



The power of three

Triple literacy means students get an even deeper understanding of the languages they learn. We find out how languages are being taught in Wales and Scotland

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Triple literacy is the concept that the teaching and learning of language one (which may be spoken at home), language two (which may be spoken at school) and a foreign language should be coordinated, so that pupils can compare the languages they are learning, and use each to support the learning of the other.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child "shall not be denied the right... to enjoy his or her own culture... and to use his or her own language" (tinyurl.com/UNlanguageRights).

In Wales, triple literacy involves teaching Welsh, English and a foreign language, while in Scotland it means teaching Gaelic, English and a foreign language.

There's evidence that under this approach, language learners transfer skills from one language to another, and home language learners who use their skills to interpret and translate for family members experience higher academic performance (see also tinyurl.com/linkingliteracy).

We look at the policy and practice of triple literacy in Wales and Scotland.

Triple literacy in Wales

The Welsh Government has a strong track record of supporting triple literacy and in 2011 published Supporting Triple Literacy: Language Learning in Key Stages 2 and 3 (see resources). Its Global Futures plan was published in 2015 and sets out a long-term strategy for a 'bilingual plus 1' nation; that is, to give young people in Wales the opportunity to learn English, Welsh and another language from year 5 onwards. "This complements our ambitious Welsh language strategy which sets out our aims to see the Welsh language thrive, where the Welsh language is taught from primary through to examination level," says Lauren Hopper from the Welsh Government's Education and Public Services Group. "Learning languages equips our learners with the cultural knowledge and communication skills that they would otherwise not experience," she says.

Addressing the decline in languages

The plan was developed as a response by the Welsh Government to address the decline in take-up of languages across Wales over the last decade. It aims to promote languages as an exciting career choice, which can lead to varied opportunities, support teaching and learning of languages and improve attainment at examination level. "Global Futures also sets out how we intend to collectively achieve our vision for all learners in Wales to become global citizens, able to communicate effectively in other languages and appreciate other cultures," says Lauren.

"Although it is a five-year programme (2015-2020), activities undertaken in the first year are already starting to have an impact on attitudes to languages and an awareness of the benefits of multilingualism," she says.

"We still have a way to go, but we hope that by the end of the programme we will have laid the foundations which will reverse the decline of modern foreign language teaching and learning, increase uptake of these subjects, and equip the next generation with the skills and experience to progress in a multilingual society."

CASE STUDY: Bro Edern, Cardiff

At Bro Edern, a comprehensive Welsh-medium school in Cardiff, bilingual Welsh- and English-speaking pupils benefit hugely from triple literacy. "This is because the students have two points of reference while learning French and German," says Ceri Anwen James, assistant headteacher.

Ceri and her colleagues have developed innovative ways to teach triple literacy. "We have adopted a shape-based system to represent different types of words, so that pupils understand that an adjective is an adjective, whatever the language," she explains. "Putting the different coloured shapes in the correct order helps students understand the syntax of the different languages they are learning. They come to understand that the red book and *das rote Buch* follow the same pattern in English and German, with the adjective before the noun, but that *le livre rouge* in French follows the Welsh pattern *y llyfr coch* with the adjective following the noun."

The teachers have worked with their feeder primary schools to create resources to introduce these shapes from foundation phase, and various symbols now decorate their feeder primary schools too (see photos). "It becomes visually useful because our pupils know that anything in their classroom labelled with a yellow circle is a noun, therefore it needs a capital letter in German."



CASE STUDY: Dylan Thomas Community School, Swansea

At Dylan Thomas Community School the Languages Faculty incorporates both MFL and Welsh. "As Welsh is compulsory from nursery, our pupils already have experience of learning another language when they commence learning Spanish in Year 7," says Laura Simons, Second in Languages Faculty and Teacher in charge of Welsh. "We build on this by working with cognates in the three languages in order to support the new language acquisition. It is interesting to compare Welsh and Spanish, especially through Latin roots (e.g. *eglwys* [church], *pysgod* [fish] etc) and we usually get pupils to highlight this in their work. We use triple literacy to teach and emphasise word order, particularly with adjectives, as very often it is English that is the odd one out."

RESOURCES

- Supporting Triple Literacy: Language Learning in Key Stages 2 and 3: tinyurl.com/walestriplelit
- Triple literacy songs: French: tinyurl.com/triplelitresource



Left and top right Some of the learning materials used at Bro Edern