A Plurilingual Approach to Teaching Irish Grammar

in English-medium primary schools

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Introduction

This report describes a research project carried out by SEALBHÚ: DCU Research Centre for the Learning and Teaching of Irish with funding support from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) in the 2023-2024 school year. The research explored an inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish grammar in English-medium primary schools (T2 primary schools are English-medium schools in which Irish is taught as a second language). Five urban T2 primary schools participated in the research and 11 teachers and 291 children in 4th, 5th and 6th class took part in inductive plurilingual lessons over a six-week period. T2 primary schools with a high percentage of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds were selected to participate in the research. Between 60-80% of children in the five schools spoke home languages different from English and Irish and there was a rich linguistic and cultural diversity in the communities of participating schools.

A plurilingual approach to language education gives learners the opportunity to use all the linguistic knowledge they have in their linguistic repertoire at school and affirms linguistic and cultural diversity in our schools (Concannon-Gibney et al., 2022; Little & Kirwan, 2019). Plurilingualism recognises that language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and spoken interaction) do not necessarily have to be at equal levels within or across the different languages known to the learner (Council of Europe, 2001; Piccardo, 2013). Plurilingualism supports pluralistic approaches to language teaching and learning rather than monolingual approaches in which different languages are considered as separate entities (Piccardo, 2013). An inductive approach to the teaching of grammar is one in which the teacher guides learners to discover

the rule and to articulate the rule in their own words (Ó Duibhir, et al., 2016; Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017). This research encouraged the children to discover grammatical rules in Irish and to compare and contrast patterns and rules in Irish with similar patterns and rules in English and in the children's home languages. The inductive plurilingual approach was used as a means of developing children's language awareness across languages and to promote children's plurilingual and intercultural awareness.

The development of plurilingualism and interculturalism has been set as an goal in *Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood* (Government of Ireland, 2024). *The Primary Language Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 2019), which is an integrated language curriculum, recommends that children develop language awareness by comparing and contrasting language patterns across languages. It is recommended that a range of languages including Irish, English, home languages and Modern European Languages be used and promoted in school. The term home languages is used in this report to refer to the children's home languages which were different from English and Irish. While strong proposals for the promotion of plurilingualism and interculturalism have emerged at policy and curriculum levels in Ireland, more research is needed to demonstrate how to practically implement a plurilingual approach in the primary school classroom. As the majority of children in Ireland are learning Irish as a second language, the teaching of Irish and the teaching of Irish grammar present valuable opportunities for teachers and learners to engage with second language learning and to promote a plurilingual approach. Learners can learn about Irish grammar, develop language

learning strategies and promote linguistic and cultural diversity at the same time through a plurilingual approach, as demonstrated in this research. The promotion of language awareness across languages and the strengthening of plurilingualism and interculturalism are among the major benefits of learning Irish for all children.

Today Ireland is a multilingual country with over 200 languages spoken daily (CSO, 2017, 2022). The number of home languages spoken other than Irish and English have been steadily increasing over the years (Gallagher, 2021). Polish is the home language most commonly spoken outside of Irish and English. Indeed, 123,986 people speak Polish as their home language, which represents 16.5% of the population who speak a home language other than Irish or English. The next most widely spoken foreign languages are Romanian, French, Spanish and Portuguese (CSO, 2022). According to the Department of Education, 10.4% of primary school children have a nationality other than Irish (Department of Education, 2022a). 92% of primary school children attend English-medium schools (Department of Education, 2022a) where English is the language of communication and Irish is taught as a daily subject. While Irish is a compulsory subject in English-medium schools, there are growing concerns in relation to increasing number of exemptions granted to children from learning Irish (Department of Education, 2024; Tynan, 2018).

The main questions that guided the research were:

- What are teachers' views regarding an inductive plurilingual approach to teaching Irish grammar?

- What impact does professional development have on T2 teachers' knowledge for implementing an inductive plurilingual approach to teaching Irish grammar?

- What are the views of learners in T2 schools towards an inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish grammar?

- What are the attitudes of plurilingual learners regarding the importance of learning Irish and other languages?

The researchers provided teachers with all the teaching resources required for the lessons and provided them with professional development. The research lasted for approximately six weeks in each class and teachers taught one or two lessons per week. The lessons were plurilingual grammar lessons. One of the researchers with experience in working for the Professional Development Services for Teachers modelled lessons and provided in class and virtual support to teachers during the project. This is an example of 'coaching'' as professional development (Ali et al., 2018; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Coaching allows teachers to receive one-on-one support.

Qualitative data was collected from the participating teachers through four focus groups (n=3, n=3, n=2, n=2) and one interview (n=1) before and after the project. Before the commencement of the project, data about the teachers' previous experience of teaching Irish was gathered. Data on teachers' attitudes towards professional development and the inductive plurilingual approach were collected at the end of the project. There were 8 focus groups and two interviews with the teachers in total. Qualitative information was gathered from 11 focus groups (n= 60) with children at the end of the project. Samples of work were collected from some of the children and the researchers also observed some of the classes.

Presentation of the Report

This report contains five parts. The second part looks at the literature most relevant to the project to place the research in context. The third part focuses on the methodology of the research and the steps taken to complete the research. The results of the research are presented in the fourth part and are discussed in the context of relevant literature and research. Conclusions drawn from the research are outlined in Part Five and recommendations are made regarding the wider implementation of an inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish grammar in primary schools.

Literature Review

This section examines the literature and research most relevant to the main research questions. The literature is discussed under four major themes: The Teaching of Irish and Attitudes towards Irish in English-medium primary schools, A Plurilingual Approach, An Inductive Approach to Grammar Teaching, Language Teacher Specialist Knowledge and Teacher Professional Development.

The Teaching of Irish & Attitudes towards Irish in English-medium Primary Schools

As explained in Part One, Irish is taught as a subject in English-medium schools and the majority of children in Ireland learn Irish as a second or as an additional language. The *Primary Language Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 2019) recommends that Irish be used informally in English-medium schools and that subjects or part of other subjects be taught through Irish. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the implementation of these goals. Irish is taught for 4.16 hours per week in the middle and senior classes of primary school. A reduction of time to 3 hours per week is recommended in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023) although schools may use discretionary time to teach Irish. The new specifications for the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023) also aim to introduce a third European language in third to sixth class in primary school, although currently there is no transparent plan for its implementation. Learning outcomes for Irish and English are provided in one language curriculum for English-medium schools. It is intended that language and literacy skills be developed through the strands Oral Language, Reading

and Writing on an integrated basis and through the following elements: Developing Communicative Relationships through Language; Understanding the Content and Structure of Language and Exploring and Using Language. This project focused on understanding the content and structure of language and on exploring and using language in particular. In the language curriculum, emphasis is placed on language interconnectivity and on the transfer of skills across languages (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). The curriculum specifically refers to Irish, English and home languages. The curriculum explains that linguistic and cultural diversity enriches the learning opportunities of all learners and that children should be given opportunities to compare and contrast all the languages they know. This approach was adopted in this research.

Children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) bring greater awareness and appreciation of languages and cultures to a classroom. Encouraging children to explore similarities and differences between languages and cultures can be of great benefit to the classroom language-learning environment by fostering a greater appreciation of languages. (Government of Ireland, 2019, p.20-21).

Learning Irish as a second language provides learners with valuable opportunities to explore language structures across languages. In this way, children will develop language awareness and metalanguage to discuss language structure (Jessner, 2006; 2013). All of these skills will help learners as they learn languages in general.

The Inspectorate reports (Department of Education, 2022b; Department of Education & Skills, 2018) in recent years raise concerns regarding the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools. Inspectors have criticised some of the pedagogical methods used by teachers including the overuse of textbooks and the method of translation from Irish to English as a medium of instruction. It is claimed in Inspectors' reports, that in some instances, learners do not have sufficient opportunities to communicate through Irish and that some learners in English-medium schools are not able to express themselves in Irish. The reports suggest that learners in English-medium schools do not have sufficient opportunities to talk and discuss through Irish. According to other research reports on teaching and learning in primary school, primary school children who attend English-medium schools have more negative views towards Irish compared to other subjects and are more negative about Irish compared to learners who attend Irish-medium schools (Devitt et al., 2016; Martinez Sainz et al., 2024). According to research by Martinez Sainz et al. (2024), primary school children in English-medium primary schools were less interested in Irish than some of the other school subjects and Irish was more challenging for them than other subjects. In the research, a variety of views were expressed among children on the value of learning Irish. Some children in English-medium schools expressed the view that there were cultural advantages to the Irish language and that Irish would be useful to enter certain professions. Children who attended the Irish-medium case-study school had more positive attitudes towards the Irish language (Martinez Sainz et al., 2024). Interestingly, in the same report, a high percentage of teachers said that they enjoyed teaching Irish even though it was clear that learning Irish posed challenges for the children in some cases.

Dunne (2020) recommends that, despite the challenges identified, good practice when learning in Irish in T2 schools must be explored and built upon to promote the language. Ní Chlochasaigh's research (2016) showed that successful Irish language learners have particular characteristics and that effective language learners use learning strategies such as analysing the structures of the language, which help them to learn languages in general. Parental involvement or support may help learners to learn Irish and to motivate

learners in English-medium schools (Little & Kirwan, 2019; O'Toole, 2023). Recent research (Little & Kirwan, 2019) showed that a plurilingual approach could increase language learning opportunities in Irish and the opportunities children have to learn other languages or learn about other languages at primary level.

A Plurilingual Approach

Psycholinguistic perspectives, socio-cultural perspectives and pedagogical perspectives are intertwined in the concept of plurilingualsim (Piccardo, 2013). Plurilingualism and plurilingual pedagogies are distinct from monolingual pedagogies that adhere to the use of one language at a time and keep languages separate. Monolingual approaches can reinforce linguistic hierarchies (Cummins, 2021). Plurilingualism emphasises linguistic interconnectedness and the value of all types of linguistic knowledge and skills of the learner. 'Seeing learners as plurilingual, pluricultural beings means allowing them to use all their linguistic resources when necessary, encouraging them to see similarities and regularities as well as differences between languages and cultures.' (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30). Plurilingualism emphasises the active language user who uses all of his/her language skills to communicate (Council of Europe, 2020, Piccardo, 2013).

A plurilingual approach shows respect for linguistic and cultural diversity by providing learners with opportunities to use a range of languages in school (Concannon-Gibney et al., 2021; Little & Kirwan, 2019). A whole-school plurilingual approach was implemented in recent research conducted by Little & Kirwan (2019). In School Bhríde Cailíní in Blanchardstown, 80% of the school's children spoke a home language that was different from English or Irish and over 50 home languages were spoken by the children of the school. The principal, Deirdre Kirwan and the staff took the opportunity to promote the use of a range of languages in school through a whole-school plurilingual approach. Children were welcomed to speak their language of choice in school. In the junior classes the children learned poems, rhymes, greetings, colours, weekdays and interesting words in a range of languages including

Irish, English and home languages. The children used 'translanguaging' e.g. they spoke in their home language when solving a maths problem and shared the feedback with the class in English. There were plurilingual displays throughout the school and children had the opportunity to create plurilingual texts in the middle and senior classes. The children wrote in Irish, English and various home languages and French was included in the senior classes in the plurilingual texts. The plurilingual approach in Scoil Bhríde encouraged respect for linguistic and cultural diversity as well as positive attitudes towards the Irish language and a high standard of Irish in the school. The school achieved results that were average or higher than the national average in assessment tests for English.

Cummins (2015) links the use of home languages in school to social justice and intercultural education. He argues that it is unfair to children when they are denied the use of their home language at school and forced to use the majority language. Cummins recommends that systems that are unfair at curriculum level should be counteracted through offering opportunities for learners to use their full linguistic repertoire in class interactions. The class teacher does not need to know all the languages of the learners, but Little & Kirwan (2019) recommend that teachers give children opportunities to use their home languages as an academic problem-solving tool, for example, or that teachers may encourage children to share information from their home languages as part of a language-awareness approach.

Plurilingual pedagogies support intercultural education and social justice by showing that every language and the speakers of every language are valued, rather than respecting one majority language and the speakers of the majority language only. It is recommended that a language awareness approach be promoted as part of a plurilingual approach as was the case in the current research project. The inductive approach to the teaching of grammar is described in the next paragraph.

# An Inductive Approach to the Teaching of Grammar

An explicit-inductive approach to the teaching of grammar entails an approach in which the teacher guides the learners to notice the rule and then to put the rule into words (Ellis, 2005). An inductive approach differs from a deductive approach in which the teacher tells the learners the rule and they subsequently practise it (Ellis, 2005; Norris & Ortega, 2000). An explicit-inductive approach develops learners' analytical skills and learners develop declarative knowledge of language; that is knowledge of the structures of the language that they can put into words (Ellis, 2005). Learners develop metalinguistic skills through objective analysis of language structures and patterns (Jessner, 2006; Jessner, 2013). Children can develop metalinguistic skills across languages by developing an awareness of the connections between the different languages in their linguistic repertoire (Jessner, 2006). Cross linguistic awareness is an example of plurilingual competence (Cenoz & Jessner, 2009). However, multilingual learners need support and training to be able to use their multilingual skills and to use all of their linguistic knowledge (Jessner et al., 2016). According to Jessner et al. (2016), metalinguistic awareness is an integral part of multilingual/ plurilingual learning.

> *Metalinguistic awareness can be described as the ability to focus on linguistic form and to switch focus between form and meaning. Individuals who are metalinguistically aware are able to categorise words into parts of speech, switch focus between form, function and meaning and explain why a word has a particular form. (Jessner et al., 2016, p. 176).*

The success of the inductive approach to developing learners' language awareness of target structures in Irish has already been shown in Irish-medium schools (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017) where Irish-medium teachers (n=12) presented enriched input on powerpoint slides to learners in 5th & 6th class (n=259). They focused on different patterns associated with the genitive case, focusing on one pattern at a time. The print was highlighted to draw the

children's attention to linguistic form and simple words were used that the children could focus on the form rather than the meaning of the language (Van Patten, 1996). Examples of slides are in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *Bain Súp As! (Ní Dhiorbháin, 2014)*
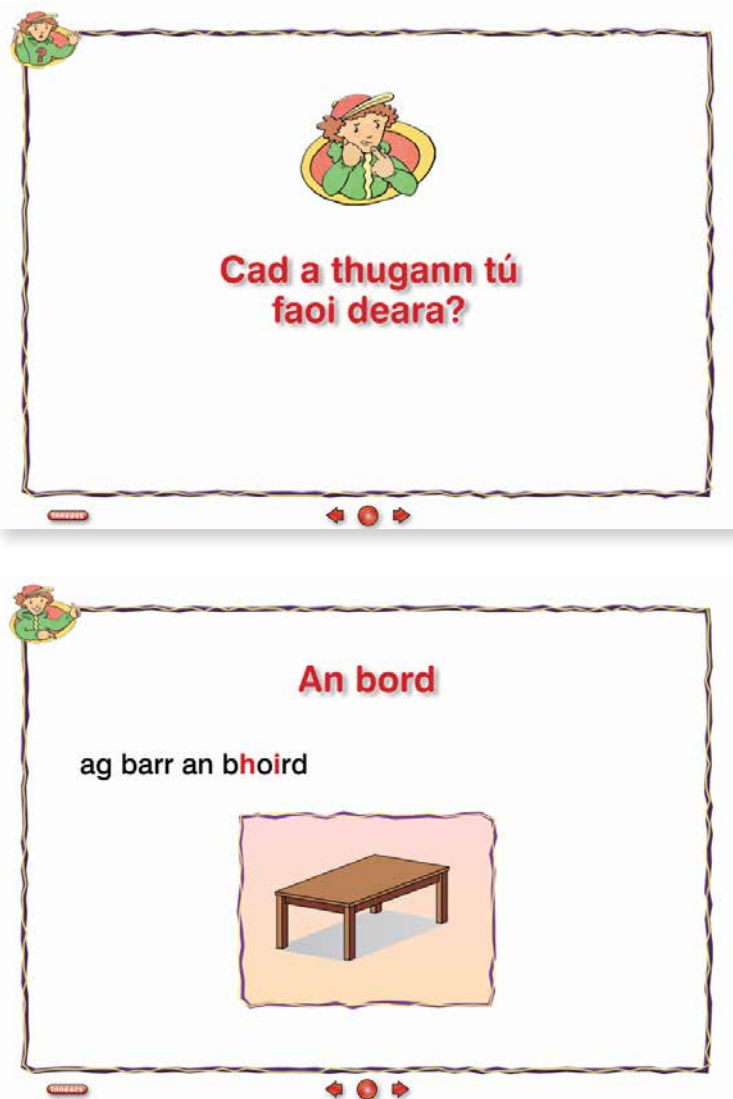
Research has shown that learners find it difficult to focus on the form and meaning of the language at the same time, since their amount of available attention is limited (Van Patten, 1996). Teachers guided the learners to discover the rules by asking them: What do you notice? Do you see a rule? Do you see a pattern? The children had the opportunity to discuss the target structures and wrote about what they had learned in a reflective journal under the following headings:

> *What did I learn? This entry illustrates examples of the target structure presented to learners.*
> *An explanation of what I have learned? The children write the rule in their own words.*
> *My own examples: The child applies the rule to new language.*
> *What did I think? The child reflects on what they have learned.*

The children practised grammar rules and highlighted the structures in other lessons and in everyday conversation. Grammar tests administered to the children showed a significant increase in outcomes between the pre-test and the delayed post-test. Both teachers and learners expressed positive attitudes towards the inductive approach as the children were encouraged to actively engage in their own learning. Teachers and children were of the opinion that children would have a better memory of the rules because they discovered them themselves (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017). The explicit-inductive approach was implemented in a similar way in this research project but there was an increased emphasis on comparing structures across languages.

Ní Dhiorbháin et al. (2024) shows that professional development supports Irish-medium teachers to implement the inductive approach and that professional development supports them in developing content knowledge in relation to grammatical rules, as well as pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) in relation to how to teach grammar. The research of Ní Dhiorbháin et al. (2024) provides two models of professional development, and it emerged that professional development is more effective when the researcher was on site in the school to support with instructional coaching (Ali et al., 2018;

Desimone & Pak, 2017). Moreover, it has been shown that it helps teachers when resources are made available to them and that professional development can be very beneficial when there is collaboration between researchers who are teacher educators and class teachers, as has also been reflected in other research (Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2020; Cammarata & Haley, 2017).

Language Teacher Specialist Knowledge & Professional Development

Primary school teachers are generalist teachers and therefore have a responsibility to teach all the subjects of the primary school curriculum. They have are required to teach Irish and English even though they are not specialist language teachers. Research has previously shown gaps in primary teachers and student teachers content knowledge of Irish grammar (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024; Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2021). Ní Dhiorbháin et al. (2024) found that Irish-medium teachers were unsure of some rules in Irish and Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir (2021) showed that there were gaps in teachers' knowledge of Irish in relation to Irish grammar, which included gaps in procedural knowledge (how to apply rules), and in the declarative knowledge (how to explain rules) of the language.

Research and literature have highlighted over the years that teaching is a profession and therefore teachers need specific disciplinary knowledge to teach a language. There are various models that demonstrate the knowledge that teachers require to teach language effectively (Andrews, 2007; Otwinowska, 2017; Wright & Bolitho, 1993). All these models form the view that language teachers need to have specific content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1987) used the term *pedagogical content knowledge* to describe the skill with which teachers adapt their content knowledge into a form that is suitable for teaching and learning. Wright & Bolitho (1996) argued that language teachers must fulfil three roles in becoming effective language teachers, namely, the role of the language user that requires proficiency in the language; the role of the language analyst which requires knowledge of the basic structures of the language; and the role of the

language teacher requiring class-management skills. Otwinsowska (2017) built on this model to highlight the plurilingual awareness of the language teacher which includes knowledge of all the languages to be taught encompassing the role of the user, the role of the analyst and the role of the language teacher.

Teaching is a profession in which teachers continue learning throughout their professional career. Professional development helps teachers develop their skills and knowledge. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) have identified particular characteristics regarding what constitutes effective professional development. It is recommended that for professional development to be effective, it should be content-focused, use active learning that draws on adult learning theories, be collaborative and embedded in work contexts where teaching is effectively modelled. It is recommended that coaching or specialist support be provided and that teachers receive feedback and opportunities for reflection that last over a sustained period (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Instructional coaching can be of great benefit as a professional development approach and distinguishes between coaching and mentoring as models of professional development (Ali et al., 2018). Mentoring support is usually focused on long-term professional development. Coaching allows the teacher and coach to focus on a particular aspect of teaching for a shorter period. Instructional/pedagogical coaching provides opportunities for teachers to learn new skills, reflect on and make amendments to current practice to assist learners. A coaching model provides one-to-one support and adapts the support to the teacher and their teaching and learning context (Ali et al., 2018). Internationally (Desimone & Pak, 2017), coaching has demonstrated great success as an effective model of professional development for teachers. Instructional coaching allows teachers to be active in their learning by observing modelled lessons or modelling lessons with a particular focus (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Having dealt with the literature and research in this section, in the next we will present our research methodology and the steps taken to complete that research.

Methodology

In this section we describe the qualitative methodology of the research. We explain the steps taken to complete the research including ethical approval, sampling, data collection and data analysis. We describe the inductive plurilingual approach implemented along with information about the schools and those who took part.

Ethical Approval & Sampling

We received ethical approval to undertake the research from the University Ethics Research Committee in November 2024 (Reference Number: DCUREC/2023/210). One school participated in the research in November/December 2023. Three teachers and three classes (n=84) participated in the first phase which acted as a pilot for the bigger study. Eight teachers in 4 schools took part in the research post-Christmas in January 2024. In total 11 teachers and 291 children took part in the lessons. Children in 4th-6th class aged 10-12 years participated in the research as shown in Table 1. Purposive sampling was implemented (Cohen et al. 2018). We invited certain schools with a high percentage of children in the school community (60-80%) who spoke a language at home other than Irish or English to take part in the project. We contacted the school principals through publicly available data and received written permission from the principal and the chairperson of the board of management in each school to undertake the research. We also received informed consent from parents/guardians and subsequently sought assent from the children. Teachers had the option of taking part or of not taking part. Table 2 shows the number of years of teaching experience of the participating teachers. Four of the teachers had between one and two years' experience;

two of whom were newly qualified teachers. Nine of the teachers had a B.Ed. and two of the teachers had a postgraduate qualification in primary education. Two teachers had an additional postgraduate M.A. and M.Ed. qualification. We aimed to select schools with a high level of linguistic and cultural diversity in order to promote a variety of children's home languages through the medium of Irish. School A, B, C, D, E or Teacher A, B, C, D are used when presenting the results and identifiable data is not presented to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

Table 1: *Schools that participated in research, the class-group and the number of children*

School	Class-group and Number of Children
School A	Class 4 (n=28) Class 5 (n=28) Class 6 (n=28)
School B	Class 4 (n=27) Class 5 (n=27) Class 6 (n=27)
School C	Class 5 (n=24) Class 6 (n=24)
School D	Class 4 (n=24)
School E	Class 4 (n=27) Class 6 (n=27)
Total number of children	291

Teacher A	12 years
Teacher B	5 years
Teacher C	1 year
Teacher D	1 year
Teacher E	1 year
Teacher F	2 years
Teacher G	13 years
Teacher H	9 years
Teacher I	2 years
Teacher J	18 years
Teacher K	2 years

Research Design, Data Collection & Data Analysis

This research was qualitative and therefore information was gathered from teachers before and after the teaching period through interviews and focus groups. Information was gathered from 11 focus groups with children (n=60) at the end of the period.

Table 3 shows the home languages of children who participated in focus groups which differed from English and Irish.

Table 3: *Number of Children in Focus Groups Who Spoke Home Languages Different from Irish and English.*

School	Number of Children in the Focus Groups	Home Languages Spoken other than Irish or English
School A	Class 4 (n=5) Class 5 (n=6) Class 6 (n=5)	Lithuanian, Polish, Chinese *All of the languages were not recorded.
School B	Class 4 (n=5) Class 5 (n=5) Class 6 (n=5)	Polish (n=3), Spanish (n=1), Tamil (n=2), Lithuanian (n=2), French (n=2), Spanish, Telugu (n=2), Hindi (n=3), Punjabi, Latvian, Arabic, Chinese
School C	Class 5 (n=5) Class 6 (n=8)	French (n=2), German (n=2), Spanish (n=2), Russian, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Polish
School D	Class 4 (n=5)	Lithuanian, Yoruba, Urdu, Arabic, Romanian
School E	Class 4 (n=5) Class 6 (n=6)	French, Spanish, German (n=2), Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Russian, Italian.

We audio-recorded the interviews and focus groups. Then we transcribed and analysed them using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The interviews and focus groups were conducted in English. We observed some of the lessons and photographed samples from the children's work in some of the classes. A professional development session of approximately one-hour was provided for the participating teachers before the start of the project. We explained the steps in the inductive plurilingual approach and shared the teaching resources with the teachers (ppt.x and teaching notes). All the classes focused on the target structure of the adjective following the noun in Irish and then focused on the adjective following a masculine/feminine noun. One class focused on the cardinal numbers in Irish. Table 4 shows the target structures and the grammatical patterns associated with them.

Table 4: *Grammatical Target Structures and their Associated Patterns*

| The target structure	Language Exemplar	Pattern in Irish
The noun and the adjective in Irish	Tá cóta dearg agam.	The adjective follows the noun in Irish.
An adjective following a masculine/ feminine noun	Tá liathróid bheag ag Síle.	This rule relates to the nominative case. An adjective that begins with a consonant is lenited after a feminine noun in Irish. An adjective that begins with a consonant is not lenited after a masculine noun in Irish.
The Cardinal Numbers in Irish	Aon, dhá, trí, ceithre, cúig, sé chupán; seacht, ocht, naoi, deich gcupán.	The singular version of the noun are used with the cardinal numbers in Irish. Nouns starting with consonants are lenited following 1-6 and eclipsed before the initial consonant following numbers 7-10. The prefix n- is added to nouns beginning with vowels between 7-10.

The lessons lasted for a period of six weeks. Teachers taught one or two classes per week and implemented plurilingual activities in class. They were provided with ongoing support during the project and an instructional coaching approach (Ali et al., 2018; Desimone & Pak, 2017) was adopted. One of the researchers acted as a teaching coach. She provided support by email, phone calls, texts and school support visits. She modelled a sample lesson for the teachers in each school while the class teachers observed. There was an opportunity to discuss and ask questions after the modelled lessons. A strong form of support was made available as is recommended in the literature on professional development for teachers (Ali et al., 2018; Desimone & Pak, 2017).

## Implementation of the Inductive Plurilingual Approach

The plurilingual approach implemented in the research was simple and clear. The same approach as is recommended in Bain Súp As! (Ní Dhiorbháin, 2014) was adopted. Each class selected one pattern at a time. The teachers presented the ppt.x slides on the interactive whiteboard and asked the children: What do you see? Do you see a rule/pattern? The slides are available in Appendix A. The language on the slides was simple to allow the children to focus solely on the form of the language (Van Patten, 1996). The children were given the metalinguistic terminology as they discovered the rules, for example, adjective, noun, masculine, feminine, singular and plural. The teachers helped the children to say the rule in Irish but it was the children themselves who first discovered the rule. A mixture of English and Irish were initially used. The first rule was that the adjective comes after the noun in Irish. The teachers gave the children the opportunity to talk about the same pattern in their home languages. The children wrote samples from their home languages on the board - using one colour for the adjective and another colour for the noun as shown in Figure 2. The children were encouraged to compare and contrast across languages. They discussed the patterns in the different languages and practised saying sentences in Irish and in different languages. They also found examples of the Irish structure in class textbooks. The children did oral language and writing work to practise and reinforce the application of the rule in Irish.

When that rule was practised with the children, the teachers focused on two patterns, namely: (i) an adjective beginning with a consonant is lenited in Irish after the feminine noun and (ii) an adjective is not lenited when preceeded by a masculine noun. The same simple approach was followed as had been done previously and it was the children who discovered the rule. The children then began learning about the gender of nouns in Irish and in other languages. Sometimes children knew the rule or pattern in oral language in their home language but were unsure of writing or spelling. Teachers and children used technological resources to seek this information and the children asked at home or sometimes at language schools at weekends about the rules in their home languages. The children explored the gender of nouns across languages. They used online dictionaries to determine the gender of nouns. The children, therefore, had the opportunity to learn independently and develop self-directed learning skills. In the class where the focus was on the cardinal numbers, children explored counting in different languages. Children had the opportunity to do plurilingual projects on paper or ppt.x illustrating the patterns of target structures across languages. The children always wrote in the reflective journal to record the Irish rule.

Figure 2: *Example of the sentence: 'I have a green box' written in Irish, English, Polish, Hindi and Lithuanian*
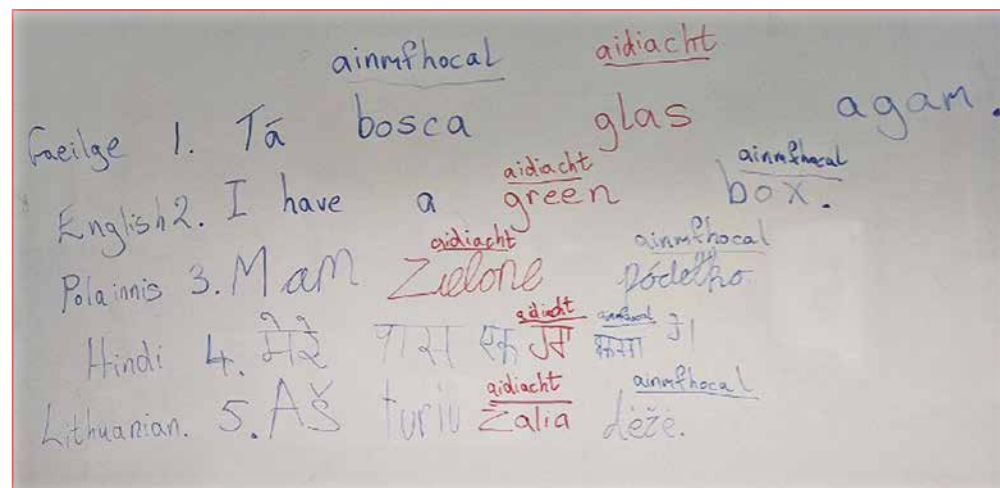
Figure 3: *Example of the sentence: 'I have a small chair' written in English, Irish, Urdu, Turkish, Telugu, French, Russian, Romanian, Tagalog and Lithuanian.*
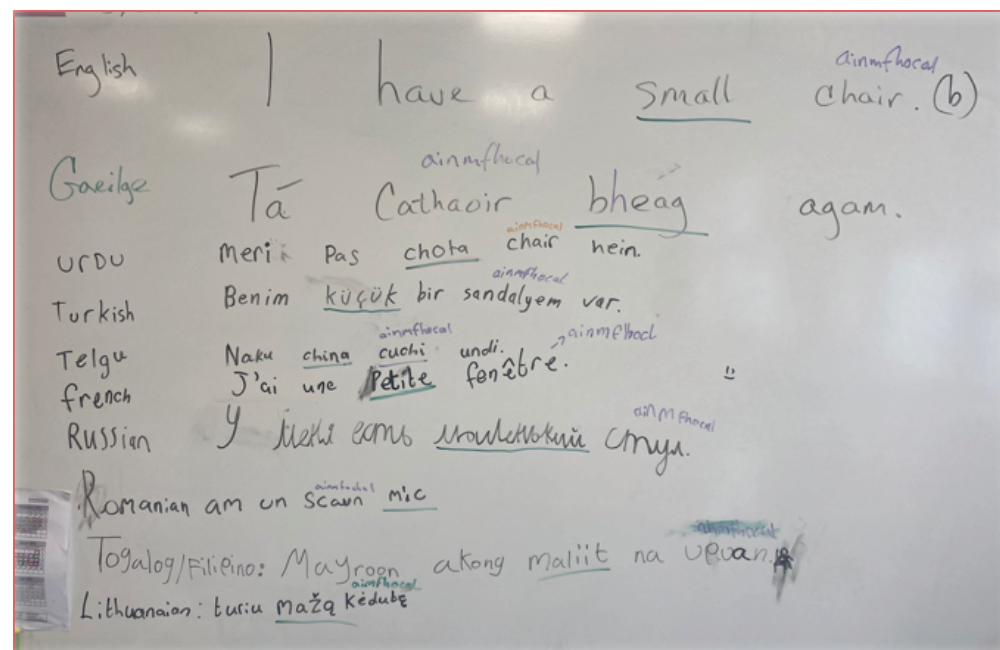
The children recorded the rules in their reflective journals under the following headings - *What did I learn? An explanation of what I have learned. My own examples* and *What I thought.* Examples of children's reflective journals are shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7. Figure 8 contains an example of plurilingual classwork and a plurilingual project undertaken by individual children is shown in Figures 9 and 10. Figure 11 contains sample work on the gender of nouns in Irish. It is interesting that the children chose everyday words.
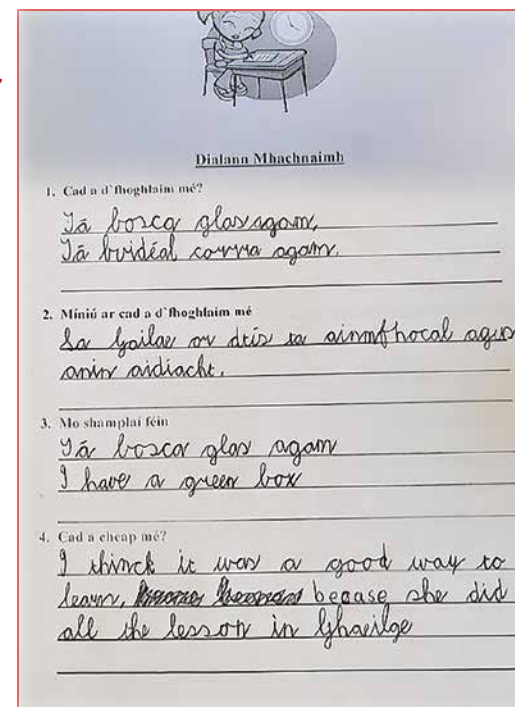
Figure 7
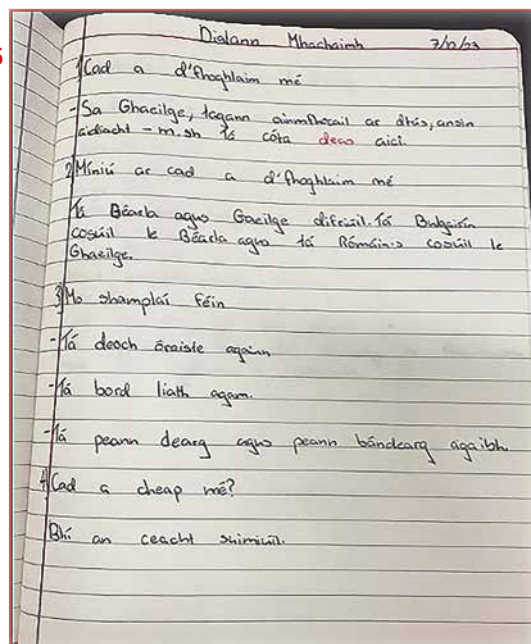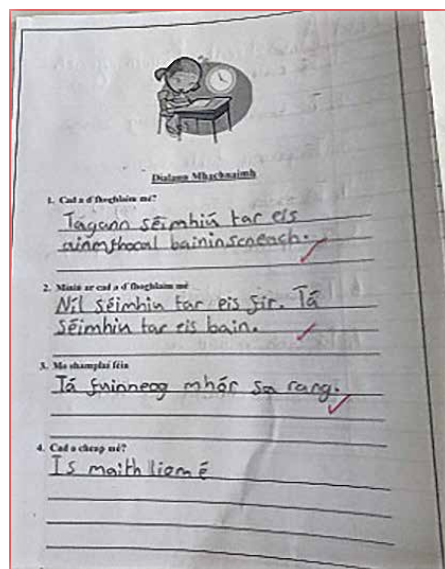
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 8: *Plurilingual Class Display*

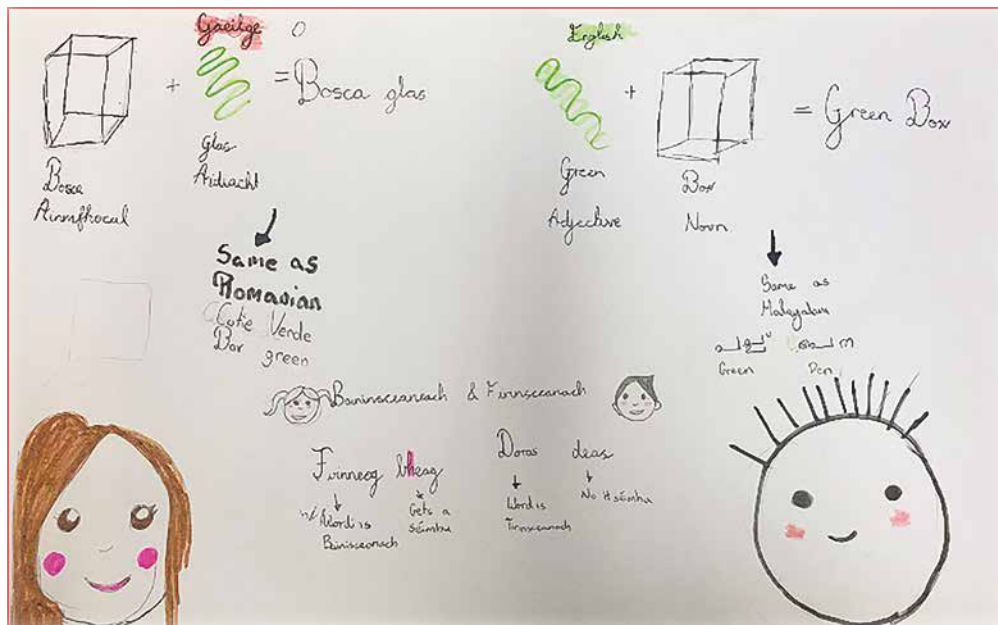**Figure 9:** *Plurilingual project from an individual child*

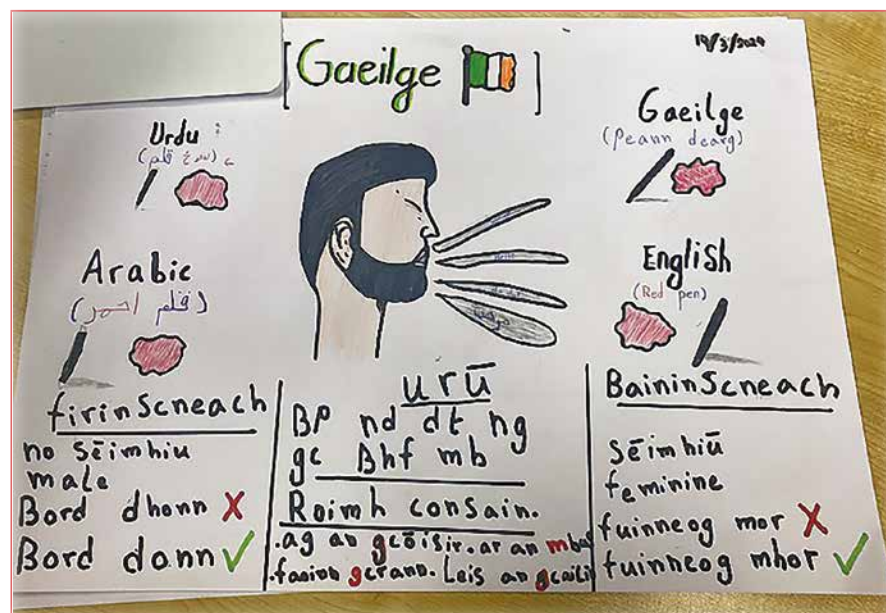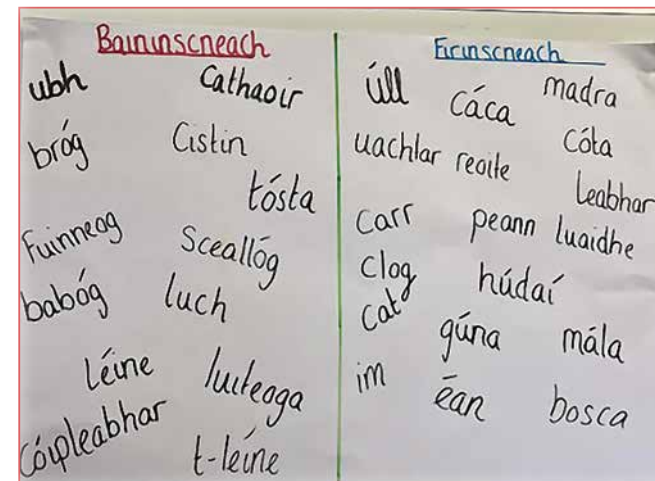**Figure 10:** *Plurilingual work from an individual child*

Figure 11: *Exploring the gender of nouns in Irish*

Having described the research methodology in this section, we will present the findings in the next section and discuss them regarding the main research questions.

Discussion of Results

In this section, we examine the research findings regarding the main questions. We present the results and discuss them in two parts. Part A relates to the data gathered from the teachers and Part B focuses on the data gathered from the children. We present data mainly collected from the focus groups and interviews, and at the end of the section we present teachers' and children's recommendations. The researchers' observation notes support the data described below.

Part A

Teachers' Prior Experience

Prior to the start of the project, information was gathered from the teachers regarding their current experience teaching of Irish. This information was important to contextualise the research and to gain an insight into the experience of this group of teachers with regard to the teaching of Irish. The teachers were all in agreement that they enjoyed teaching Irish. This opinion is in accordance with the positive views of primary school teachers towards the teaching of Irish as shown in Martinez Sainz et al. (2024).

> *I love teaching Irish. It's one of my favourite subjects to teach but I find the higher the class level in primary school the less enthusiasm the children have so that can be frustrating.* (Teacher A, School A)

Teachers were asked about their own competency in Irish and their confidence in teaching the language. The teachers were asked to give themselves a score out of five using the following scale, 1= very low, 2= low, 3=medium, 4= high and 5= very high. In terms of competence and confidence, the teachers awarded themselves a score of 3, 4 or 4-5 as shown in Table 5 and Table 6. While the teachers were not at the top of the scale in their view, it is clear that this group of teachers felt reasonably competent and confident when teaching Irish. All of the teachers in the middle and senior classes in the participating schools had the opportunity to participate or not to participate in the project. The participating teachers may have taken the opportunity to take part in the project because they were comfortable with Irish. There were other teachers in each of the schools who chose not to take part. This suggests that some teachers may need specific encouragement to participate in professional development.

Table 5: *Teacher Competency Levels*

1 Very low	2 Low	3 Average	4 High	Between 4 high and 5 very high	5 Very high
		4 teachers	4 teachers	3 teachers	

Table 6: *Teacher Confidence Level*

1 Very low	2 Low	3 Average	4 High	Between 4 high and 5 very high	5 Very high
		3 teachers	3 teachers	5 teachers	

It is of interest that although teachers enjoyed teaching Irish, they reported that children lacked motivation in relation to Irish lessons and that the interest and engagement levels in Irish lessons varied greatly between children in the junior classes and senior classes. This finding is in accordance with Martinez Sainz et al. (2024) who showed that many children were unmotivated to learn Irish. According to the teachers, children were reluctant to undertake Irish lessons because of the emphasis on reading and writing in the textbooks in the middle and senior classes. Teachers expressed the view that the level of Irish in the textbooks was not suitable for the children and that this discouraged them. They also explained that many of the children did not see the value or importance of learning Irish (Martinez Sainz et al., 2024) and that some parents did not emphasise the importance of Irish either.

> *I suppose the kind of lack of interest from the children, there are definitely very few of them enjoying Irish. They complain when we start doing it.* (Teacher F, School B)

> *Some of the children's negative attitude to Gaeilge has been reinforced by their experience of the book and how accessible they find the book.* (Teacher G, School C).

> *And, like that, with the parents, I suppose, as going to the teacher "Oh I've no Irish!" There's like "I can't help them at home" when it's something …. "Can't help them with that!" I do love teaching it but sometimes it is challenging.* (Teacher K, School E).

According to teachers, children's motivation was one of the main challenges in teaching Irish. Other challenges that arose were access to appropriate resources, differentiation and promoting the speaking of Irish in the middle and senior classes. The shift in emphasis from oral language in the junior classes to the emphasis on reading and writing in the middle and senior classes has been identified as a challenge in the teaching of Irish (Gallagher, 2021). One teacher explained that it was also challenging to teach Irish through the medium of Irish.

> *So, it is hard to speak Irish and teach through Irish. Like resolving on kind of having to talk through English and a little bit of Irish. It's much more English at times.* (Teacher A, School A)

The teachers used the textbook and the resources that were part of the Irish language programme purchased by the school to teach Irish. They also used online resources such as Twinkl, TG4, Irish language resources designed by other teachers which were available for sale online, language games, rhymes and songs. The teachers reported that it was difficult to find suitable resources for Irish. In relation to the teaching of grammar, teachers were using a variety of strategies before the start of the project. Many of the teachers showed the children examples of grammar in the context of a song, poem or story and asked the children to find other examples. Verbs were taught through repetition and games. Teachers expressed the view that it was difficult to teach grammar in a fun and interactive way.

There was a rich linguistic and cultural diversity in the participating schools and all teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of home languages in school, although most of the teachers said they would like to give children a greater opportunity to use their home languages and that the children spoke English most of the time.

> *I try the odd time sometimes, and the children will want to sing Happy Birthday in their own language, and they'll teach a Happy Birthday but I've never explicitly asked a child "Can you share your language and share it with the class?" "It's something that I really need to work on."* (Teacher A, School A)

One or two of the teachers compared structures in several languages with the children. Some schools celebrated multicultural days/weeks. In one school for example, children had the opportunity to write two words in their home language each night with the help of their parents and they also had a special exercise book to record the language. Before the start of the project, all teachers had

positive attitudes towards the teaching of Irish despite the challenges involved. The next section will focus on the key questions of the research.

An Inductive Plurilingual Approach to Irish Grammar Teaching

A key question of the research was: What are teachers' views regarding an inductive plurilingual approach to teaching Irish grammar?

All of the teachers had positive attitudes towards the inductive plurilingual approach to grammar teaching. Teachers reported that it was a simple and enjoyable approach in which the children were actively engaged in learning as they were discovering the rules which in turn motivated them to learn. The main themes emerging from the analysis of the benefits of the inductive plurilingual approach were: (i) the use of home languages, (ii) the development of language awareness and (iii) learners' increased confidence and interest in Irish. No significant challenges arose. Teachers particularly liked the simplicity of the approach.

Benefits of the Inductive Plurilingual Approach

Use of Home Languages

All teachers who participated in the research were teaching in schools with a high level of linguistic and cultural diversity. A key advantage of the inductive plurilingual approach according to teachers was that it encouraged children to share information from their home languages at school.

> *The inductive approach provided great engagement for the children due to them using their own languages and becoming the 'expert in the room'.* (Teacher G, School C).

Teachers expressed the view that a link to home languages helped the children to understand grammar rules in Irish and that they had a sense of pride when they discovered the rule.

> *The fact that they discovered it themselves I think it was better for them. Comparing it to their own language, I think it made them understand it more when they saw similarities between the languages.* (Teacher E, School B)

> *Yes, being able to identify more what the ainmfhocal or aidiacht is. Before this they probably would have struggled. The linking to their home languages helped them to understand more detail as well. We did a whole-class activity on the first day and everybody wanted to come up and write their language.* (Teacher D, School B)

The use of home languages increased children's interest and understanding of the rules. In some cases, teachers said that children asked questions about the grammatical structure at home and that some of the children asked questions about the grammatical patterns at language schools at the weekend. In this way, the approach encouraged the participation of multilingual parents in some instances.

> *One of the girls did a list of a whole load of nouns. She went home and asked her mam for words in Urdu in Arabic and she and her mam went and identified whether they were masculine or feminine.* (Teacher I, School D).

All teachers were of the opinion that the children should have the opportunity to use their home languages at school to affirm linguistic and cultural diversity as well as to enhance children's language learning. The Irish lessons gave every child in the class the opportunity to learn about patterns in different languages.

> *In terms of my class, there's two thirds of my class who come from an EAL background so there's lots of different languages in the classroom. It's great for them to make connections between English, Irish and whatever their home language is.* (Teacher C, School A).

It is also interesting that teachers explained that children with English as an additional language (EAL) at times may not be at the same level in English as children with English as their home language, but in Irish, children are starting at the same level and EAL learners are given the opportunity to show their linguistic knowledge.

Development of Language Awareness

The teachers agreed that the children had learned a lot about language patterns across languages in the Irish lessons. The children were successful in analysing the language exemplars and comparing and contrasting between languages. They were using metalanguage. It can be concluded from the results that the inductive approach significantly increased children's language awareness. An interesting finding that emerged was that the children were also more aware of the structure of the language in other Irish lessons, and were thinking about linguistic structures outside of the context of the grammar lesson.

> *I suppose they can see patterns, similarities. They can see things that happen in one language but not in another language. I think they remembered it a little better. It's not just me going "OK with the Irish, you have to do this for this number and this for this number."*
> (Teacher J, School E)

> *We were reading in the book "Is ………. iad" We didn't cover that but they were able to say "Is that because it's more than one?"*
> (Teacher F, School B)

Teachers had mixed opinions on the use of the reflective journal while some teachers reported that the children really liked it, others teachers felt that it took a lot of time.

Increased Confidence and Interest of the Learners

Interestingly, many of the teachers reported that the children now had a more positive attitude towards Irish because of the inductive lessons. The children were proud when they discovered the rule, and it was an activity that gave them confidence. The teachers explained that the children were motivated to discover the rules and some of the teachers said that the children started thinking about Irish as a language that is connected to other languages.

> *I would say their attitude before was negative. I'd say now it's neutral and, by neutral, I mean it's become more another language. It's now become another language that they're learning. It's now much more engrained with the other languages.* (Teacher I, School D)

> *I noticed a change in the children's attitude towards Irish when I approached it in a different way. They liked playing around with it and looking it up together and it made it a bit more collaborative - we were all learning together.* (Teacher K, School E)

> *We're a very diverse school – loads of languages and in my class there's one particular child, he speaks three or four languages and he can get very frustrated with his English but it really gave him a chance to shine.* (Teacher B, School A)

It is evident that the inductive approach increased the confidence and interest of the learners. We discuss professional development for teachers in the next section.

Teachers' Professional Development

The second question was: What impact does professional development have on T2 teachers' knowledge for implementing an inductive plurilingual approach to teaching Irish grammar?

The main themes emerging from the focus groups and the interview were: (i) The Effectiveness of Instructional Coaching (ii) Teachers' Professional Learning and (iii) Change in Classroom Practice.

Effectiveness of Instructional Coaching

A strong result that emerged was how supportive the teachers found the professional support, that is, the instructional coaching model. Teachers particularly praised the modelling of the lesson as a support that made them feel comfortable and helped them make sense of the teaching notes.

> *Like seeing Eithne doing it the first time was really helpful. It was great to see how easy it was like to portray the different examples and using different things in the classroom like peann dearg agus mála bándearg and things like that. It just shows how easy it is.* (School A, Teacher C)

> *Being able to see it modelled, that was a big part of it. Looking at the lesson plans, I was overwhelmed and then once I actually saw it.* (Teacher I, School D)

During the project, the teaching coach was available to answer teachers' questions and to provide encouragement. Classes, therefore, managed to progress at their own pace and there was always support for them. It is clear that the support gave confidence to the teachers.

Teachers' Professional Learning

It was clear that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge had developed with regard to implementing the inductive plurilingual approach throughout the project. Teachers also developed content knowledge regarding some of the patterns in Irish.

> *Like the other teachers said here, sometimes I'd be throwing in a h but I wouldn't be sure so it's brought me back to the basics and kind of made me reflect on my own grammar understanding and everyone benefitted from it.* (School A Teacher A).

Teachers expressed the view that they would be very encouraged to continue the approach in the future.

> *Definitely, I would say it would impact going forward. They enjoyed the process so why wouldn't I try to do it again? Knowing that it's ok to make those links with other languages. Especially because we've so many languages in the school.* (Teacher K, School D)

Change in Classroom Practice

All of the teachers expressed the view that they would continue the inductive plurilingual approach in the future because of the simplicity of the approach, the high level of children's participation and the opportunities it fostered to make connections between languages.

> *I'd definitely recommend it because it's the primary language curriculum. It's not the English curriculum and then the Irish curriculum. It makes sense to link them. It steers away from the rote-learning and lets them experiment and learn. We can just learn together and it's fine to not know all the rules off by heart.* (School E, Teacher K).

Discussion of Results Part A

It is clear from teachers' feedback that the lessons were successful in stimulating children's interest in language learning and learning about languages. The children's language awareness (Jessner, 2006; Jessner et al., 2016) developed. According to the teachers, the plurilingual approach increased the children's interest, participation and understanding. A link was made with the children's prior knowledge through their home languages and, in some schools, this encouraged parental involvement.

These findings align with the research of Little & Kirwan (2019) on the benefits of a plurilingual approach Interestingly, some of the children's attitudes towards Irish changed because of the lessons and they were more positive and confident about the Irish language. The learners in Little & Kirwan's (2019) research were also very positive about the Irish language and learning it as

part of a plurilingual approach. There is evidence in this research that Irish is a language that makes connections between languages. The challenges associated with the teaching of Irish in T2 schools have been well reported (Department of Education, 2022; Department of Education & Skills, 2017; Gallagher, 2021; Martinez Sainz et al., 2024).

It would be worthwhile to try communicative approaches and other plurilingual approaches to support T2 learners to develop competence, confidence and interest in Irish. These findings may suggest that the inductive plurilingual approach to Irish is suitable for promoting plurilingual and intercultural education (Government of Ireland, 2024). The Irish lessons led to a wide range of languages being used and discussed in all schools. An advantage of studying Irish at primary level is that learners are given the opportunity to develop language learning skills such as metacognitive skills that will assist them in learning other languages in the future (Cummins, 2021).

There is evidence in this project that the children were developing skills for analysing language and metalanguage that would benefit them as language learners in the future. As the majority of children in the country are learning Irish as a second language, the teaching and learning of Irish offers schools valuable opportunities to promote plurilingualism, interculturalism, language learning and an interest in language learning. These advantages are in addition to the specific advantages of learning Irish.

A key finding emerging from data collected from the teachers was the effectiveness of professional development and coaching in particular (Ali et al., 2018; Desimone & Pak, 2017). As demonstrated in other research internationally (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Pak, 2017) and in Ireland (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024), professional development is effective when teachers are provided with focused support, when lessons are modelled and when teachers have opportunities for reflection and feedback. It was clear that teachers developed pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) about how to teach grammar and how to implement a plurilingual approach, as well as content knowledge about grammar through the professional development therefore, there was dual learning (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2024).

If plurilingual approaches are to be adopted and if the teaching and learning of Irish in primary school is to be improved (Government of Ireland, 2024), it is worthwhile providing the appropriate supports for teachers. It is clear that there is great benefit to be gained from in-school support where a teaching coach supports teachers to achieve a particular goal over a definite period of time. While the teaching resources and notes helped the teachers, the teaching coach helped them make sense of the resources so that they were comfortable using them. Moreover, the school visits, which formed part of the professional development, ensured that teachers continued with the project. It is recognised in literature and research that on-going in-school support is more effective as a model of professional development than short one-off courses.

Part B

Attitudes to the Inductive Plurilingual Approach

We now present data collected from focus groups with the children. We explored children's attitudes through the question: What are the views of learners in T2 schools towards an inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish grammar?

The children who participated in the focus groups had positive views about the inductive plurilingual approach. They agreed that they liked it and had learned about patterns in Irish and other languages. In each focus group, children managed to accurately articulate what they had learned in class. Findings in relation to the strengths of the approach according to the children are presented in three main themes, namely:

   (i)   the benefits of the Inductive Approach,

   (ii)   the development of Language Awareness and

   (iii)   the benefits of the Plurilingual Approach.

(i) The Benefits of the Inductive Approach

- The children were unanimous that the inductive plurilingual approach was a fun approach in which they were actively engaged, similar to problem solving. The children reported that they liked the approach because they were active in their own learning.

- They believed they would have a better memory of the rules because they discovered them themselves. They all expressed the view that they would prefer to discover rules rather than have a teacher telling them the rules and that they would develop skills for independent learning in this way.

- Some of the children also reported sense of pride through discovering the rule themselves.

- The children enjoyed using digital tools such as an iPad to find information and explained that this particular approach was more interactive than studying from the textbook.

> *Sometimes people get really tired when the teacher is talking and they just don't listen to it so they don't realise they're hearing it and they don't remember it. But then, if you're learning it, you'll remember it "Well actually when I was there, I discovered it." Also, if you discover that, you'll get used to discovering things so that if you ever need to do it yourself, you can.* (School E, Sixth Class Child)

> *I think it's better for you to discover them because it gives you more skill and it would be better for secondary school and college. You're also more likely to remember it, it's self-accomplishment rather than being told. I also think that it's better that we find it out because in the future there won't always be a teacher there to tell you something.* (School E, Sixth Class Child).

(ii) Development of Language Awareness

In the focus groups, the children gave many examples of the rules they had learned and how they compared and contrasted structures across languages. They used the Irish metalanguage competently and confidently, e.g. masculine, feminine, noun and adjective. Some of the children expressed the view that learning Irish grammar could help them learn other languages.

> *We learned about firinscneach and baininscneach. I didn't even know they were a thing until then. It was interesting to kind of how to figure out if they're firinscneach or baininscneach. I liked learning that they weren't just words, that they have more depth. Ainmfhocal agus aidiacht. We did that in different languages. We chose a sentence and wrote it down and people came up to the board to see if it was more like English to see if the adjective is before the noun or like Irish where it was ainmfhocal before aidiacht.* (School E, Sixth Class Child)

> *I think it does because some languages are really similar to Irish like ainmfhocal and aidiacht. It could be the same in Spanish. I think it's good to learn Irish because it helps you learn other languages because it gets you used to new things. I think it helps you get used to the learning process of a language. I think it does indirectly because in Junior Infants I couldn't imagine myself learning a new language but now I can imagine myself learning a new language like Spanish.* (School E, Sixth Class Child)

The children expressed the view that the reflective journal was useful for recording rules and that the journal would help them revise the rules as they were all in one place. Interestingly, the children were also of the opinion that it was important to learn Irish grammar as a way to help them understand the rules of Irish and to make connections between languages. They also relayed that knowledge of grammar would help them in post-primary school.

> *I think people should learn the Irish grammar because it's similar in a lot of languages and it's also different so because there are similarities and differences we can easily memorise everything.* (School B, Sixth Class Child)

(iii) Benefits of the Plurilingual Approach

A key achievement of the inductive plurilingual approach in this project was that the children were encouraged to use a range of languages in class, and that they were learning Irish and learning about other languages at the same time. The children explained that it helped them to learn Irish when they made a connection with their home language and that learning Irish helped them make connections across languages. It was clear from the children's reports, that the approach encouraged an interest in language learning and created opportunities for them to share knowledge from different cultures and languages.

> *It's easier learning it while you're comparing it with your language because it's easier to remember and then you get the hang of it. It's just really fun this way and I prefer it a bit more than the normal way. It's also fun to learn about what languages my friends speak and their rules in their language. You get to know a bit more about other languages and Irish.* (School B, Sixth Class Child)

> *I know some languages were connected but I never made the connection between Irish and other languages.* (School A, Fifth Class Child)

> *It was nice to see how other languages would say a certain sentence. We get to see how other people's languages sound like and show how our language looks like and sounds like. We can teach other people our language. We can also experience other languages and become familiar with them.* (School B, Fifth Class Child)

It also emerged that the inductive approach encouraged the use of a range of languages at school and that this opportunity fostered pride among some of the children as they had the opportunity to share their home language with the class. In this way, the children played the role of the expert and space was created for all the languages in the class. Some of the children indicated that the approach affirmed their linguistic knowledge.

> *I didn't think they knew I spoke Lithuanian and I was writing sentences on the board and I would get to know a new language. And trying to see other people learn it as well instead of English and Irish. It made me feel happy.* (School D, Fourth Class Child)

Attitudes towards Different Languages

In the focus groups, we took the opportunity to gather information from the children about their views on the learning of Irish, the learning of English and the use of home languages. The question that guided this part of the research was: What are the attitudes of plurilingual learners regarding the importance of learning Irish and other languages?

The children expressed the view that it was important to learn Irish, and analysis of data showed that there were four main advantages:

- cultural advantages
- cognitive advantages
- educational advantages
- employment advantages.

As stated by children in other projects, some felt it was important to learn Irish because it is the native language of Ireland and that the language should be kept alive. Interestingly, some of the children demonstrated an understanding of the benefits of learning Irish in developing learning strategies that would help them as language learners. Other children were of the opinion that Irish would be helpful for secondary school and that learning Irish could be useful for particular professions. Some of the children also mentioned Irish as a secret language that could be used on holidays, for example.

> *Yeah, it's good to learn Irish because technically it's our native language* (School A, Fifth Class Child)

> *I think it's important to know Irish because it's our native language and we should know it and we should learn English because it's one of our languages but it's really important to learn different languages to help your brain develop more.* (School E, Fourth Class Child)

The children agreed that it was important to learn English because it is a globally dominant language which is spoken as a majority language in many different countries and because many people know English.

> *Because loads of people speak it [English] so if you learn it you'll get to communicate with other people from different countries.* (School B, Fourth Class Child)

The main reason it was important for the children to use home languages was to talk to their families, especially grandparents or family who lived abroad. Communication was the main virtue associated with using English and home languages. According to the children, there were other advantages to the Irish language. The children used all the languages they knew for different purposes.

> *Yes because it's important to use your language. I talk to my grandparents in Bulgarian. They only understand bits of English. It's important to talk to them like that.* (School E, Fourth Class Child).

Discussion of Results Part B

The findings from the focus groups align with the views of children in Irish-medium schools on the inductive approach to the teaching of grammar previously reported (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2017), in that it is a fun approach which actively engages learners.

Children in this research expressed the same opinion as children in Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir (2017), in that they would have a better memory of the rules because of the process of inductive learning. The children were of the opinion that they were developing analytical language skills that would assist them in learning languages independently in the future (Cummins, 2021). It was clear that the children were noticing the interconnectedness of languages (Cummins, 2021; Jessner et al., 2016).

It is also clear from the examples given by the children of the different patterns using metalanguage, that the inductive plurilingual approach has succeeded in promoting children's language awareness and cross linguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006; Jessner et al., 2016). The rule-based knowledge was also important in enabling the children to engage in independent learning in Irish and other languages (Ellis, 2005). Rule-based knowledge can help learners understand the structures of the language and rule-based knowledge may transfer into automatic knowledge of language if children are given plenty of opportunities for use (Ellis, 2005). A good start to learning about grammar had been made in this research.

An interesting finding was that the implementation of the approach succeeded in establishing plurilingual practice (Little & Kirwan, 2019) in class, thus affirming linguistic and cultural diversity. The children's interest in the different languages in the class was stimulated. Interestingly, children were of the opinion that the link with their home language facilitated the learning process of Irish for them (Little & Kirwan, 2019). It could be interpreted from these findings that the teaching of Irish is a very appropriate means of promoting language awareness and enacting plurilingual and intercultural practice in the classroom. A most important interpretation of these results is that it was advantageous for children to learn Irish and that learning Irish as a second language helped children:

- develop language learning skills (Cummins, 2021; Jessner et al., 2016)
- develop an interest in language learning (Hawkins, 2005) and
- foster respect for linguistic and cultural diversity through a plurilingual approach (Little & Kirwan, 2019; Government of Ireland, 2024).

The children in this research were more positive about the value of Irish compared to the views of language learners in English-medium schools in other research (Martinez Sainz et al., 2024). According to the children who took part in the focus groups, learning Irish had cultural, cognitive, educational and employment benefits. These opinions are in keeping with the views already expressed by multilingual children in small-scale research (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2023). The children were very aware that there were metalinguistic advantages to learning Irish that would help them as they learn other languages. The majority of children who took part in the focus groups were multilingual (Jessner et al., 2016). They knew at least three languages so they may have been more aware of the virtues of plurilingualism because of this.

The children understood the importance of English as a lingua franca and that home languages were very important in maintaining a relationship with family. The children viewed all the languages in their linguistic repertoire as valuable and that they could use languages at different levels for different purposes; these opinions are consistent with the theories of plurilingualism (Council of Europe, 2001; Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo, 2013). It would be worthwhile for educators to seize opportunities to help children harness their plurilingual skills (Jessner et al, 2016).

Recommendations from Teachers and Children

The teachers and children were very positive about the inductive plurilingual approach and the resources provided for them. They were all asked if they would have suggestions for improving the resources provided for them (pptx slides and teaching notes etc). A key recommendation of teachers in two schools was to set out a school plan with certain target structures to be covered each year through the inductive plurilingual approach to ensure continuity from class to class and to develop a whole-school approach. Other suggestions from teachers and children were that it would be worthwhile designing more activities to practise the rules – language games and digital resources in particular, were mentioned. Teachers suggested providing some examples in other languages as well as providing an audio clip in different languages.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section, we draw conclusions from our research in this project and make recommendations regarding the inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish, and regarding the teaching and learning of Irish at primary level more broadly.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Eleven teachers and 291 children took part in the research lessons in five different schools in which there was high percentage of children coming from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The main questions of the research we explored were:

- Teachers' and children's views on the inductive plurilingual approach to the teaching of Irish grammar
- The effectiveness of professional development provided to teachers
- The views of a group of primary school children on learning and using languages.

Teachers and children alike were very positive about the inductive plurilingual approach for many reasons, particularly in relation to active learning and the links fostered between languages. The benefits of the inductive plurilingual approach are discussed under five main titles, namely:

- The development of language awareness
- The development of plurilingual and intercultural education
- A change in learners' attitudes

- The effectiveness of professional development
- Children's attitudes towards different languages.

Views and Experiences of Children and Teachers

Development of Language Awareness

This research showed that the inductive plurilingual approach to grammar teaching is a good way to develop children's language awareness of target structures in Irish and in a range of languages. During the project the children developed metalinguistic and crosslinguistic skills. They reflected on and discussed the structure of the language across languages. It is clear from this research that the teaching of Irish is ideal for developing children's language awareness and in helping children develop language learning skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. As most children learn Irish as an additional language, the teaching and learning of Irish provides valuable opportunities for them to learn a new language alongside their peers and to compare and contrast Irish with the other languages that they know. It is advantageous for children to learn Irish because of the opportunities associated with the development of language awareness and the development of language learning skills. Naturally, these advantages are in addition to the other specific advantages of learning Irish. Grammatical knowledge could translate into automatic knowledge of a language if children have plenty of opportunities to use it. The approach that was implemented took a certain amount of

time for teaching and learning but it was a worthwhile experience. Children need to be given plenty of time to act as active language learners and to develop knowledge of Irish. Learners need sufficient time to benefit from the advantages of learning Irish.

Development of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education

The research highlighted that teachers can promote a plurilingual approach through the teaching of Irish grammar. Plurilingual and intercultural education were reinforced in this project as children were sharing information from their home languages which fostered respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. Parental involvement was encouraged in some cases and interest in language learning and linguistic and cultural diversity were encouraged in all schools. Both teachers and children expressed positive views on the use and promotion of home languages in school. This research shows that it is possible to promote a plurilingual approach through the medium of Irish. It would be worthwhile to extend this project to other schools nationally as one approach to support plurilingual and intercultural education as well as to support the teaching of Irish in primary school.

A Change in Learners' Attitudes

An interesting finding that emerged was how positive the children were about the inductive plurilingual lessons. The inductive approach encouraged the children to be active in their own learning and to explore language patterns. The children were of the opinion that the inductive approach would lead to a better understanding and memory of rules in Irish and in many cases children reported that they would have a better understanding due to the connection made with their home languages as well. The children enjoyed the use of technology and the opportunities they had to search for information themselves.

It would be worthwhile to carry out further research on pedagogies for the teaching and learning of Irish in the middle and senior classes that would give children the opportunity to be active language users. It is worth supporting

teachers to develop a range of strategies to help learners develop competence and confidence in Irish. This project showed that the children had a positive attitude towards learning Irish when an active, learner-centred approach was implemented. It would be worthwhile availing of the opportunities offered by the use of technological resources, in particular, to promote Irish.

Effectiveness of Professional Development

A key finding from the research was the effectiveness of professional development for teachers when teaching resources and a teaching coach were provided. If the teaching and learning of Irish is to be enhanced at primary level, this type of support must be provided to teachers. That is support that is: school-based; focused on a specific target over a definite period of time; based on teachers' needs; ensures that a coach is available and which includes modelling of lessons, if possible. Professional development made a significant contribution to teachers' learning in this research and the result was evident in children's learning and in their feedback. In particular, it would be worthwhile to provide professional development with a focus on the development of content knowledge (knowledge of Irish) and pedagogical content knowledge (information on the methodology of language teaching) as well as professional development that is evidence-based.

The teachers who took part in this research chose to do so, but other teachers did not avail of the opportunity. It is also worth considering how to encourage teachers to participate in professional development if it were available. It is worth providing professional development where teacher educators/researchers work in partnership with class teachers. In this way research and teaching are linked to benefit learning.

Children's Attitudes Towards Different Languages

The children who took part in the focus groups were positive about all the languages they knew. They associated certain advantages with the Irish language in terms of cultural, cognitive, educational and employment benefits.

They understood English was important as a globally dominant language and as the majority language in Ireland.

They reported home languages as being particularly important for communicating with family and relatives.

It is clear that the children had plurilingual attitudes towards languages.

It could be interpreted from the data that some children have positive attitudes towards learning Irish and that it is worthwhile providing supports for the teaching and learning of Irish in the middle and senior classes in T2 primary schools.

Conclusion

Present day Ireland is a multilingual and multicultural country where children will develop a plurilingual language repertoire which will include Irish, English and other languages they will learn from home or at school.

Children will develop knowledge of languages at different levels across different language skills and across different languages. Learning Irish provides valuable learning opportunities for all learners to develop language learning skills and to make connections between languages.

The inductive plurilingual approach in this research was successful in promoting language awareness and intercultural awareness.

Teachers were given in-school support to implement the approach. It would be worthwhile extending this approach to other schools and conducting further research on pedagogies for teaching Irish that are suitable for the middle and senior classes in English-medium primary schools.

This research gives us an insight into how we can promote the learning and teaching of Irish by providing the appropriate support.

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Appendix A

Sample Slides Bain Súp As! (Ní Dhiorbháin, 2024)

An Aidiacht i ndiaidh an Ainmfhocail

Tá peann **dubh** agam.

Tá mála **bándearg** agam.

Cad a thugann tú faoi deara?
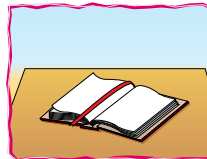

Tá peann luaidhe **buí** agam.

Tá cóta **deas** agam.

Tá bosca **glas** agam.

Tá buidéal **corcra** agam.

Cad a thugann tú faoi deara?

- Tá **peann dubh** agam.
- Tá **peann luaidhe buí** agam.
- Tá **mála bándearg** agam.
- Tá **cóta deas** agam.
- Tá **bosca glas** agam.
- Tá **buidéal corcra** agam.

An Dialann Mhachnaimh

- Cad a d'fhoghlaim mé?
- Míniú ar cad a d'fhoghlaim mé
- Mo shamplaí féin
- Cad a cheap mé?

Cur Chuige Ilteangach

- Cad iad na patrúin a bhaineann leis an ainmfhocal agus leis an aidiacht i dteangacha éagsúla?
- Roinn an t-eolas leis an rang.
- Scríobhaigí abairtí i dteangacha eile.
- Déan comparáid idir na teangacha.

Cad a thugann tú faoi deara?

Tá **cathaoir dhearg** agam.

Tá **fuinneog mhór** sa rang.

Tá **liathróid bheag** ag Síle.

Tá **srón mhór dhearg** ar Rudolf.

Cad a thugann tú faoi deara?

- Tá **cathaoir dhearg** agam.
- Tá **fuinneog mhór** sa rang.
- Tá **liathróid bheag** ag Síle.
- Tá **srón mhór dhearg** ar Rudolf.
- Tá **pancóg bhlasta** ag Rónán.
- Tá **ubh mhór** agam.

Cur Chuige Ilteangach

- Cén patrún a bhaineann leis an aidiacht agus leis an ainmfhocal i dteangacha eile?
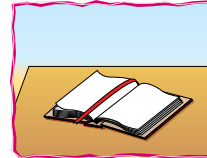- Conas a léirítear inscne ainmfhocal i dteangacha eile?

Tá **pancóg bhlasta** ag Rónán.

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An Dialann Mhachnaimh

- Cad a d'fhoghlaim mé?
- Míniú ar cad a d'fhoghlaim mé
- Mo shamplaí féin
- Cad a cheap mé?

Tá **ubh mhór** agam.

Cleachtaí

- Tá **liathróid** (beag) aige.
- Tá **mála** (dubh) ar an urlár.
- Tá **cóta** (gorm) agam sa bhaile.
- Tá **foireann** (mór) acu.
- Bhí **oíche** (deas) againn.
- D'ith sí **ubh** (mór seacláide).
- D'ith mé **dinnéar** (mór).
- D'ith mé **pancóg** (deas).
- Shuigh mé ar an **gcathaoir** (mór).
- Bhí **cluiche** (maith) acu.