

## RESEARCH NOTE

# *Bilingual Teaching in ITET Courses*

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### ABSTRACT

Bilingualism within education provides the focus for this research note. The use of two languages (Welsh and English) side by side in higher education courses is explored within the context of courses of initial teacher education and training. Whilst there is a dearth of basic international research in this area, there is a rich history of practice and convention, based on classroom experience. The development of a framework for bilingual teaching leads to an analysis of practice across a range of institutions in Wales and the identification of an agenda for further work, both within teacher training and within higher education in general. The note summarizes the results of a collaborative project funded by ESCalate, the education branch of the LTSN (Learning and Teaching Subject Network) which supports staff development for teaching and learning in higher education in the UK.

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### *Introduction*

Welsh-medium education in Wales expanded significantly over the last sixty years of the twentieth century, including a growth in the number and influence of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools.<sup>1</sup> Much developmental work has been accomplished in the wake of this growth, including the identification of effective practice and the provision of curricular back-up in the form of a supply of appropriate materials in Welsh.<sup>2</sup> Such developments have also influenced the provision of Welsh-medium courses post-16, although the potential for such provision within FE and HE remains largely

unexploited. Courses for trainee teachers have necessarily had to address the needs of teachers entering a bilingual sector. Teacher training, not unsurprisingly, is the largest sector within higher education which provides Welsh-medium and bilingual education.<sup>3</sup>

Basic conceptual and empirical research remains relatively sparse, for Welsh-medium education in general and for Welsh-medium education within HE in particular. There are signs, however, that the research community is beginning to respond and that there is a greater realization of the need to interpret the Wales experience within the wider international context of bilingualism and bilingual education.<sup>4</sup> One manifestation of this growing awareness has been the establishment by the University of Wales of a Welsh-medium Education Development Unit.<sup>5</sup>

Within this context, a group of institutions of higher education in Wales involved in initial teacher education and training (ITET) undertook an exploratory project during 2001/2 focusing on bilingual teaching and learning in ITET courses.<sup>6</sup> Representatives of those institutions together with an Estyn observer and the Director of the University of Wales' Development Unit formed the group and were funded by ESCalate (Education Subject Centre: Advanced Learning and Teaching in Education), the education branch of the wider LTSN (Learning and Teaching Subject Network).

### *Background*

The aim of this project was to research the opportunities for offering courses in a bilingual teaching context. It built on the work initiated by Canolfan Bedwyr (a research and development centre at the University of Wales, Bangor) on bilingual teaching and learning methods in education in Wales (Williams, 1994, 1997, 1999).

The project focused on the following objectives:

- sharing information regarding the learning and teaching methods adopted by individual institutions in response to the perceived linguistic needs of students and their potential employers;
- analysing the present curricular provision within institutions on the basis of a specific bilingual teaching framework;
- recognizing the opportunities for development and the obstacles to such development;
- promoting special studies of some of those opportunities and obstacles;

- drawing up recommendations for the further development of bilingual provision in the higher education sector in general and within ITET in particular.

### *Project development*

Membership of the project group included representatives from five ITET institutions in Wales, four of which teach through the medium of Welsh within their courses and the other institution offers Welsh courses as a second language. The project was based on a framework<sup>7</sup> which categorizes the various contexts of bilingual teaching and learning. The framework describes a variety of bilingual teaching models, ranging from separate Welsh and English classes, through separate language groups within the same class, to a range of integrated bilingual modes.

The two main purposes of bilingual teaching were defined as (i) being able to maintain provision in both languages by dealing with both language media in the same teaching group, and (ii) developing the bilingualism of each student in the group. The two purposes are interlinked although, in broad terms, the first facilitates administration while there is an educational reason for the second. They are linked to two types of bilingual provision. As an example of the first type, financial considerations may militate against running parallel classes in different languages, and provision has then to be made for the use of both languages within the same group. As an example of the second type, students with varying levels of bilingual skills may be deliberately combined in a single class for a core subject like mathematics in order to develop the bilingualism of the whole group within that subject. The majority of the bilingual teaching examples in higher education currently match the first type.

Bilingual teaching and learning situations were defined as those where, typically, one or more of the following conditions apply:

- the teaching materials are available in both languages;
- there is an opportunity to discuss in both languages (either within a small group or in a class situation);
- assessment is possible in both languages.

Thus any individual student is able to follow the course (i) entirely through the medium of Welsh, (ii) entirely in English or (iii) is able to complete some aspects through the medium of Welsh and some through the medium of

English. In the latter category this diversity could include studying some topics in one language and other topics in the other language. It could also include receiving lecturer input in one language and producing written work for assessment in the other language.

Within the bilingual teaching framework, case studies were developed of the teaching methods that are currently being used in some of the institutions, together with descriptions of the organizational contexts. The case reports vary in terms of their detail and structure. However, they form a reasonably comprehensive record of the current situation and the diversity underlines the variety within the complex bilingual contexts that exist in Wales. There are, for example, wide variations in terms of the levels of competence in Welsh amongst students across the institutions, variations regarding Welsh-medium staffing across institutions and variations regarding the Welsh-medium patterns within partnership schools associated with each institution.

As an extension of the present framework, two possible developments were considered that were tested over the period of the project, viz:

- the use of the internet in bilingual teaching, with a particular emphasis on its exploitation within institutions – recognizing also its potential in the context of distance-learning;
- the use of the ‘lead lecture’ for bilingual teaching in which, typically, a whole year group, including students studying through the medium of Welsh alongside those studying through the medium of English, attends a plenary lecture, delivered bilingually, before separating into separate language tutorial mode.

#### *General observations*

It was realized at the beginning of the project that awareness across the sector of the different methods of bilingual teaching was comparatively low. By comparing case studies, the project increased the awareness of the bilingual teaching techniques used by members of the group and in the individual institutions in general. Within the defined framework, most of the models were used but there had, hitherto, been little attempt to classify and interrogate those models objectively as a mechanism for their further development and dissemination within the institution and across institutions.

On a more basic level, consideration of the case studies also raised the members’ awareness and understanding of the general organization and objectives of the various institutions. It was realized that all of them, in

their different ways, were trying to respond to the learning needs of students who vary in terms of their knowledge and skills in Welsh. They also prepare students to work in schools, which differ in terms of their bilingual pattern, and there is an attempt to recognize this variety within the delivery of courses.

It was noted that there is a shortage at an international level of basic research into measuring the effectiveness of various methods of bilingual teaching within education in general, and within higher education in particular.

- i. In the USA there is a shortage of appropriate bilingual material for higher education; what is available is mainly for incomers who have difficulties in learning through the medium of English.
- ii. In Canada, there is hardly any work with immersion students at the higher education level.

There are only a few examples of higher education students following their studies in a minority language – the Basque Country, Wales and Catalonia are the exceptions – and a minimal amount of basic research work has been done to try to establish a theoretical base for this work.

#### *Recommendations*

While recognizing the potential of bilingual teaching in general, and particularly in ITET courses, the report recommends the following:

- a. More *basic* research is required in order to establish effective practices in bilingual teaching at the level of higher education in general. Wales has an opportunity to be a pioneer in this area.
- b. Further studies should be promoted in order to establish and develop *practical* effective practice in the application of bilingual teaching models in ITET courses in particular, and higher education courses in general.
- c. Further research is needed in order to establish and share good practice in the use of technology in the bilingual teaching context, including:
  - the use of basic technology (for example, projector);
  - the use of computer technology (for example, PowerPoint, the internet);
  - the use of specialized video-conferencing resources.

The group's work represents but a modest venture into a complex area of research. Much current knowledge remains anecdotal and localized. The project does, however, represent an initial step towards defining an agenda for future research and suggests that locating this area of interest, both conceptually and empirically, within a wider research agenda should be a valid and worthwhile exercise.

#### Notes

The membership of the project group included: **Sue George, Dylan Vaughan Jones, Gwilym Dyfri Jones, Dr Gwyn Lewis, Dr Cen Williams, Dr David Williams, Dr Sian Rhiannon Williams. Professor Colin Baker** assisted the group in an advisory capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams (2002) includes a detailed analysis of the establishment and development of Welsh-medium schools over the period 1939–2000.

<sup>2</sup> Over the last fifty years a number of bodies have undertaken such developmental work, including both official government-sponsored agencies such as the current curricular, assessment and qualifications body ACCAC, and its predecessors, and other bodies including LEAs (e.g. Canolfan Astudiaethau Iaith in Gwynedd), the universities (e.g. the Centre for Educational Studies at Aberystwyth) and a number of private publishing companies.

<sup>3</sup> Figures published annually by ELWa (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales) suggest that, typically, about 45 per cent of the total volume of Welsh-medium teaching within higher education in Wales is attributable to courses of initial teacher education and training.

<sup>4</sup> As evidenced by the increasing number of articles on bilingual education within the Wales context which appear in journals such as the *Welsh Journal of Education* and the *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*.

<sup>5</sup> The work of the unit and its publications may be accessed via its website [www.cymru.ac.uk/wme](http://www.cymru.ac.uk/wme).

<sup>6</sup> The group's full report can be accessed via the ESCalate website at [www.escalate.ac.uk](http://www.escalate.ac.uk) and hard copies are available on request from the School of Education, University of Wales, Bangor.

<sup>7</sup> Full details of the framework are included in the project report (see note 6).

*References*

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