

Exploring linguistic diversity

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This guide supports the teaching of all languages and is relevant to all learning outcomes across the three strands.

- Oral Language/Teanga ó Bhéal
- Reading/Léitheoireacht
- Writing /Scríbhneoireacht



Linguistic diversity as a resource

Children can be familiar with languages other than English or Irish for a variety of reasons. Some children have parents and extended family who communicate in these languages, some have experienced them to various degrees because they spent time in other countries and some have friends and neighbours who speak them.

Learning experiences that promote awareness of linguistic diversity benefit all children. Teachers can help children to observe the multilingual reality that already surrounds them and encourage them to see it as a valuable resource.

Linguistic diversity is a part of Irish society and is therefore reflected in schools in Ireland.

Learning experiences can be adapted according to the ages of the children, their language skills and the diversity represented in the school and in the local community.

A range of linguistic experiences

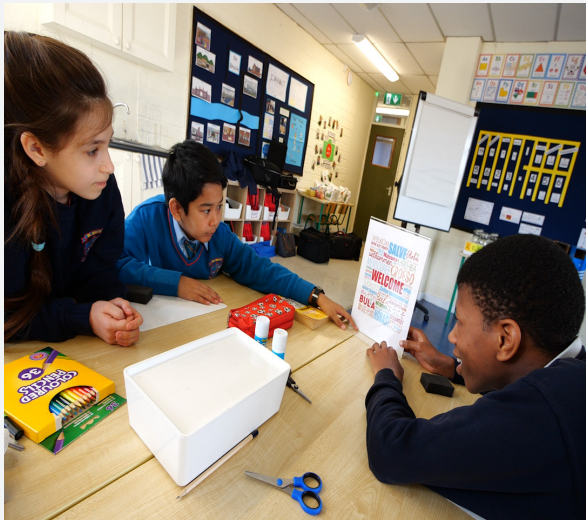
Children's language experiences are wide ranging and they are shaped by many circumstances,

migration being only one of them. It is important to provide a learning environment that fosters linguistic diversity and values all languages and all abilities. Teachers can encourage children to reflect on the experience of speaking or being exposed to languages that are different to the school languages, English and Irish.

Language is not only a tool that allows children to communicate and learn, but it is a core component of a child's identity.

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These include Irish Sign Language and Cant, as well as the many other languages that make up children's linguistic repertoires. For this reason, a whole school approach is necessary in order to ensure that children, families and the whole school community value all languages equally and that they see multilingualism as an enrichment rather than a deficit or a barrier to integration and achievement.



Linguistic diversity is a resource that all schools can use to;

1. foster awareness of the diversity of linguistic experiences of children
2. increase children's understanding of the way we learn and experience languages
3. offer children the opportunity to reflect on their own language competence in English and Irish
4. help children who are not regularly exposed to other languages to become comfortable with new and unfamiliar words and sounds
5. support children who can't speak languages other than English or Irish in developing a better understanding of the diversity of languages in the community
6. allow children who can speak other languages to use these languages in the school and make use of this often underused resource
7. instill in all children a sense of accomplishment in their language skills, no matter how much of a language they know, and ultimately nurture a more positive disposition towards language learning in all children.

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Whole school approach to promoting awareness of linguistic diversity

To support a whole school approach in using children's linguistic experiences as a resource, schools can do the following:

- Create multilingual displays and labels in the school (in English, Irish and the other languages children know or want to know more about)
- Display books in different languages
- Involve children in the production of displays that include the languages they know or want to know more about
- Encourage children to use the languages they know and to share their language experiences with their peers
- Allow children to use their

languages in school and for homework

- Communicate with parents about the whole school approach to embracing linguistic diversity.

Planning for learning experiences that build on linguistic diversity

In preparing for learning experiences that investigate the language experiences of children, it is important to find out

- what languages other than English and Irish are part of children's linguistic repertoires
- whether children who can speak languages other than English or Irish have also developed literacy skills in these languages
- how many children have experience of learning a foreign language

- what are the most widely spoken languages in the local community. Teachers can gain information at the start of the school year by using a parental questionnaire and a pupil questionnaire. The latter questionnaire could also be produced by the children themselves and it could be used as a research tool to investigate linguistic diversity in their school.



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Bilingual children in the classroom

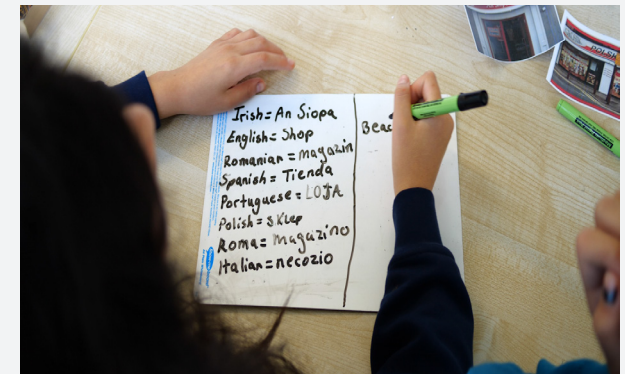
Teachers need to be aware of the fact that children who know more than one language are not usually equally competent in each, and they can develop different skills and a different range of vocabulary in each language. It is therefore reasonable to expect that a bilingual child who uses English in school and another language within the family may not be able to use the same range of vocabulary in both languages. It is worth noting that many children who are fluent speakers of a heritage language may not be literate in that language. There are also bilingual children in Irish-medium schools whereby they speak, read and write Irish within school and mainly speak, read and write English at home.

Practical classroom activities to promote awareness of linguistic diversity

The following are examples of ways in which teachers can use linguistic diversity as a resource in their classrooms:

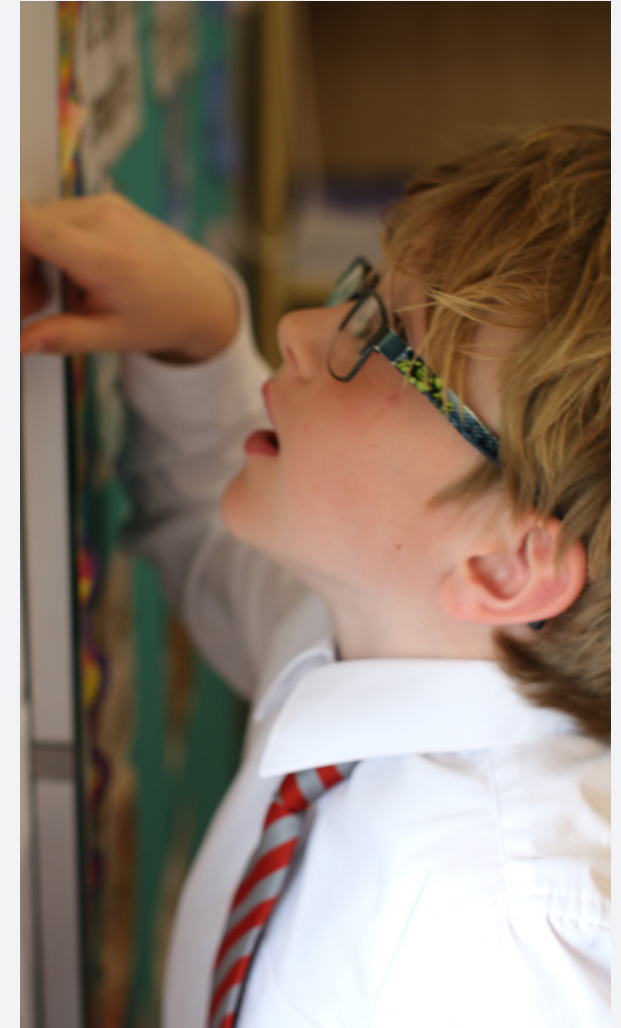
- Engage children in language awareness activities where they compare and contrast English, Irish and other languages when naming objects, using instructional language, counting, etc.
- Play guessing games, by asking one child to say a word in any language and asking the rest of the class to guess its meaning. Use this opportunity to ask all children if they know how to say the same word in other languages.
- Choose a range of phrases that are commonly used in the class and translate them in all the languages

of the classroom. Each month, a teacher can focus on one of the languages and encourage children to use those phrases. An example would be instructional language such as *let's tidy up* or questions such as *what time is it?* or *raise your hand if you know the answer*. Seek help from children and parents to write down the sentences and to learn the pronunciation of the sentences. Teachers can audio-record a child or a parent saying the sentence and play the audio in class to help all children learn the pronunciation.



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- Ask children to bring objects from home that display more than one language or a language other than English. These could be books, food labels, packaging, instruction booklets, pictures, postcards or anything the child can find at home. Children can be asked to describe what they found, what languages are displayed, and the meaning of the print or text. Older children can search for familiar words, look up words in dictionaries, or search for words that look similar to English. A focus could be placed on homographs, homophones and cognate words.
- Developing listening skills is essential for language learning. In addition, it is important for children to become accustomed to unfamiliar sounds to develop their awareness of linguistic diversity. Listening to the radio or to recordings in various languages is an experience that transports children to unfamiliar territories. Ask children to guess what languages they hear, and discuss the reasons for their answers. Teachers can expose children to languages that are familiar to children and languages that are unfamiliar to the children. In this way, languages are used to increase awareness of linguistic diversity in the classroom, the community and the wider world.



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Working with vocabulary

1. Make a list of words and find images that represent the words. These can be subject-specific words or high frequency words the children are familiar with.
2. Write these words in all the languages spoken by the children in the class. If there aren't children who speak foreign languages, the teacher can focus on one or two languages that are commonly spoken in the school or in the local community.
3. Show children pictures or objects that represent the words and ask them to name them in as many languages as possible.
4. Stick the images on a large sheet of paper and let the children write down the words. Where necessary, the teacher can act as scribe.
5. Audio-record the pronunciation of the words. Children's voices can be used as a model for the class to practise the pronunciation of words in different languages.
6. Encourage children to point out similarities and differences between languages. Highlight similarities and differences in spelling and correspondence between grapheme and phoneme.

This approach can be applied or used across curriculum areas.

Have fun with multilingual dialogues

Dialogues can be used to encourage the use of multiple languages and to help children to learn about each other's languages in a fun way. Writing bilingual dialogues increases children's awareness of oral and written language conventions across languages. Discussing how different languages sound and how they convey meaning improves children's language skills and language awareness. Multilingual role-play can also foster intercultural understanding. Role-play allows children to test new sounds and to relate to the experience of speaking a different language. This experience can allow children to learn something new about each other and it allows all children to try a new language or to showcase a language they use at home.

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1. Show children an example of a dialogue and demonstrate the role-play before getting started.
2. Give children a common theme or a context. For example, they could be asked to imagine a dialogue in the playground or a dialogue between a shopkeeper and a customer or between two characters from a book they are reading.
3. Encourage children to create a dialogue in small groups of two to four. Every child should have a role in the dialogue.
4. Ask children to work in pairs on a short dialogue in any language they know. Children can also use gesture instead of spoken language if they want to. Encourage children to be creative in their use of language, e.g., mixing languages, inventing new words.
5. Children can practise the dialogue in their groups and then present to the class.
6. If the dialogues are in a language that most children in the class don't understand, encourage the 'actors' to use gesture and facial expression.
7. Encourage the children who don't know the languages used in the dialogue to infer or guess the meaning.
8. This activity lends itself to a reflection of how it feels to act in a different language and to use it in school and also how it feels not to understand a language.

References

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