

## Teaching for Transfer of Skills Across Languages

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

*This guide supports teaching for a transfer of skills across languages; the examples given illustrate a transfer of skills particular to the following outcomes:*

- Reading/Writing: Conventions of Print/ Gnásanna cló
- Reading: Phonological and Phonemic awareness/ Feasacht fhóineolaíoch agus fhóinéimeach
- Reading: Comprehension/ Tuiscint

### Teaching for transfer

Languages by their nature are interconnected. Children learn a second language in much the same way as they learn their first language – by interacting with other people in order to communicate their needs. The vast majority of children can speak at least one language on commencing school. This ability in one language affects how they will learn subsequent languages. Some features of the first language,

such as pronunciation and syntax, may interfere with how the child will speak the second language. Other features, such as similarities in the alphabet and letter sounds, can transfer from one language to the other and thereby help the child learn the second language. The purpose of this guide is to help teachers in facilitating that transfer from one language to another.

From a teaching and learning perspective, teachers can make better use of class time if they draw children’s attention to similarities and differences between the languages that they are learning, and give children opportunities to reflect on these similarities and differences. Many children do this naturally in an informal way. This process helps children to not only learn the second language more efficiently, but also, to gain a greater understanding of the structure of their first language. The process of learning

The process of learning Irish (or English) as a second language will be more efficient if teachers devote some instructional time to teaching for transfer across languages.

Irish (or English) as a second language will be more efficient if teachers devote some instructional time to teaching for transfer across languages in this way, rather than viewing each language in isolation. English and Irish share many similarities in terms of letters and phonemes which do not have to be learned separately in each language. An explicit focus on integration between languages enables children to make connections between languages and develop an awareness of how language works.

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### Learning Outcomes and identifying transferable skills

Learning outcomes describe what children should know and be able to do as a result of the teaching and learning process. Learning outcomes for oral language, reading and writing are outlined for schools in which English is the medium of instruction (English Language 1 and Gaeilge Teanga 2) and Irish-medium schools (Gaeilge Teanga 1 and English Language 2). The learning outcomes for the second language of the school (L2) clearly **link**, where appropriate, to the learning outcomes for the first language of the school (L1). Where a transfer of skills from the L1 to the L2 occurs, learning outcomes are denoted by the symbol §.

The transfer of skills from one language to another can support children's learning in both languages. Teachers can facilitate this transfer of skills and can provide opportunities for children to make clear links across languages.

Previously learned skills and concepts in a first language (L1) can be applied to a child's learning in a second language (L2). Planning for a transfer of these skills in the areas of **oral language, reading and writing** can help children to develop an increased

knowledge about language and an understanding of how languages work.

### Planning for a transfer of skills across languages

Examining the similarities between learning outcomes for English and Irish can help teachers to identify the **skills, language features** and **contexts** where links can be made across languages. However, it is important to consider children's level of **knowledge and skills in their first language**, as this will impact on their level and development of knowledge and skills in a second language.

The sections below highlight some of the common **concepts and skills** which can be transferred from one language to another.

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### Reading

- An awareness and understanding of the **conventions of print**, including left to right orientation and identification of the title and author of a text
- **Phonological awareness**, including the ability to recognise, hear and distinguish words within sentences, syllables within words, rhyming words and words with the same initial sound
- The skills associated with **word recognition** and **decoding**
- The use of **comprehension strategies** to interact with and make meaning of text
- The knowledge and development of a range of **vocabulary**

### Writing

- The recognition that **writing is to communicate** with the reader
- Engagement in the **writing process**, including topic choice, planning, drafting, editing and presentation/sharing of work
- Extension of **vocabulary** and creation of wordlists in writing activities
- The use of **spelling strategies** and sound patterns to aid in the spelling of words



The language curriculum supports teachers to value the language experience of all children. It recognises that, when children develop skills in one language, they are not just learning the skills of that particular language. They are also developing an underlying knowledge base that enables the transfer of language skills and learning strategies to other languages.

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### Whole school approaches to promote the transfer of skills

To support a whole school approach in promoting the transfer of skills across languages, schools can do the following:

- Use multi-lingual displays and labels in the school (in English and Irish).
- Display dual language work in English and Irish, e.g., children's writing, audio recorded videos and voice recordings.
- Involve children in the production of a bilingual video about the school where children speak in both English and Irish.
- Use common approaches, where suitable, to language teaching in both languages.

- Ensure that teachers engage in joint planning for adopting and developing cross-language initiatives and activities.
- Ensure common terminology is adopted throughout the school in relation to concepts, terms and skills so that children are repeatedly exposed to the same terminology.
- Ensure teachers are familiar with the gradual release of responsibility model where children are exposed to the modelled, shared, guided and independent phases of instruction.

### EFFECTIVE CONDITIONS FOR THE TRANSFER OF SKILLS

- Similarity in learning conditions, task and response, in both languages
- Making explicit to children, where possible, the connections and similarities between both languages
- Providing children with adequate exposure to the second language
- Teaching Irish through Irish in schools in which English is the medium of instruction
- Understanding of concepts and skills in L1
- Opportunity for practice in L1 before L2

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### Practical classroom activities to promote a transfer of skills

Making initial links across languages involves identifying **common and similar learning outcomes** between languages, and planning activities to promote a transfer of skills. Planning for a transfer of skills across languages doesn't mean that children will be engaging in identical activities in English and Irish. It is important to remember that children will be at different places in their early communication skills, language learning and development in both languages. The levels of expectation will therefore differ between children's first and second languages. Children will develop at different rates and the progression continua for both L1 and L2 reflect this. With this in mind, teachers plan for progression by making judgements about where children are in their language learning and by planning for the next steps for their language learning.

The following activities are examples of **suggested activities** which can be adapted, according to children's ability, **across languages** to enable children to transfer their skills and knowledge from their first language to a second language.

- Teachers can explicitly highlight the **conventions of print** across languages, by drawing children's attention to left to right orientation, top to bottom orientation, front to back orientation and identification of the title, illustrations and author of texts. This can be done using large format books and picture books in both *English* and *Irish*. While reading large format books, attention can also be drawn to the similarities in punctuation – full stop, capital letters, comma, question mark.
- Phonological awareness is an oral and aural skill. Early **phonological awareness** skills include being able to recognise, hear and distinguish words within sentences, syllables within words, rhyming words and words beginning with the same initial sound. Playing with words and rhymes develops phonological awareness. Phonological awareness activities can be carried out interchangeably between English and Irish to highlight the transfer of phonological awareness skills from English to Irish. These include the following:

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- *Identification of words within sentences:* Teacher says some words/short sentences. The child repeats each word, placing a counter into a box as each individual word is repeated, e.g., Tá mé ag rith (four counters are placed in the box).
- *Syllable segmentation:* Recite simple poems and rhymes, asking children to tap their knees or clap on each syllable while they do so, e.g., Lámh, lámh eile, a haon, a dó.
- *Rhyming words:* Prompt children to identify rhyming words in both English and Irish by using pictures or concrete objects. *I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with 'bat'/Tá mé ag smaoineamh ar fhocal a bhfuil rím aige le 'lán'.*
- *Initial sounds identification:* Using pictures or concrete objects, children identify words beginning with a variety of initial sounds. This activity can be carried out in English and Irish. *Tá mé ag smaoineamh ar fhocal a thosaíonn le 'b'. Cad é?*
- *Identify letter patterns in words where possible:* Create word families of words with the same endings, e.g., \_án, \_ann/\_ eann.



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- Use popular stories and **fairy tales** for literacy activities in both languages, e.g., *Little Red Riding Hood/ Cochaillín Dearg*. Engage the children in **similar activities** across languages, e.g., prediction, sequencing of events, character descriptions, drama activities, questioning. Make comparisons between the English and Irish versions of the story.
- Choosing a variety of **topics/themes** and planning a variety of activities in both languages to develop the topic/theme, e.g., *my favourite toy*. Activities may include making a very short oral presentation, developing vocabulary and word lists and engaging in written activities in both languages.
- Explicit teaching of the same **written genres** in English and Irish. As each genre has an associated **structure** and **language features**, these remain the same across languages and the **framework** associated with the genre can be taught and developed in both languages. Aspects of each genre will be developed initially in the first language of the school. Work in the second language of the school will not commence until a level of competence has been achieved. Work in L2 may initially focus more on modelled and shared writing sessions, where teachers can continue to expose children to a variety of written genres in both English and Irish. Children become familiar with these frameworks through modelled, shared and guided writing sessions. As children develop their second language learning, teachers can encourage them to engage with a wider variety of genres. Finished pieces of children's writing in L2 may be very short.
- Engage children in the **Language Experience Approach**, which involves the children composing various sentences to form a story, with the teacher acting as scribe. This can be carried out in both English and Irish and can be used for future reading material and oral language activities.
- Engage children in the **writing process** in both languages as they are engaging with the various genres. This will involve children choosing topics, drafting, redrafting and presenting to an audience.
- **Free writing** sessions in both English and Irish enable children to experiment with a variety of genres and give them independence in **making choices** of topics to

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write about. It also gives children the opportunity to practise the skills of writing that have been explicitly taught to them during modelled, shared and guided writing sessions.

- Engage children in **language awareness activities** where children compare and contrast elements of English and Irish, e.g., counting, days of the week and colours.
- Explicitly teaching a range of **comprehension strategies** in English and Irish using the gradual release of responsibility model, e.g., making predictions, creating images. As children gradually begin to interact with and make meaning of text in English, these skills can be further developed in Irish.
- Engage children in the **creation of dual language texts** with the guidance of the teacher (see description of suggested steps involved). Writing dual language texts requires children to compare expressions and structures in each language, thereby prompting transfer of knowledge and skills across languages. These texts can be used as a basis for future reading material and oral language discussions. The completion of a single

dual language text may be completed over a lengthy period of time. The L2 text may be a shorter and simplified version of the L1 text.

### Creation of dual language texts

1. Pupils decide on a topic of their choice to write about and pick a title for their book. This can be done individually, in groups or with the aid of the teacher.
2. They plan for their writing in English, using brainstorming and mind mapping to create an outline of their story.
3. As they start to create the first draft of their story, pupils are encouraged to think in both languages. At this stage, children are guided by the teacher.
4. As the children create each page of the book, they write text in both English and Irish to convey similar meaning. Doing this may involve simplifying the language in the L2 text. Initially, this process can be modelled by the teacher. Children can be guided through the process of choosing words and using phrases of similar meaning in L2.



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5. An important teaching point at this stage is avoiding direct translation between languages. Teachers can model how to phrase sentences of similar meaning in English and Irish, e.g., *My favourite hobby of all is soccer/ Is maith liom sacar.*
6. The children then proof-read the texts and are aided in the proof-reading by teachers. They edit their work as necessary.
7. Each page is then re-drafted and revised again, editing text where necessary.
8. A final draft of the text is written.
9. Illustrations are added to each page.
10. A front cover and a back cover for the book are created.
11. Children plan a presentation for others. This involves reading the book in both languages, showing the illustrations and explaining the steps involved in creating the book.

*\*It is important to note that the level of teacher assistance required will vary depending on pupil needs and class level.*

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