/usage for CYP with ALN in Wales is relevant to EPs on several legal fronts. The author endeavours to explore the possible discrepancy between inclusive legislation and the systemic reality.

A critical realist lens

A critical realist perspective on ontology holds that an external world exists, and humans can gain knowledge of it, but this knowledge relies on perception which is imbued/constrained by individual interpretation (Burr, 2015). We each have a unique way of seeing and interpreting the world based on our knowledge, experiences, and perceptual apparatus, thus rendering objective observation impossible. Critical realists support using rigorous scientific methods to investigate phenomena, whilst simultaneously valuing people’s perspectives.

This paper adopts a critical realist approach. A systemic disadvantage for CYP with ALN regarding Welsh language opportunities is thought to exist based on converging empirical evidence, although this disadvantage cannot be unreservedly proven within this paper. However, quantitative and qualitative research is reviewed that should alert practitioners, and suggestions are provided to inform future EP practice.

Systemic thinking

Vocabulary referencing the development of inclusive contexts for Welsh language opportunities recurs across WG language legislation. *Cymraeg 2050* (WG, 2017a) focuses on creating “an inclusive and positive environment” (p. 11), and “conditions to facilitate” (p. 2). This contextual theme is reiterated in the Education Strategies (2017b; WG, 2010), and the *ALNET Welsh Language Impact Assessment* (WG, 2018b).

Centring on contexts renders Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST, Bronfenbrenner, 1977) a useful analytical tool. Bronfenbrenner (1977) posits levels of systems around CYP which impact upon their development via direct and indirect means. Effects are bidirectional, and both CYP and systems are transformed through interactions and changing circumstances. The macrosystem entails the prevailing culture

and law, for example principles within WG language legislation, HCPC (EDI, 2018–20), UNCRC (1989) and the Equality Act (2010). These aspects converge on the responsibility to provide inclusive Welsh language opportunities. The microsystem encompasses systems with which CYP are in regular, direct contact, such as family and school. The exosystem involves interaction of two or more systems, including at least one CYP contact, such as interactions between LAs and schools, or parent support groups. The author explores Welsh language contexts for CYP with ALN in relation to microsystems and exosystems, and the role of EPs in promoting equity within them.

Focusing on contexts alone may be insufficient to provide inclusive Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) augment EST in their bioecological PPCT model, re-igniting the influence of CYP's characteristics ("Person") and highlighting the dynamicity of contexts. This model proposes that CYP engage in complex, reciprocal interactions with others/artefacts within systemic contexts as they develop ("Process"). This paper is concerned with processes in which CYP with ALN are engaged that could facilitate or hinder Welsh language learning/usage. It is then suggested how EPs could engage with systems to facilitate Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN.

"Person" characteristics such as the abilities of, or difficulties experienced by, CYP with ALN (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) are not discussed. Providing equitable Welsh language opportunities is laid out within legislation, irrespective of CYP's abilities/difficulties. The composition of CYP accessing "Welsh-medium education should reflect the composition of the Welsh population" (*Welsh-Medium Education Strategy*, WG, 2010, p. 12). This demonstrates commitment towards a diversity of CYP, including those with ALN, attending Welsh-medium schools. Of course, there are other person characteristics which may play a role in language learning such as motivation and interest (for example, Peng et al., 2020), but discussion of these factors lies beyond the scope of this paper. The author is concerned with systemic disadvantages CYP with ALN may face regarding Welsh language opportunities. Pertinent to this matter are the "Context" and "Process" factors which emanate from WG language legislation and the literature; areas EPs can address by applying systemic thinking (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to their practice.

The main body of this paper is structured according to "Context" and "Process" sections, with implications for EPs relating to each. However, it is important to note that contexts and processes are mutually dependent and inextricably linked; hence they should be considered together. In this paper "Context" is broadly concerned with factors underpinning the perceived/actual availability of Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN, and "Process" delves deep into their everyday interactions.

"ALN" is operationalised in this paper to not only refer to CYP with conditions that impact upon their language development, but also those who need additional learning provision (ALP) generally, such as Braille or sign language, or those who attend specialist settings, for example.

Context

WG language legislation emphasises the importance of education in fostering Welsh-English bilingualism (*Cymraeg 2050*, WG, 2017a; *Welsh-Medium Education Strategy*, WG,

2010; 2017b). This is in stark contrast to the days of the “Welsh Not” where, up until the latter part of the nineteenth century, some schools sanctioned students for speaking Welsh. Pupils wore a wooden sign around their neck with the initials “WN”, and could experience corporal punishment for speaking their home language (Lewis, 2008). Macrosystemic change towards the end of the nineteenth and during the twentieth century saw the Welsh language come to be valued in education, and a proliferation of Welsh-medium educational settings (Lewis, 2008; Statham & Siencyn, 2013). This section explores whether availability of Welsh language opportunities in microsystems and exosystems reflects the macrosystemic ideology, exploring quantitative and qualitative angles.

Access to Welsh-medium education

Examining the school microsystem, if CYP with ALN were not disadvantaged regarding access to Welsh-medium education, one would expect a similar proportion to attend Welsh-medium educational provisions as typically-developing CYP (Statham & Siencyn, 2013). Statham and Siencyn (2013) highlighted that these statistics were unavailable when they conducted their research. More data have been published in recent years; however it remains the case that one cannot derive confident conclusions. Crude comparison of figures from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC, WG, 2022c) shows that, of CYP with ALN attending maintained mainstream schools, 22.7% attend Welsh-medium, bilingual, dual stream or transitional settings. This seems comparable to the overall 23.5% of CYP in these specified settings (PLASC, WG, 2022a). Superficially, it appears that CYP with ALN are not disadvantaged regarding access to mainstream Welsh-medium education. However, data on language medium of specialist and nursery settings are unavailable. It is unknown whether the 5561 CYP with ALN attending these provisions or otherwise (PLASC, WG, 2022c) access Welsh language opportunities. This is a significant group of CYP with ALN to leave unaccounted for in relation to accessing Welsh-medium educational opportunities. Furthermore, the PLASC Welsh-medium classification is broad, encompassing settings such as dual-stream schools where it is possible that CYP access the Welsh language only in their Welsh language lessons. CYP with ALN on reduced timetables may miss language lessons for ALP. Data are available for the number of CYP in Wales attending Welsh-medium schools where the language of instruction is Welsh; however these data are unavailable for the number of CYP with ALN attending these provisions.

Teachers

Teachers are intrinsic to the school microsystem; ~33% can speak Welsh, and ~27% can teach through the Welsh medium (Education Workforce Council (Wales), EWC, 2022). Numerically, this seems insufficient to provide adequate Welsh language learning opportunities generally for CYP in Wales, let alone those who require ALP. Moreover, ~18% of teachers in Wales work in Welsh-medium settings (EWC, 2022), leaving ~15% of Welsh-speaking teachers in non-Welsh-medium schools. This suggests a finite number of teachers able to foster Welsh-English bilingualism across English-medium schools. It is also unknown how many of these teachers work in specialist settings. Regardless of whether

the teaching values in Wales include commitment towards the Welsh language, and meeting learners' rights (Hwb, 2018; WG, 2018a), the resources/means must exist to fulfil these values.

Teacher numbers in Wales are depleted, and there is a significant challenge recruiting and retaining those who can teach Welsh as a secondary-level subject and those in Welsh-medium schools (Ghosh & Worth, 2020). The WG has offered training incentives for these specialisms (for example, *Teacher Training Incentives*, WG, 2021a; *laith Athrawon Yfory Incentive Scheme*, WG, 2021b). The latter scheme was established in 2018, yet Ghosh and Worth (2020) outlined persistent challenges. Macrosystemic funding may be a reductionist short-term fix drawing Welsh speakers to the teaching profession; however, without holistic examination of day-to-day practices, this is unlikely to lead to sustained change at the microsystemic and exosystemic levels.

Obscurity

The quantifiable nature of accessible Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN in mainstream settings is questionable based upon available statistics. This is partly due to inconsistent labelling of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools in the absence of standardised guidance (Jones, 2016). This issue sits within the exosystem of LAs since schools can vary in their application of the "bilingual" label. A bilingual school could teach a substantial proportion of subjects in Welsh, or be a dual-stream school whereby some students receive Welsh-medium, and others English-medium education (Lewis, 2008).

Within such schools where students with ALN require ALP such as alternative curriculum content or a one-to-one teaching assistant (TA), it cannot be determined whether this provision is always available in Welsh. The *ALNET Welsh Language Impact Assessment* (WG, 2018b) stipulates "a requirement on local authorities to have regard to the desirability of ensuring that ALP is available in Welsh" (p. 6). Having "regard" is not an obligation if it is perceived that securing Welsh-medium provision is not possible, which could weaken the effectiveness of this legislation. Obscurity in LAs' requirements and labelling could conceal a systemic disadvantage for CYP with ALN. The mere inconclusive nature of this warrants further investigation.

A challenge regarding provision of Welsh language opportunities seems to exist generally for CYP in Wales. It is therefore logical to reason that CYP with ALN may be disadvantaged, whereupon ALP is required. The lack of specific data renders a quantifiable disadvantage impossible to ascertain. However, more can be learnt from qualitative studies.

Parent and teacher perspectives

Statham and Siencyn (2013) offer case studies that investigated the parent microsystem. Themes of feeling forced to choose between Welsh-medium education and adequate ALP, along with a paucity of specialist Welsh-speaking teachers emerged. Both themes are reiterated in Mitchell and Higgins' (2020) interviews with parents and teachers of deaf CYP, where again it seems parents are faced with a choice between their CYP benefitting from Welsh language opportunities, or accessing an English-medium provision that will more optimally accommodate their ALN. One teacher claimed that they were "the only

teacher of the deaf ... through the medium of Welsh within the county” (p. 18). This suggests not only a lack of Welsh-medium specialist provision, but an overwhelming workload for Welsh-speaking specialist teachers which raises questions from an ethical standpoint in terms of meeting levels of need and the potential negative impact on professionals’ wellbeing. Those in role may be over-stretched, and both those professionals who speak Welsh and those who do not may experience unease where Welsh-medium specialist provision cannot be provided for CYP with ALN. Mitchell and Higgins (2020) found these teachers were committed to fulfilling parental Welsh language wishes wherever possible, and they felt discomfort where this was not.

Griffiths’ (Griffiths, 2017) interviews with mothers of CYP with autism did not find that professionals explicitly advised “forced monolingualism” [where bilingual parents are told to speak one language to their child with ALN (Ward & Sanoudaki, 2021); in the Welsh context this would usually be English]. However, a mother shared that conversations nudged in this direction with notions such as “it’s just easier to cope”, and “English is the main language that they will hear” (p. 87). Therefore, whilst professionals today may not advocate an overt “monolingualism’s what’s best” attitude, there may be a persistent undercurrent in the perceived unavailability, or inadequacy of Welsh-medium ALP. These qualitative studies provide subjective accounts, but nonetheless both parental and teacher perspectives appear to converge on a systemic contextual disadvantage for CYP with ALN.

Implications for EPs related to contextual factors

Ability over intention to change

The intention/wish for CYP with ALN to access Welsh-medium education is seemingly present in parent and teacher microsystems. Moreover, an international study surveying school and clinic-based professionals challenges the “monolingualism’s what’s best” rhetoric (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). These professionals believed CYP with developmental conditions to be capable of second-language learning.

Given the proposed existence of systemic disadvantages despite contrasting intentions in microsystems, and the belief of capability in the professional exosystem, it is reasonable for EPs to concentrate on the ability of these systems to provide inclusive Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN. Consulting COMOIRA, an executive framework guiding EP practice (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2010), leads EPs to consider both the intention and the ability of systems to change. As the intention to foster Welsh-English bilingualism appears to exist, the author offers suggestions regarding EPs’ facilitation of “ability to change”, in relation to context.

Exosystem - improving clarity

It is important to recognise boundaries of the EP’s role. EPs cannot increase numbers of Welsh-speaking teachers, or capacity of Welsh-medium schools; however, they can raise awareness and improve clarity. EPs could communicate with exosystemic organisations such as StatsWales that statistics regarding Welsh-medium provision of specialist and nursery settings should be publicly available. They could inform the EWC that ascertaining

the distribution of Welsh-speaking teachers across language-medium settings would be useful. Such statistics could enable more confident quantification of Welsh language opportunities available to CYP with ALN.

Standardised labelling of school language medium could lead to more informed decisions on behalf of parents and CYP, and again could enable more confident conclusions on the nature of Welsh language input for CYP to be drawn. The WG have recently published updated guidance (Welsh Government, 2021a), reducing the number of categories to three: English medium, dual stream and Welsh medium; and presenting the aim for schools across Wales to move along the continuum to increased Welsh-medium provision. These changes should gradually be reflected in school prospectuses and the PLASC. To support this reform, EPs could offer assistance to schools in interpreting the guidance such that it is utilised more consistently in the future, hence enabling more transparent quantification of Welsh language opportunities available to all CYP; not just those with ALN.

Microsystem – promoting collaboration

In addressing the notion that parents may feel forced to choose between two of their children's rights (that is, choosing between pursuing Welsh language learning/usage for their CYP, or securing access to optimal ALP), the role of the Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) is key. EPs could work alongside ALNCoS to raise awareness that both rights should be fulfilled for CYP with ALN. Perhaps ALNCoS could collaborate with Welsh Language Charter Coordinators (WLCCoS) to produce high-quality Welsh-medium ALP. WLCCoS are "teachers responsible for leading on the design and delivery of the Welsh Language Charter in Schools" (WG, 2020, p. 5). EPs could promote collaboration between ALNCoS and WLCCoS, perhaps via inter-professional supervision; a key aspect of the EP role (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). This facilitation could lead to the establishment of their own way of joint working. Subsequently, these professionals could conduct in-house staff training to challenge potentially limiting assumptions around ALN and bilingualism.

The WG are progressing from "having regard" and taking "reasonable steps" to provide Welsh-medium ALP to these duties becoming "absolute" (*ALNET Welsh Language Impact Assessment*, WG, 2018b). Moreover, the suitability of Welsh-medium ALP should be continually reviewed in the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) of CYP with ALN. EPs can be involved in the co-construction of IDPs with CYP and stakeholders (National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists Wales, NAPEP, 2020), hence they could seek input from WLCCoS and ALNCoS such that opting for English-medium ALP arises from consideration of the needs/preferences of individual CYP and their parents/carers; not due to a paucity of appropriate Welsh language contexts. The importance of providing Welsh-medium ALP is repeated throughout the *ALNET Welsh Language Impact Assessment* (WG, 2018b), but readers may be left wondering how practitioners can ensure this. The suggestions above relating to EPs collaborating with members of the school microsystem, and encouraging synergistic interactions between them, could be a way to illuminating the "how".

Process

Creating “conditions to facilitate” Welsh language learning/usage (*Cymraeg 2050*, WG, 2017a, p. 2) transcends providing contexts to investigating processes in which CYP with ALN are engaged. The author concentrates on processes spanning school and parent microsystems, considering CYP with ALN from English-speaking and Welsh-speaking homes. The microsystemic focus is consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) depiction of a process as a direct interaction between CYP and their immediate settings, such as interactions between CYP and parents/carers, school staff or peers.

School bilingualism ethos

Several authors argue that simple exposure to a minority language in school is insufficient when considering holistic learning/usage (Bird et al., 2016; Cummins, 1984), and parental choice of school (O'Hanlon & Paterson, 2017). However, the WG promotes classroom exposure to the Welsh language through the *Incidental Welsh Strategy* (Davies, 2013). This involves incorporating Welsh phrases such as “bore da” (“good morning”) and “diolch” (“thank you”) into lessons such that some Welsh language usage becomes common amongst students and teachers. Whilst incidental Welsh could be a start, it seems inadequate for efficacious Welsh language learning. Furthermore, research indicates that the strategy is not implemented into English-medium schools in North Wales as intended (Parry, 2021). Where CYP have ALN that must be accommodated, including reduced timetables, incidental Welsh may recede further into the background.

In contrast to incidental Welsh, one may believe that prioritising Welsh over English may improve Welsh language learning/usage. Selleck (2013) presents two case studies of different language medium schools, where one school did just that. This latter school advocated separate bilingualism ideology where Selleck utilises Blackledge and Creese's (2010, p. 111) definition: namely, languages are kept separate, and one is prioritised/valued over the other (p. 26). Staff encouraged Welsh and discouraged English to the point where one student revealed that they were told “there's an English school down the road” (p. 32) when they spoke English. There was a view of some students not feeling as accomplished as peers who spoke Welsh to a higher level, and they felt pressured to avoid speaking English even when they struggled to express themselves in Welsh. There were also divisions between students based on Welsh language attainment.

Separate bilingualism appears to conflict with inclusive Welsh language practices. Where parents from English-speaking homes think their child with ALN may or does struggle due to separate bilingualism processes, they may opt for English-medium provision. Additionally, parents of deaf CYP feel negative judgement within communities which are predominantly Welsh-speaking when they speak English to their children (Mitchell & Higgins, 2020). Selleck (2013) proposes that separate bilingualism practices may serve to exclude students attempting to learn Welsh. If this is the case, students from English-speaking homes who have ALN impacting their language development may be further disadvantaged through a greater reliance on English. It seems that neither incidental Welsh exposure, nor separate bilingualism prioritising Welsh over English are facilitatory processes for developing inclusive Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN.

Teaching assistants

It is not just overt Welsh language teaching practices that are relevant to the discussion of whether CYP with ALN are at a systemic disadvantage, but processes inherent in the day-to-day running of classrooms. Regarding the microsystem of TAs, Blatchford et al. (2009) discovered a negative correlation between level of TA support and attainment of students with ALN in mainstream schools. A considered explanation is that the TA and student become a separate unit where the TA almost becomes the student's teacher. Relating this to Welsh teaching in English-medium schools, TAs are not required to be Welsh speakers, only to "promote" the language (Hwb, WG, 2019). Even if they are Welsh speakers, TAs are not trained to teach which may reduce the pedagogical value of interactions with students, compared to student-teacher interactions. Therefore, CYP with ALN could be disadvantaged regarding their Welsh language learning regardless of whether their ALN impacts upon their language development. Even if their propensity to acquire language is comparable to peers, the mere fact they have one-to-one TA support could mean they do not receive the same teaching input in Welsh lessons.

Parents and attachment

Salient to CYP's pre-school language development is the parent microsystem. There are "issues of power" which may conflict with the "respect" ethic in the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (2021, p. 6) when parents are advised/nudged towards forced monolingualism. This is especially the case given the importance of language for culture and the lack of empirical evidence to support a "monolingualism's what's best" attitude. Moreover, EPs could consider the effect on early caregiver-child interactions if Welsh-speaking parents feel restricted to using English. Wharton et al. (2000) studied families of CYP with pervasive developmental delay and autism from minority-language backgrounds in the United States. Parents encouraged to engage with their children in their native language facilitated richer interactions in terms of vocalisations, facial expressions, and gestures. Conversely, those who restricted their language use to English became pre-occupied with finding the correct English words/phrases; such interactions felt stilted, with less meaningful affect.

The quality of early caregiver-child interactions is paramount when considering the formation of attachments and healthy development of CYP (Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, World Health Organisation, WHO, 2004), drawing from Bowlby's (1969) Theory of Attachment. Caregivers' use of language plays a key role in these interactions even when infants are pre-verbal (Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, WHO, 2004, p. 13). Therefore, notwithstanding the cultural and ethical issues pertaining to Welsh-speaking parents feeling obliged to speak English to their children with ALN, this practice could in fact negatively impact their children's social and emotional development. This is a complex hypothesis for which data are unavailable to evaluate, but even the possibility should be addressed by EPs and relevant professionals.

Implications for EPs related to process factors

By framing this paper through “Context” and “Process” factors, it has not only been considered what provisions are/should be available, but how macrosystemic language ideology can infiltrate functioning of microsystems and exosystems. Kelly (n.d., as cited in Kelly, 2016) outlines “Implementation Science”; a discipline focused on how to implement interventions into real-world contexts with due consideration for processes that may underpin sustainable change. Below, the author suggests implications for EPs in facilitating processes that could foster inclusive Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN.

Flexible bilingualism

Returning to Selleck (2013), students in the English-medium school described themselves and teachers as using “Wenglish” (a hybrid form of Welsh and English) to acknowledge various Welsh input in students’ backgrounds. Students could choose either Welsh or English to express themselves in an environment that valued both languages, reflecting “flexible bilingualism” (Blackledge and Creese, 2010, p. 111, as cited in Selleck, 2013, p. 26). Whilst English was the dominant language, students were motivated to learn/use Welsh; Welsh-English bilinguals were viewed as “perfect” (p. 29). Nevertheless, students relying on “Wenglish” were not penalised. Selleck (2013) proposes that a flexible bilingualism approach could accommodate those from lesser Welsh-input backgrounds. Perhaps this process would be appropriate for CYP from English-speaking homes with ALN that impact their language development, since then they would not be restricted to one language. EPs could work alongside headteachers to instil a flexible bilingualism ethos into schools. This may also encourage non-Welsh-speaking teachers to use Welsh in their practice, which could further foster Welsh language learning in all CYP attending the school, not just those with ALN.

TAs and teachers

EPs could encourage greater collaboration between TAs and Welsh teachers, emphasising the importance of the latter interacting with students. A TA’s presence should not correspond to separation of students with ALN from teachers, as per the ALN Code (WG, 2021d). Within English-medium schools EPs could raise awareness that this is particularly pertinent for Welsh lessons where TAs may have little/no knowledge of the language. Inclusion conveys “means to participate” (EDI, HCPC, 2018-20, p. 5) in lessons where TAs would be the “means”; not a scenario where TA and student become a separate unit. To facilitate an inclusive process, EPs could observe TAs’ and Welsh teachers’ current practice, collaborating with them to extend their joint working, thereby ensuring that students with ALN are fully involved in Welsh lessons.

Sharing psychology

Concerning the parent microsystem and potentially perceived forced monolingualism, EPs could share knowledge of attachment psychology with parents and professionals. Consulting this research could also challenge EPs’ own potential pre-conceptions

regarding ALN and bilingualism. EPs could highlight the possible negative impact on early caregiver-child interactions, facilitating understanding of the underlying psychology, if parents restrict language use to one which they may not feel as confident/relaxed speaking. EPs could collaborate with professionals such as health visitors and speech and language therapists to encourage Welsh-speaking parents to speak Welsh to their children with ALN, alleviating potential worries. It is important to note that EPs must be sensitive to parental autonomy/choice however, since they may opt to solely speak English to their child with ALN. This decision should be respected, whilst working towards ensuring that the option to speak Welsh is facilitated where this is desired.

Non-Welsh speaking EPs

Non-Welsh speaking EPs may facilitate the development/coordination of ALP for CYP with ALN whose first language is Welsh, for example by eliciting CYP's views, observation/assessment, and/or consultations with parents/carers whose first language is also Welsh. Welsh language interpreters could scaffold interactions in consultations such that parents/carers can speak their first language. In terms of direct work with CYP, creative ways to elicit their voice could be incorporated into sessions such as the use of drawings/pictorial stimuli. For example, they could sort the Children's Exploratory Drawings cards (Timney & Cohman, 2020) according to non-verbal emotion cards to express how they feel about different school-based situations. Resources with verbal labels may also be translated by translation services in LAs, and used in creative activities with CYP. EPs could consider collaboration with teachers/staff who may be considered key adults for CYP such that they can assume the role of mediation in direct work. Collaboration with key adults could additionally empower their role in the change process.

Welsh language assessments

Aligned with the themes of empowerment and collaborative working, there is an endeavour amongst researchers in Wales to develop Welsh-medium standardised assessments for administration by school staff. For example, Morris et al. (2022) have created a Welsh reading assessment for CYP aged 1-11 years. Using this resource with first language Welsh CYP who may have ALN affecting their literacy development could enable earlier identification, and their progress could be monitored/evaluated in a standardised way, assessing the impact of interventions, and adapting them accordingly. This could help ALNCoS/teachers make more confident decisions regarding the nature/level of CYP's reading difficulties, and what may be working for them or not. This assessment is intended for use in Welsh-medium schools, however the author believes it could also be an effective tool for information gathering in English-medium schools in Wales for first language Welsh CYP presenting with literacy difficulties. In this scenario the author would again suggest collaborative working, here between WLCCoS, ALNCoS and Welsh language teachers. The role of EPs in this context could be consulting/supervising school staff regarding the purpose of assessments, along with procedural, ethical and interpretative considerations.

Trainee and assistant EPs

Carrington (2004) describes supervision as a reciprocal process and one could apply this to supervision between EPs and trainee educational psychologists (TEPs)/assistant EPs. Just as EPs could benefit from fresh insights and different experiences of TEPs and assistants, they could explore joint working where non-Welsh speaking EPs collaborate with Welsh-speaking TEPs and assistants. Again, this could be empowering for the latter and a learning experience for both parties. Post qualifying learning is important in continually developing EP competence.

Finally, in terms of building capacity and expanding influence regarding what EPs in Wales could offer CYP with ALN, their families, and schools relating to Welsh language opportunities, attention could be drawn to Cardiff University's EP doctorate. TEPs could be offered increased contact with, and opportunity to learn, the Welsh language. Additionally, EPs/TEPs working with Welsh-speaking CYP and their families, and Welsh-medium schools, could network to share best practice/resources. Such a virtual community has formed recently (Stenner & Jones, 2022) whose meetings this author attends.

Limitations

This paper has focused on equality and inclusion for CYP with ALN regarding their access to, and participation in Welsh language opportunities. It is argued that language is an important part of culture via referencing Matsumoto's use of the verb "communicate" (1996, p. 16, as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 2). However, there are non-verbal forms of communication and, from Spencer-Oatey's (2012) analysis, language-independent elements of culture. People can identify as Welsh and participate in Welsh culture, irrespective of whether they speak the language. 17.8% of the population aged three and over born in Wales identified as Welsh speakers (Census, WG, 2021f), yet 63.3% of residents in Wales described themselves as Welsh only or British and Welsh (Census, WG, 2021e). The author is not arguing that CYP with ALN must experience inclusive Welsh language practices for them to be integrated into Welsh culture; only that they should not be disadvantaged in this area. The Welsh language is an important consideration for some, including the WG. Furthermore, even if culture were omitted from the equation, the UNCRC Article (1989, Article 30, p. 10) on language minorities and the HCPC EDI policy (2018–20) converge for the same principle; that is, if CYP with ALN are thought to be at a systemic disadvantage, this requires addressing.

"Person" characteristics from the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) were not covered. The rationale provided reasoning for this, nonetheless "Person" characteristics are significant factors, especially in "Processes", which Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) describe as reciprocal interactions between CYP and others/artefacts. Baker (2013) argues that consideration of whether to introduce a second language to CYP with ALN should be on an individual basis. The author is not proposing a blanket "bilingualism's what's best" approach. Rather, it is argued that a blanket "monolingualism's what's best" approach not be adopted, as an ALN designation can often lead to generalised practices/assumptions, along with lowered expectations around attainment (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). EPs could guard against this, as well as encourage others to do so, addressing disadvantage where it is thought to exist.

Several relevant microsystems and exosystems were not discussed. For example, mothers in Griffiths (2017) shared that “speaking with other parents is the most supportive thing” (p. 95), implying that EPs’ involvement in the development of Welsh-medium support groups for parents of CYP with ALN would be an improvement in the parent exosystem. O’Hanlon (2015) found that a prominent reason behind Welsh-medium and Gaelic-medium students choosing to continue their secondary education in the minority-language medium was a wish to be educated with friends. Moreover, separate bilingualism processes seemed to create divisions between Welsh-speaking and English-speaking students as identified by Selleck (2013). Combined, these considerations suggest a worthwhile focus for EPs would be to investigate and develop inclusive Welsh-English bilingualism practices in the peer microsystem.

The author has primarily discussed the school microsystem due to the overarching focus of WG language legislation on education (for example, *Cymraeg 2050*, Welsh Government, 2017a), and the key relevance of the EP’s role in this arena. The parent microsystem was explored in light of qualitative insights parents could provide on “Context” and “Process”, along with ethical/cultural issues pertaining to actual/perceived “forced monolingualism”. Future research could investigate the peer microsystem and parent exosystem, along with pre-school and post-16 Welsh language opportunities for CYP with ALN. Regarding pre-school, progress is underway. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, a Welsh-medium pre-school provision, collaborated with Bangor University to create “Dwylo’n Dweud” (“talking hands”), a sign-language project for deaf CYP (Mitchell & Higgins, 2020).

This paper focuses on implications for EP practice from examining current literature. Such suggestions could be better informed via application of a researcher lens. EPs/TEPs could conduct qualitative studies to elicit the perspectives of CYP with ALN, their parents/carers and school staff on the context and process factors implicated in facilitating Welsh language learning/usage whilst accommodating ALN. Interviews with CYP (where possible), and adults in the microsystems around them could access their experiences, and explore what they perceive to be facilitators/barriers. Adoption of an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (Smith et al., 2009), as used by Griffiths (2017) for example, could attempt to make sense of these experiences. Such an in-depth exploration could enable EPs/TEPs to promote facilitatory processes and contexts, and highlight where there may be barriers, for the attention of LAs. Research of this kind could also lead to a deeper understanding of contrasting thoughts/feelings regarding ALN and Welsh language learning/usage which could subsequently be explored sensitively with parents/carers and school staff in consultation.

Conclusion

The author has discussed systemic disadvantages that CYP with ALN may encounter regarding Welsh language opportunities, considering “Context” and “Process” factors and the systems in which they operate. Consistent with critical realism, the goal is not to prove the unquestionable existence of a disadvantage, but to explore quantitative/qualitative research that converges towards it being a valid possibility. EPs are legally bound by the macrosystem to address potential disadvantage, and suggestions are provided regarding how EPs can promote equal contexts and inclusive processes at

microsystemic and exosystemic levels. It is not the author's intention to negate existing efforts directed at fostering Welsh-English bilingualism for CYP with ALN. Several efforts were mentioned, for example inclusive initiatives in WG language legislation, and the intentions of parents/teachers. However, indications of a systemic disadvantage still exist. Whilst this area requires further research and investigation, the suggestion of a possible disadvantage should alert EPs and key stakeholders to the systems around CYP with ALN in Wales.

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