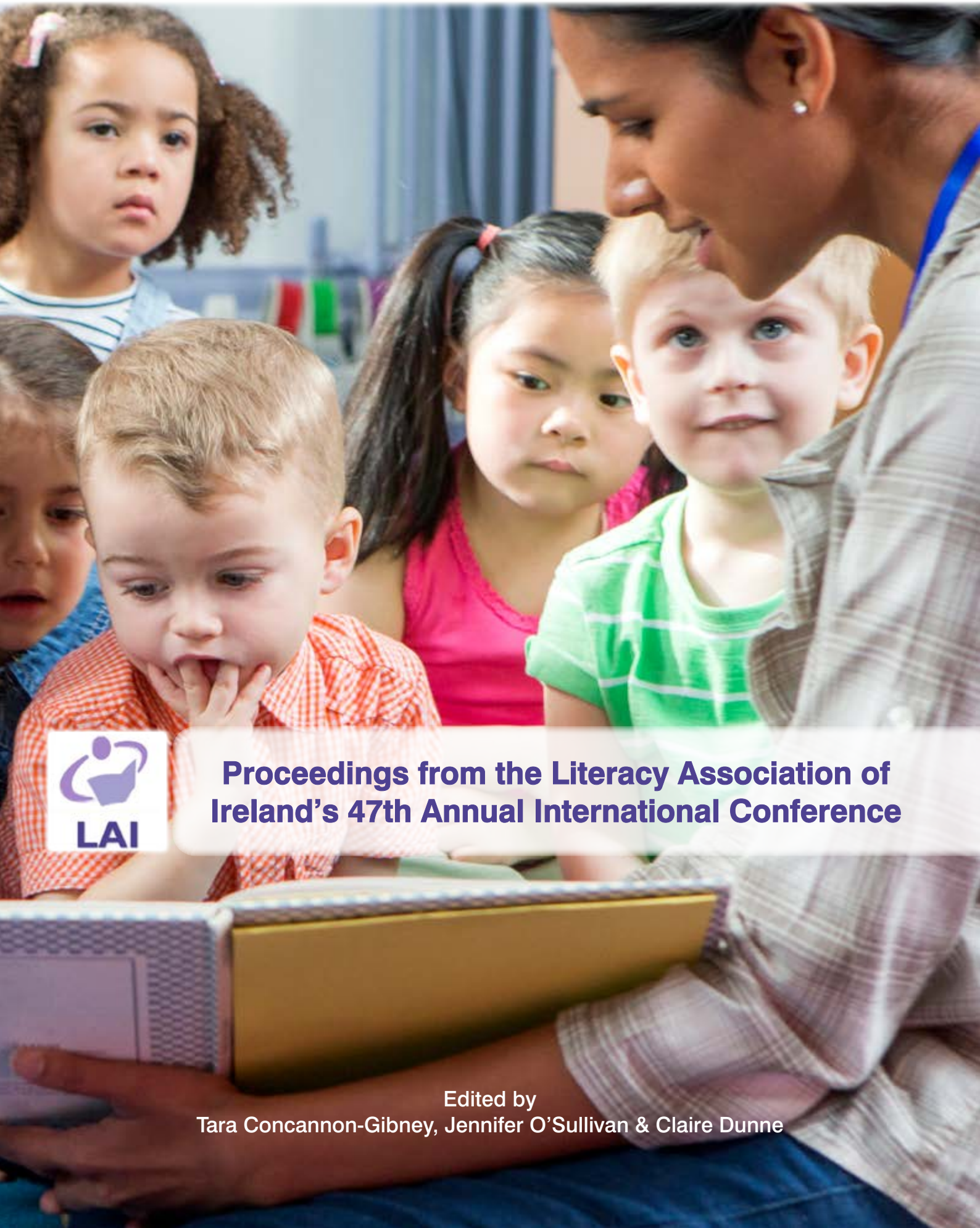
Celebrating Language and Literacies: Unpacking Practice and Exploring Possibilities



LAI

Proceedings from the Literacy Association of Ireland's 47th Annual International Conference

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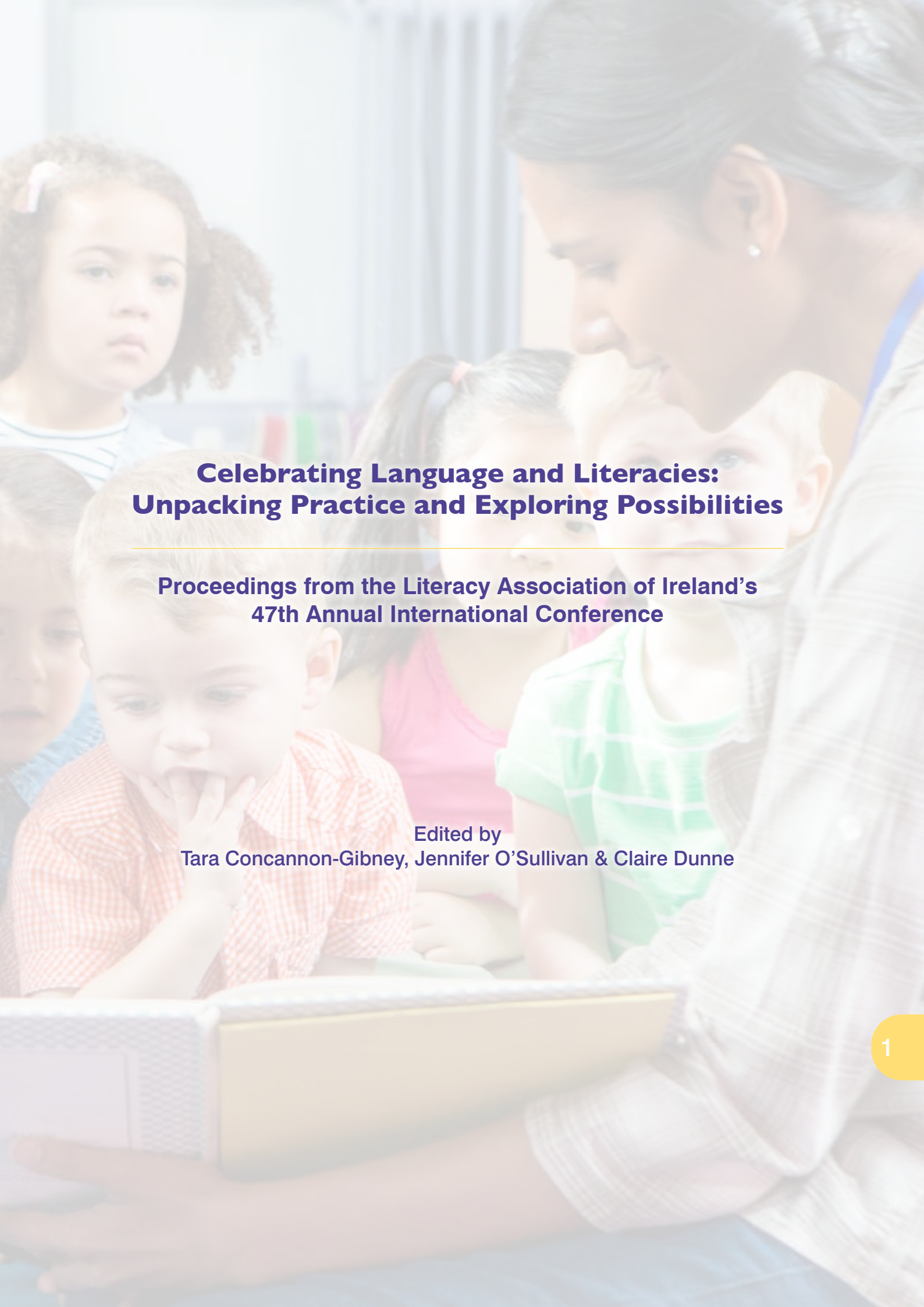
Tara Concannon-Gibney, Jennifer O'Sullivan & Claire Dunne



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Published by The Literacy Association of Ireland

www.literacyireland.ie

ISBN: 9781899162345

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Designed by www.tudco.ie

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Foreword

It is with great enthusiasm that we present this collection of proceedings from our recent conference on literacy. This current volume, *Celebrating Language and Literacies: Unpacking Practice and Exploring Possibilities* is a compilation of papers delivered at our 47th Annual Conference in 2023. This volume brings together a diverse range of perspectives, research findings, and practical approaches, offering a comprehensive view of literacy in today's educational landscape. By exploring topics ranging from foundational literacy skills to advanced instructional strategies, these proceedings provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of literacy education.

The papers included here reflect the rich dialogue and shared commitment of teachers, researchers, and literacy specialists who presented at the conference. Their contributions highlight literacy not only as a fundamental skill essential for academic and personal success, but also as a powerful tool for fostering critical thinking, inclusivity, and engagement across all areas of life.

It is our hope that this volume will inspire further research, collaboration, and innovation in literacy instruction. By continuing to push the boundaries of literacy education, we can help build a more inclusive and literate society where all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We are grateful to the contributors for sharing their expertise and experiences, and to the readers who will carry these ideas forward into their own practices.

Editors

Tara Concannon-Gibney

Jennifer O'Sullivan

Claire Dunne (Gaeilge)

Contributing Authors

Is léachtóir í ***Jacqueline de Brún*** *in Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath. I ndiaidh di bheith ina múinteoir i ngaelscoileanna chaith sí seal mar Chomhairleoir Oideachais san Áisaonad i gColáiste Ollscoile Naomh Mhuire agus seal mar Oifigeach Oideachais leis an Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta. Tá dhá úrscéal do pháistí scríofa aici chomh maith le scripteanna do chláir theilifíse do pháistí. Tá MA aici san aistriúchán agus PhD aici ar léitheoireacht na Gaeilge sa chóras tumoideachais.*

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Forbairt Foclóra Thar Dhá Theanga: Ag Tacú le Stór Focal Uile an Pháiste

An Dr. Jacqueline de Brún[1] & Pádraig Ó Duibhir[2]

Sa pháipéar seo léirítear gné de chás-staidéar ar theagasc agus foghlaim foclóra i gcomhthéacs na léitheoireachta i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla sna hardranganna bunscoile, aois 10-11, i suíomhanna tumoideachais. Roghnaíodh scoil amháin sa dá dhlínse in Éirinn le léiriú a fháil ar chleachtais sa tumoideachas thar dhá churaclam. Déantar iniúchadh ar straitéisí atá in úsáid sna scoileanna splacha, an teagasc agus an fhoghlaim atá á gcleachtadh, dar le múinteoirí agus daltaí. Pléitear na féidearthachtaí atá ann le cur le foclóir nuair a bhíonn dhá theanga nó níos mó i gceist agus an traschur a tharlaíonn idir teangacha. Moltar straitéisí a bhaineann le feasacht teanga, feasacht fhóinéimeach agus mhoirféimeach agus an léitheoireacht leathan i gcomhthéacs na feasachta.

Eochairfhocail: *forbairt foclóra, traschur scileanna, léitheoireacht, délitearthacht*

Intreoir

Is scil neamhshrianta í forbairt foclóra a leanann trí shaol duine (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Imríonn an t-eolas a bhíonn ag páistí ar fhoclóir agus iad ag tosú ar scoil tionchar ar léitheoireacht agus ar thuiscint na léitheoireachta agus iad sna hardranganna bunscoile (Snell et al., 2015). Ar ndóigh, tá nasc láidir idir an stádas socheacnamaíoch a bhíonn ag páistí agus an réimse focal a bhíonn ar eolas acu ag dul ar scoil (Graves, 2016) agus mura bhfuil teagasc an fhoclóra mar ghné de theagasc rialta na litearthachta ar scoil leanfaidh an bhearna seo san eolas agus leathnóidh sí (Graves, 2016; Snell et al., 2015). Is ionann an cás sa dara teanga (T2) agus i dteanga bhreise (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010). Tá fianaise ann go bhfuil foclóir níos teoranta ag léitheoirí ilteangacha in aon teanga amháin dá gcuid ná mar a bhíonn ag léitheoirí aonteangacha (Marchman et al., 2010; Umbel et al., 1992). Ach, ar an lámh eile, bíonn eolas ar fhoclóir spréite thar na teangacha ar fad ag daoine ilteangacha agus bíonn níos mó focal ar eolas acu san iomlán ná mar a bhíonn ag daoine aonteangacha (Bialystok et al., 2009). Is dara teanga (T2) í an Ghaeilge don chuid is mó de na daltaí i suíomhanna tumoideachais in Éirinn. Dóibh sin a bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar chéad teanga (T1) acu bíonn dúshláin eile ann a bhaineann le mionteangacha (Péterváry et al., 2014). Bíonn an délitearthacht mar sprioc sa tumoideachas, is é sin go mbeidh an caighdeán céanna á bhaint amach sna hardranganna bunscoile, bíonn páistí ag cur lena bhfoclóir i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. Ach, níl mórán eolais againn ar na straitéisí a bhíonn acu le foclóir a shealbhú sa dá theanga. Tá fianaise ann go mbíonn dúshláin léitheoireachta ag páistí tumoideachais mar gheall ar an eolas teoranta a bhíonn acu ar fhocail agus ar choincheapa gramadaí in aon teanga amháin i gcomparáid le daltaí aonteangacha (Hermanto et al., 2012). Ach tá buntáistí ann má bhíonn léitheoirí ilteangacha ag tarraingt go héifeachtach ar an eolas ar fad atá acu thar theangacha. Sa chás-staidéar seo déantar iniúchadh ar chleachtais teagaisc agus foghlama an fhoclóra i gceachtanna léitheoireachta i scoileanna tumoideachais dar le múinteoirí agus daltaí. Dírítear ar dhaltaí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht nó orthu sin nach í an Ghaeilge teanga an bhaile acu.

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Traschur

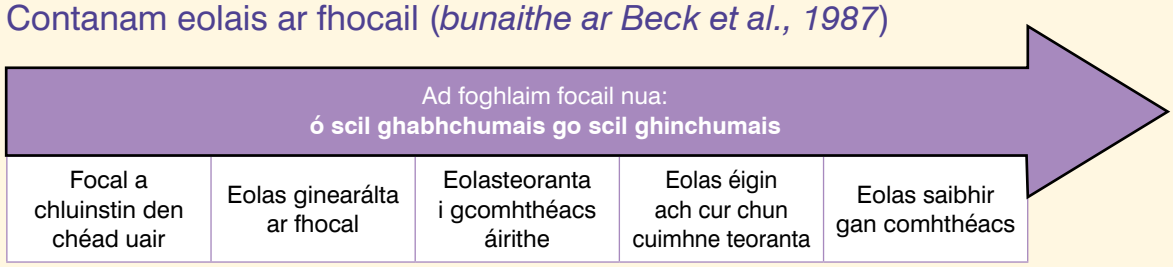
Tá barúil ann go n-imríonn eolas ar fhoclóir sa T1 tionchar ar inniúlacht an T2 agus cumas foghlama focal forbartha (Snow & Kim, 2007). Ach tá fianaise ann nach réamh-mheastóir é eolas ar fhoclóir sa T1 ar thuiscint na léitheoireacht sa T2 (August & Shanahan, 2017). Is cinnte go mbaineann foghlaim foclóra thar dhá theanga le coincheapa nua ar nós foirmeacha éagsúla fóineolaíochta a fhoghlaim, comhréir agus difríochtaí séimeantacha (Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2011). Is féidir le léitheoirí struchtúir choitianta nó modhanna coitianta a aithint agus a úsáid idir na teangacha atá acu. Le teangacha aibítreacha is féidir na focail a bhriseadh ina n-aonaid lena ndíchódú. Le páistí níos sine, agus an díchódú daingnithe acu, is iad na scileanna séimeantacha, na scileanna tuisceana agus eolas ar fhoclóir is mó a léiríonn an difear sa chumas idir léitheoireacht sa T1 agus sa T2 (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010). Is gá ansin go n-aithneofaí focail agus go ndéanfaí nasc leis an stór focal atá ar eolas le ciall a bhaint astu. Mar sin, tarlaíonn traschur ag leibhéil an díchódaithe agus le modhanna inaistrithe idir teangacha. Ach maidir le heolas ar fhoclóir féin is gá a chinntiú go mbíonn forbairt ann go sainiúil agus go follasach i ngach teanga (Farver et al., 2013; Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2011).

Na Leibhéil Eolais

Tá eolas ar fhocail ilchineálach. Is féidir go mbeadh focail ar eolas ag leibhéil éagsúla mar atá léirithe ag Beck et al. (1987) ar Fhigiúr 1.

Figiúr 1

Contanam eolais ar fhocail (*bunaithe ar Beck et al., 1987*)



Bíonn focail ar eolas ó bhéal, i bhfoirm scríofa, ag leibhéal gabhchumais, agus ag leibhéal ginchumais. Deirtear go mbíonn níos lú focal ag daoine ilteangacha in aon teanga amháin (Marchman et al., 2010), ach, is scileanna ginchumais go minic a bhíonn i gceist. Bíonn na scileanna gabhchumais níos airde ag daoine dátheangacha (Legacy et al., 2016). Is gá mar sin leibhéil eolais, leithead agus doimhneacht ar fhocail, a chur san áireamh agus muid ag plé nó ag meas foclóra sa T2 agus le léitheoirí ilteangacha.

Straitéisí le Focail a Fhoghlaim

Tá ardchaighdeán eolas meititheangeolaíoch nó feasacht ar fhocail de dhíth le bheith eolach ar chiall focal, comhthéacs agus codanna na bhfocal (Lane & Allen, 2010). Tá sé ríthábhachtach tacú le daltaí bheith feasach ar fhocail go ndéanfaidh siad na naisc chuí agus go mbeidh siad spreagtha le focail nua a fhoghlaim.

An léitheoireacht leathan. Tá sé aitheanta gur féidir foclóir agus teanga nua a fhoghlaim le téacsanna ardchaighdeáin atá scríofa go maith (Dunne & Hickey, 2017; Snell et al., 2015) agus gur féidir cur le foclóir acadúil le téacsanna neamhfhicsin (Flowers & Flowers, 2009; Job & Coleman, 2016). Ach, ní

bhíonn an ábaltacht chéanna ag gach páiste focail a fhoghlaim i gcomhthéacs agus caithfidh múinteoirí inniúlachtaí difriúla a chur san áireamh sa teagasc (Graves, 2016). Tá seans ann chomh maith nach mbeadh na scileanna meiteachognaíocha ag an léitheoir le heolas ó chomhréir na habairte a úsáid le focail a fhoghlaim (Snell et al., 2015). De réir mar a théann páistí in aois sa bhunscoil méadaíonn an difear sa bhearna in eolas ar fhocail mura mbíonn aird chuí uirthi (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010).

Ní leor an léitheoireacht amháin (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Tá gá le léitheoireacht atá dírithe ar ghnéithe ar leith (Chard et al., 2002). Is féidir cur le foclóir le téacsanna suimiúla i réimse seánraí agus a chinntiú go mbíonn athrá ar fhoclóir nua i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla (Nagy et al., 2006). Bíonn cuid mhór focal nua i bhfíorthéacsanna, rud atá dúshlánach sa T2 (Zhang & Ma, 2021) agus luaitear foclóir mar dhúshlán do dhaltaí tumoideachais i staidéar eile (Hermanto et al., 2012). Aithnítear ganntanas foclóra mar ghné shuntasach den léitheoireacht le daltaí tumoideachais (Gebauer et al., 2013; Lee & Chen, 2019) agus bíonn tionchar aige sin ar líofacht agus ar thuiscint na léitheoireachta (Perfetti et al., 2010). Tá níos mó seans ann go mbeidh páistí in ann focail nua a fhoghlaim sa léitheoireacht má tá an chuid is mó de na focail sa téacs ar eolas acu agus níos lú seans ann má tá barraíocht focal nua ann (Snell et al., 2015). Tá gá, mar sin, le téacsanna a fhreastalaíonn ar an riachtanas seo.

Feasacht ar fhocail agus moirfeolaíocht sa Ghaeilge. Moltar béim ar mhodhanna le focail a fhoghlaim seachas liostaí focal (Carlo et el., 2005). Ba chóir an difear a aithint idir foghlaim focal agus foghlaim an dóigh le focail a fhoghlaim, rud a chuireann go mór le feasacht mheititheangeolaíochta (Snow, 2002). Molann Graves (2016) fráma ceithre chuid do theagasc an fhoclóra agus Béarla mar T1. Is iad sin taithí teanga shaibhir a chur ar fáil, teagasc foclóra aonánaigh, straitéisí foghlaim focal agus cur le feasacht ar fhocail. I gcomhthéacs T2 cuireadh béim faoi leith ar ghné fhadtréimhseach na foghlama foclóra mar dhúshlán breise (August & Shanahan, 2017; Manyak et al., 2021).

Cuireann eolas ar mhoirféimí sna hardranganna bunscoile go mór le heolas ar fhocail agus tacaíonn sé go mór le neamhspleáchas sa léitheoireacht. Tá nasc léirithe sa taighde idir an mhoirfeolaíocht agus forbairt foclóra agus gur féidir le feasacht mhoirféimeach cur le heolas ar fhoclóir sa T1 agus sa T2 (Snow & Kim, 2007). Sa Bhéarla tá moirféimí measartha rialta. Ach sa Ghaeilge, tá moirféimí casta (Barnes et al., 2017). Tá ról lárnach ag moirféimí sa Ghaeilge. Tarlaíonn athruithe, infhillteacha, séimhiú agus urú i gcomhthéacs comhréire agus gramadaí. Léiríonn moirféimí sa Ghaeilge úinéireacht, inscne, aimsir, iolraí agus cineál focal, mar sin, cuidíonn eolas ar na moirféimí ciall a bhaint as focail.

Foclóirí agus gluaiseanna. Is cleachtas coitianta é foclóirí agus gluaiseanna a úsáid i gcomhthéacs na léitheoireachta sa T2. Ach, níl aontú sa taighde orthu mar chur chuige éifeachtach (Webb & Nation, 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Maidir le gluaiseanna, measadh i staidéar amháin go raibh míniú ar an leathanach céanna níos éifeachtaí ná in áit eile sa téacs agus gur thacaigh míniú sa T1 le hionchur teanga sa T2 (Taylor, 2002) ach i staidéar eile measadh go raibh míniú sa T2 éifeachtach ach go raibh gá le hinniúlacht ard sa T2 lena thuiscint (Kim et al., 2020). Tá aontú ann gur chóir foclóirí agus gluaiseanna a úsáid mar aon straitéis amháin i measc réimse straitéisí agus go bhfuil gá le gníomhaíochtaí leantacha agus athchleachtadh le foclóir nua a choinneáil i gcuimhne go fadtréimhseach (Webb & Nation, 2017; Zhang & Ma, 2021).

Modheolaíocht

Roghnaíodh dhá scoil don chás-staidéar. Bailíodh eolas maidir le forbairt foclóra trí úsáid a bhaint as ceistneoirí, agallaimh agus breathnú ar chleachtas ranga. Rinneadh anailís ar na sonraí cainníochtúla agus cáilíochtúla a bailíodh. Ó tharla nach bhfuil mórán ar eolas againn faoin ghné seo thug cás-staidéar deis bheith cóngarach do na rannpháirtithe agus eolas a fháil san fhíorshaol ar chleachtas reatha, rud a thug guth do na rannpháirtithe (Creswell, 2015).

Rannpháirtithe

Tógadh na céimeanna cuí de réir rialacha Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath maidir le treoracha eiticiúla. Bhí dhá scoil sa staidéar, Scoil A (SA) i mBaile Átha Cliath agus Scoil B (SB) i mBéal Feirste, ceann amháin i ngach ceann den dá dhlínse in Éirinn. Bhí 6 mhúinteoir (n=6) agus 6 rang (n=186) rannpháirteach. Thug múinteoirí le fios go raibh cúlra socheacnamaíoch measctha ag SA agus cúlra soch-eacnamaíoch íseal ag SB. Roghnaíodh scoileanna uirbeacha ina raibh ranganna ar cóimhéid, thart ar 30 dalta i ngach rang. Ní raibh an Ghaeilge mar theanga an bhaile don chuid is mó de na páistí.

Bailiú sonraí

Bhí dhá cheistneoir ann, ceann do mhúinteoirí agus ceann do dhaltaí. Bhí meascán de cheisteanna oscailte agus dúnta ann. Cuireadh ceisteanna ar mhúinteoirí maidir le teagasc an fhoclóra agus cleachtais na ndaltaí. Bhain ceistneoirí na ndaltaí le cleachtas na léitheoireachta, suimeanna agus straitéisí léitheoireachta atá acu. Cuireadh na múinteoirí faoi agallamh le heolas níos doimhne a bhailiú ar na freagraí a tugadh sna ceistneoirí. Bhí na hagallaimh leathstruchtúrtha le ceisteanna a spreag comhrá. Rinneadh breathnú ar cheachtanna léitheoireachta agus glacadh nótaí. Bhí seisiúin phlé ann leis na múinteoirí i ndiaidh na breathnóireachta le deis a thabhairt dóibh an cleachtas a chíoradh agus a mbarúlacha a léiriú. Cuireadh gach rud i gcomhthéacs na bhfreagraí agus na hábhair phléite a thóg múinteoirí sna ceistneoirí agus sna hagallaimh.

Anailís

Bailíodh sonraí cainníochtúla den chuid is mó sna ceistneoirí. Cuireadh na freagraí ar fad ar *excel* don anailís. Bailíodh sonraí cáilíochtúla ó chuid de na ceisteanna sna ceistneoirí, sna hagallaimh agus na nótaí breathnóireachta. Rinneadh téamaí coitianta as na freagraí oscailte a tugadh sna ceistneoirí agus leis na nótaí a bailíodh sa bhreathnóireacht. Rinneadh tras-scríbhinní de na freagraí a tugadh sna hagallaimh. Baineadh úsáid as anailís théamach (Braun & Clark, 2006) leis na sonraí cáilíochtúla ar fad agus d'fhorbair téamaí astu.

Torthaí

Bunaíodh na torthaí ar an anailís a rinneadh ar cheistneoirí, agallaimh agus breathnóireacht ranga. Chomhlánaigh sé rang (n=172), ceithre rang i SA (N=123) agus dhá rang i SB (N=49), na ceistneoirí. Bhí roinnt daltaí as láthair ar an lá. Rinneadh agallaimh agus breathnóireacht le 6 mhúinteoir agus i 6 rang. San anailís théamach, tháinig foclóir chun tosaigh mar théama.

Teagasc an fhoclóra

Rinne gach múinteoir cur síos ar dhúshláin i dteagasc agus i bhfoghlaim na léitheoireachta; fadhbanna le díchódú, gan foclóir a bheith ar eolas agus deacrachtaí an téacs a thuiscint. Léiríonn na ráitis thíos rudaí a dúirt múinteoirí maidir le teagasc agus foghlaim foclóra.

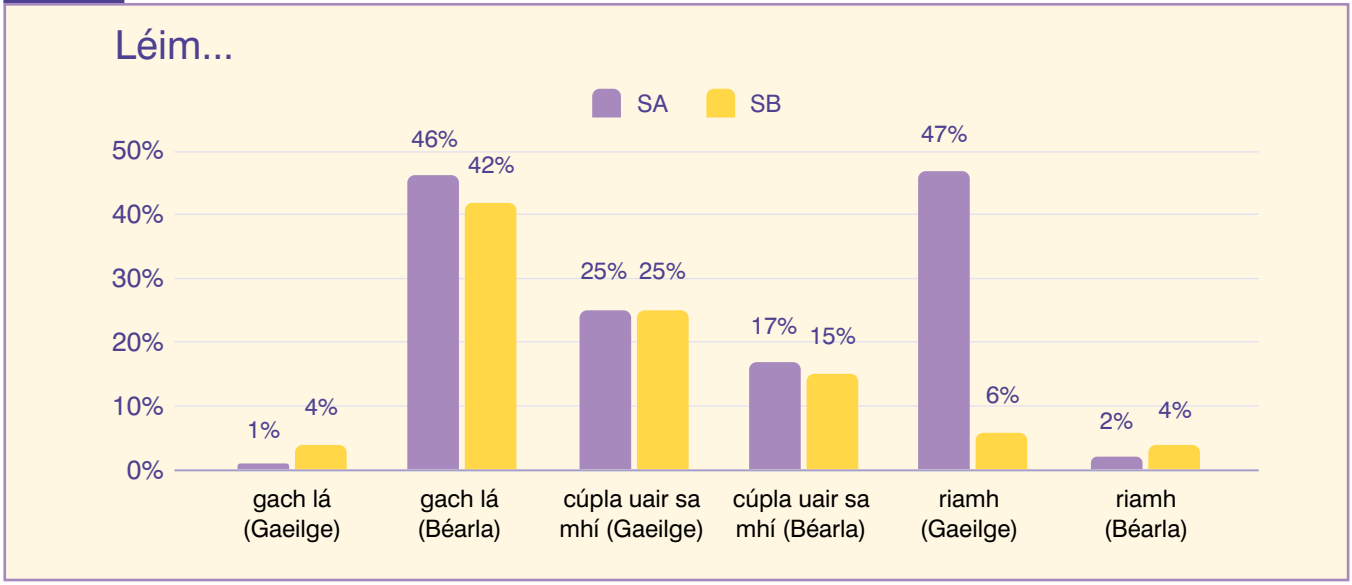
Ach d'fhéadfadh sé bheith deich nóiméad dul tríd an leathanach amháin, chun é ar fad a mhíniú. (4A SA)
Yeah, so má tá focal ann atá cineál deacair, cuirfidh mé ceist orthu é a aimsiú san fhoclóir agus b'fhéidir é a scríobh amach in abairt. (5B SA)
Mar ní thuigeann siad an scéal, uaireanta, caithfidh tú gach rud a mhíniú. So, léann siad, tuigeann cuid den rang, ní thuigeann an chuid is mó den rang, caithfidh tú an rud a léigh siad a mhíniú go soiléir. (4B SA)
Em, bhuel, bealach leis na focail a mhúineadh daofa, like, dul fríd, roimh léamh, bíonn ort na focail a thabhairt daofa. (6 SB)

Cleachtas iomlán ranga is mó a tharla i gceachtanna léitheoireachta i SA, an leabhar céanna ag gach páiste, agus léigh an múinteoir nó dalta amháin sliocht os ard ar a sheal. Cuireadh stop leis an léitheoireacht go minic le foclóir a mhíniú nó le ciall an fhocail a aimsiú i bhfoclóir. I SB bhí tréimhse iomlán ranga ann ar dtús ar scil nó straitéis ar nós gramadach nó poncaíocht. Ansin chuaigh na páistí i ngrúpaí ábaltachta, leabhar difriúil ag gach grúpa. Léigh siad agus rinne siad gníomhaíocht éigin bunaithe ar an téacs go neamhspleách agus bhog an múinteoir ó ghrúpa go grúpa. Bhí béim sa dá scoil ar léamh os ard agus ar thuiscint gach uile fhocal sa téacs. Dúirt múinteoirí an dá scoil gur caitheadh barraíocht ama ar fhoclóir agus gur bac a bhí ann ar an léitheoireacht. I gcur síos ar cheachtanna Béarla dúirt na múinteoirí ar fad nach gcaitear an oiread céanna ama ar fhoclóir ach go ndírítear ar na straitéisí tuisceana.

Cleachtas na léitheoireachta

Cuireadh ceist ar na daltaí cé chomh minic is a léigh siad i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. I gcomhthéacs na léitheoireachta leathan agus foghlaim focal trí léamh, léirigh an cheist seo an léitheoireacht mar straitéis fhéideartha. Tá an mhinicíocht léitheoireachta mar a thuairiscigh an dá scoil i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla léirithe i bhFigiúr 2.

Figiúr 2 *Léitheoireacht don phléisiúr i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla mar atá tuairiscithe ag daltaí.*



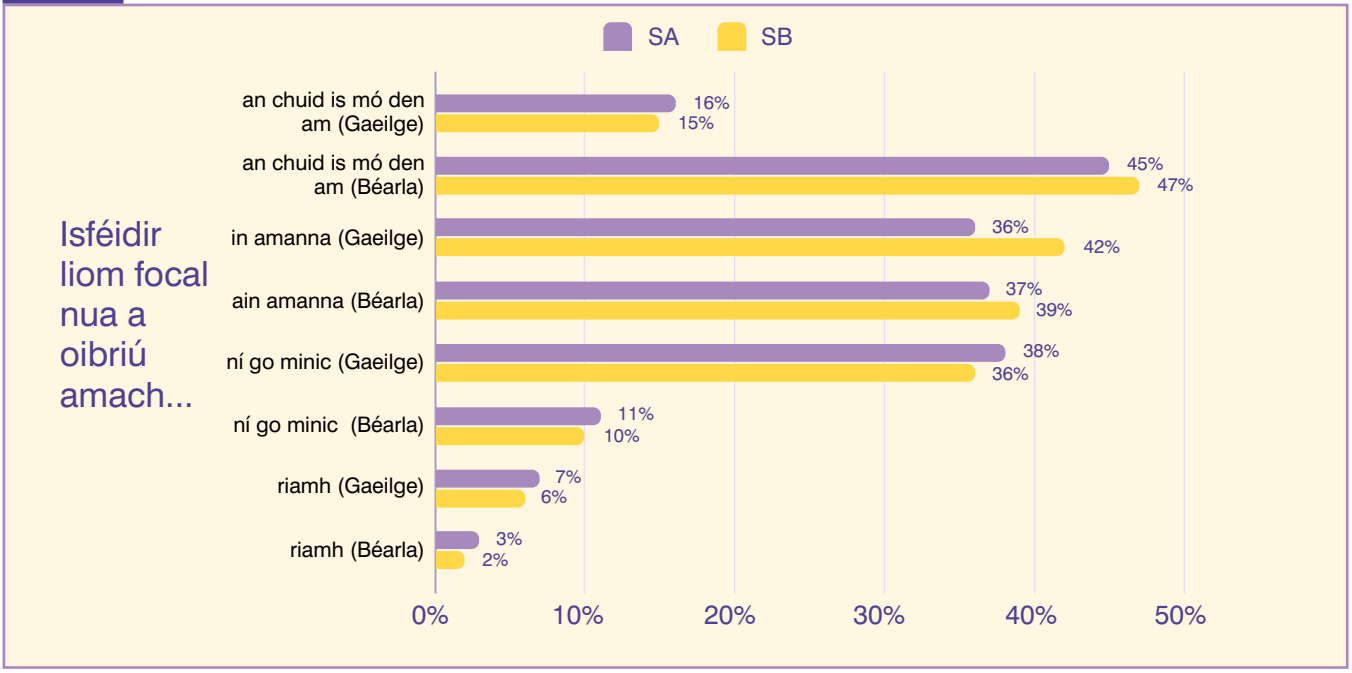
Dúirt chóir a bheith leathchuid de na daltaí i SA agus i SB go léann siad don phléisiúr gach lá i mBéarla. Dúirt líon íseal daltaí i SA (1%) agus i SB (4%) go léann siad don phléisiúr go laethúil i nGaeilge. Chonacthas i staidéar eile nach cleachtas coitianta é Gaeilge a léamh don phléisiúr (Dunne & Hickey, 2017). Is cinnte gur rud dúshlánach é seo le mionteanga. Léann daltaí SB níos minice thar sheachtain ná SA, dar leo.

Ba iad na príomhchúiseanna a thug daltaí mar chúis nár léigh siad chomh minic céanna i nGaeilge ná focail, focail fhada agus gan na focail bheith ar eolas. Ba é an phríomhchúis a tugadh go raibh léitheoireacht an Bhéarla níos fusa ná léitheoireacht na Gaeilge ná go raibh na focail ar eolas agus go raibh níos mó Béarla ar eolas.

Foghlaim an fhoclóra

Thuairiscigh múinteoirí go dteagascann siad straitéisí foclóra i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla go laethúil. Ach ba léir gur mheas na daltaí go raibh na straitéisí a bhí acu don Bhéarla níos éifeachtaí ná na straitéisí a bhí acu don Ghaeilge. Cuireadh ceist ar dhaltaí sa cheistneoir ar mheas siad go mbeadh siad in ann focal nó frása nua a oibriú amach agus iad ag léamh. Tá na freagraí ón dá scoil ar Fhigiúr 3.

Figiúr 3 *Cur síos na ndaltaí ar a straitéisí féin*



Bhí cosúlachtaí sonracha sna freagraí a tugadh sa dá scoil. Dúirt chóir a bheith leathchuid de na daltaí sa dá scoil go bhféadfadh siad focal a oibriú amach i mBéarla an chuid is mó den am, rud nach raibh chomh hard céanna le Gaeilge, i SA (16%) agus i SB (15%).

Plé agus moltaí

Is T2 í an Ghaeilge ag an chuid is mó de léitheoirí i suíomhanna tumoideachais. Is mionteanga í an Ghaeilge chomh maith, rud a chothaíonn dúshláin sa bhreis. Míníonn an easpa foclóra ag léitheoirí T2 an mhoill a bhaineann le scileanna tuisceana na léitheoireachta (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010). Ba chóir, mar sin, príomhthosaíocht a dhéanamh d'fhorbairt foclóra ó bhéal leis an ghrúpa seo. Léirigh an staidéar seo go gcaitear cuid mhór ama ag míniú focal i gceachtanna léitheoireachta Gaeilge. Má bhíonn focail ar eolas ag leibhéil éagsúla ní gá go mbeadh gach uile fhocal sa téacs ar eolas ag leibhéal domhain le tuiscint a fháil ar théacs (Legacy et al., 2016). Is scil ann féin é na focail a chuireann bac le tuiscint a aimsiú i dtéacs.

Ní leor páistí a chur ag léamh le go mbeadh feabhas ar fhorbairt foclóra. Moltar idirghabhálacha agus frámaí tacaíochta ilghnéitheacha. Is gá na huirlisí cuí a thabhairt do léitheoirí óga le go mbeadh siad feasach ar fhocail. Mar theangacha aibítreacha is féidir modhanna coitianta a úsáid idir an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla a bhaineann le codanna, aonaid, fréamh focal, teaghlaigh focal, le focail a aithint agus a thuiscint i gcomhthéacs na léitheoireachta. Cuireann an cineál seo cleachtais le heolas meiteachognaíoch a thacóidh le forbairt na scileanna liteartha eile (Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2011).

Is gá go mbeadh an teagasc céanna ann sa T2 agus atá sa T1 ach go mbeadh aird faoi leith ar na riachtanais bhreise atá i gceist le foghlaim sa T2 agus aird ar dhiantheagasc an fhoclóra i rith an ama. I gcóras tumoideachais tá sé dúshlánach cothromaíocht i gcumais sa dá theanga a bhaint amach agus aithnítear nach mbeidh an dá theanga forbartha ar aon dul (García et al., 2008). Ach tá buntáistí ann má bhíonn léitheoirí ilteangacha ag tarraingt go héifeachtach ar an eolas ar fad atá acu thar theangacha.

Teorainneacha, inghinearálaitheacht, bailíocht agus iontaofacht

Aithnítear an teorainn a bhain le staidéar a dhéanamh ar dhá scoil agus bheadh gá le staidéar níos leithne. Rinneadh iarracht cur le bailíocht an staidéir trí ranganna ar cóimhéid i scoileanna uirbeacha a aimsiú. Bhí meascán nó stádas íseal soch-eacnamaíoch ag an dá scoil, rud atá an-ábhartha in eolas foclóra agus a thugann dúshlán sa bhreis do mhúinteoirí. Baineadh úsáid as réimse sonraí, cainníochtúla agus cáilíochtúla, le próifíl níos leithne a thabhairt agus le pictiúr a léiriú den chleachtas.

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Boosting Young Children's Language and Literacy: An Overview of the Scaling Up of the Early Talkboost Programme in Ireland

Suzanne M. Egan[3], Mary Moloney, Jennifer Pope, Deirdre Breatnach & Mai Burke Hayes

Early Talk Boost (ETB), is an early language intervention programme. Developed by Speech and Language UK (a UK-based Community Charity), it is a targeted intervention for children aged between 3 and 4 years old, delivered by educators in early childhood settings. ETB aims to boost young children's language and communication skills, helping to narrow the gap between them and their peers. It has been delivered across a number of ECEC centres, located primarily in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Ireland recently. With the support of a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), educators identify children who would benefit from participation in the programme. This may include children with English as an additional language. ETB sessions are fun and interactive. They consist of practical activities, games, songs, rhymes and a series of eight, Jake and Tizzy storybooks, specifically designed for Early Talk Boost. This paper, which outlines an independent evaluation of the ETB intervention in Ireland, highlights the significant benefits of the programme for participating children. The evaluation also points to benefits for early years educators (e.g., increased knowledge of language and communication, and enhanced ability to identify young children in need of support with communication and language in the early years). From the perspective of speech and language therapists, this increased educator knowledge may lead to reduced caseloads and speech and language waiting lists. In considering the findings, we make recommendations regarding the future rollout of the Early Talk Boost intervention from both a targeted and a universal stance.

Keywords: *Young children; Language Delay; Early Childhood Education; Language Intervention; Speech and Language Therapy*

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Introduction

Language development supports and sets the pace for both formal and informal learning (Reilly & McKean, 2023). Early language skills, such as listening, understanding words, speaking, and building vocabulary, are vital foundations that enable children to learn to read (Feldman, 2019). Accordingly, when young children face challenges in language acquisition, they are more likely to struggle with learning to read when they start school, with the poorest children being most at risk of falling behind from an early age (Feldman, 2019).

Speech and Language UK (a UK-based Community Charity) developed Early Talk Boost (ETB), a nine-week intervention targeted at children between the ages of 3 and 4 years old with delayed language development. Using books and other language-based activities, ETB has been implemented in early years settings in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The programme has also been running for a number of years in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Ireland (e.g., Limerick; Ballyfermot, Knocknaheeny, the Midlands and Tallaght West). In 2023, the Tusla National Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme scaled up evidence-based community-based language support across several new areas. This was facilitated by engaging clusters of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings and Primary Care Speech and Language therapists (SLTs) in the delivery of the Early Talkboost (ETB) programme.

Children who are selected to take part in ETB attend three 15-20-minute sessions per week (27 workshops over 9 weeks), delivered by the early childhood educator during circle/story time. Sessions include activities that cover the foundational skills in speech, language and communication that children need for learning and understanding new words, as well as having conversations (Speech and Language UK). Each session is supported by a range of materials: the ETB programme manual, a planning board, a series of eight Jake and Tizzy storybooks and accompanying puppets and playful resources.

To investigate the impact of ETB, Prevention Partnership and Family Support, Tusla commissioned a research team from Mary Immaculate College to undertake an independent outcomes-based evaluation of the ETB Scaling Up Project in ECCE clusters, nationally. This article, which provides an overview of the evaluation, provides insight into the benefits for participating children, their early childhood educators and participating Speech and Language Therapists.

Evaluation of the Early Talkboost Programme

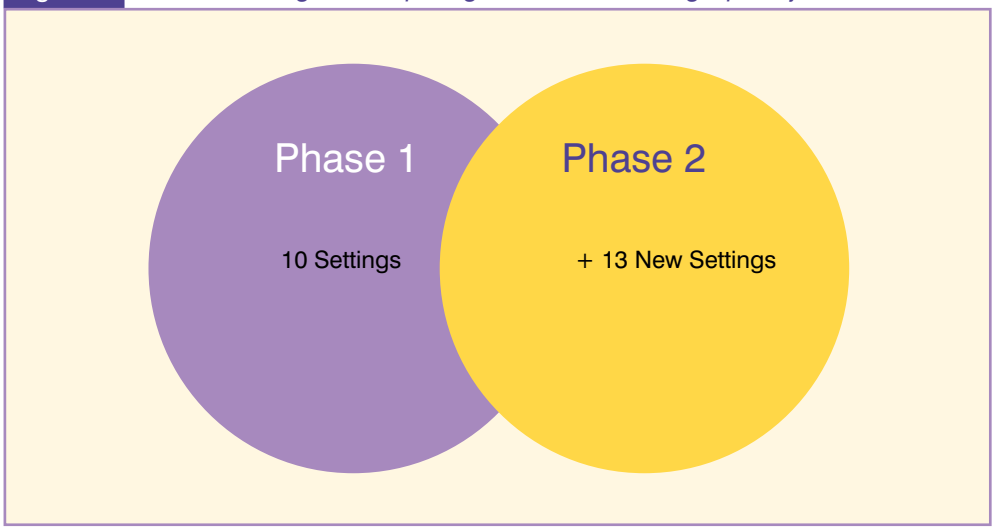
Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) propose that the development of each child is influenced by the various ecological systems in which development takes place, such as the microsystem of the home or the early years setting. Additionally, the relationships between individuals (e.g., between children and parents, or between early years educators and parents) is also very important in shaping child development. Given the complex nature of the evaluation, with multiple stakeholders (e.g., children, parents, early years educators, Speech and Language Therapists) and the intervention taking place in the early years' settings with involvement from the home too, an ecological systems theory approach was adopted. Underpinned by the ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), the mixed-methods outcomes-based evaluation, sought to:

1. Review pre- and post-intervention data, to measure the impact of the intervention on Child Outcomes and Language Outcomes
2. Measure any changes in the identification of Speech, Language and Communication needs

3. Review the barriers and enablers that supported the implementation of ETB across the new sites
4. Assess the applicability of this model of language supports within the Equal Start Model proposed within *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies Young Children and their Families* (Ireland, 2018).

Data collection occurred between April 2023 and March 2024. It involved two phases: the first, April to June 2023, and the second, September 2023 to March 2024. TUSLA selected all participating early childhood settings prior to the commencement of the evaluation, and there was no waiting list control group. In total, 23 settings, offering the Early Childhood Care and Education programme participated in the ETB scaling-up project. Ten settings participated in Phase 1 with 16 settings participating in Phase 2 (i.e., 13 new settings, plus 3 settings from Phase 1). As shown in Figure 1, 3 settings participated in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the programme, involving different child cohorts each time. Of the 23 participating settings, 2 were privately run, with some of the children attending Speech and Language therapy. In both cases, the settings participated in ETB at the request of the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT).

Figiúr 1 *ECCE Settings Participating in the ETB Scaling Up Project*



Speech and Language Therapists and early childhood educators co-delivered the ETB programme in the 23 participating early childhood settings. The mixed-methods, outcomes-based evaluation utilised both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (see Table 1 for a summary). It involved all the key stakeholders involved with ETB: children, SLTs, educators and parents/guardians. All data collection tools and procedures were approved by the Mary Immaculate College (Reference: A23-022) and the TUSLA Research Ethics Committees.

Table 1 *Summary of Methods and Data Sources*

Participant	Method	Purpose: Gain Insight into…
Early Childhood Educator	Bespoke anonymous online questionnaire, administered in week 9 (final week of the programme) 20 completed questionnaires returned = 87% setting response rate	• Educators' perspective of the intervention • Confidence in identifying children for inclusion in the programme • Confidence in supporting children's language and communication pre and post intervention • Perception of the programme • Recommending the programme
	Interviews with 8 educators, undertaken within 4 weeks of programme completion	• Educators' experience of the programme • Attitude towards their training and preparation • Perspective on the usefulness of the ETB tracker in determining changes in different aspects of a child's language and communication • Impact of the programme on children's language and communication • Thoughts on the programme overall (what worked well; challenges, if any, recommendations for future implementation)
Parents/ Guardians	Bespoke anonymous online questionnaire, administered in week 9 (final week of the programme) 33 completed questionnaires returned	Parent/guardian opinions on • Child's language and communication pre and post intervention • Parent/guardian confidence in supporting child's language and communication • Perception of the programme • Recommending the programme
	Interviews with 7 parents (undertaken within 6 weeks of programme completion)	Parent/guardian perspectives about: • Their child's involvement in the programme • Impact of the programme on their child • Changes if any, noticed in their child's communication and language skills post-intervention • Whether participation had increased their child's interest in books or reading • What worked well with the programme in terms of how it was run • Challenges, if any experienced during the programme in terms of how it was run

Participant	Method	Purpose: Gain Insight into…
Speech and Language Therapists	Focus Group 10 SLTs in Phase 1 (undertaken in June 2023) 4 SLTs in Phase 2 (involved in the second rollout) (undertaken in February 2024)	SLTs views about: • The programme • The training and how it was delivered • How the early childhood setting, educators and children responded to the programme • Suggestions for running the programme in the future
Children	Online Early Talk Boost language tracker measure Pre and post-programme data available for 179 children	This assessment of language provided pre and post-intervention data relating to: • Children's auditory (receptive) and expressive abilities • Changes in the identification of speech, language and communication needs
	Informal conversation/drawing with 9 children in one participating early childhood setting	• Experience of participating in the programme • What they liked/disliked • What they liked best/least • Anything they might like to change about the programme

Key Findings from the Evaluation

Overall, the findings were overwhelmingly positive for all stakeholder participants involved, across both the quantitative and qualitative data sets. As illustrated in Table 1, tracker data was gathered both before and after the intervention for 179 children. The evaluation shows significant improvements in each of the language areas measured (Attention and Listening, Understanding, Speaking and Communication) in children who took part in the programme. These significant increases were present across children of various ages in the sample, across boys and girls, with boys making greater gains than girls in terms of language development, and across children with English as an additional language before and after the programme. In addition, the programme was found to have a meaningful impact on the children's confidence and social and emotional development. Parents, early years educators and SLTs also noted these positive changes.

The programme also enhanced educator's knowledge and understanding of language and communication in young children, and how to support this. Furthermore, educators reported an increased ability to select children who would benefit from the programme. Both educators and SLTs reported a greater appreciation of each other's professional roles and improved working relationships. SLT involvement was an important factor in the success of the programme. Accordingly, co-delivery, involving speech and language therapists and educators was especially beneficial. This approach is transformative. SLTs noted its potential to reduce their workload, as well as speech and language therapy waiting lists.

Discussion and Recommendations

Recently the Government launched the Equal Start Model which is a component of Together for Better, the funding model for Early Learning and Care. Equal Start will adopt a tiered approach by incorporating universal, child-targeted and setting-targeted measures to support access and participation in early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) for children and their families who experience disadvantage. Informed by the findings of the ETB evaluation, and based upon our recommendation that ETB should be a central pillar of wrap-around therapeutic supports (e.g., play therapy, occupational therapy), ETB will be incorporated in 800 early years settings in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, nationally.

Based on the positive findings from the evaluation across all stakeholders, and particularly for children's language development, we also recommend that the ETB programme should be integral to the ECCE programme, notably in year one, when children appear to make the most significant gains in language and communication (Moloney et al., 2024). Rolling the programme out through the ECCE programme reduces the risk of children in need of support falling through the cracks (Wright and O'Donoghue, 2018), ultimately reducing SLT waiting lists and workloads (Moloney, et al., 2024). In keeping with First 5, these measures will ensure a good start in life for all young children, ensuring equal participation for all.

More broadly, drawing upon the findings from the evaluation, it is essential to ensure the successful continuation of the programme. As such, we recommend that SLTs and Educators continue to co-deliver the programme in the short to medium term, to ensure high-quality delivery and closer co-professional collaboration between these key stakeholders. We further recommend the need to build capacity in terms of the professionals trained to deliver the programme. We propose that ETB training should be incorporated into undergraduate SLT and ECCE degree programmes, with the purpose of including the programme in their practicum experiences, in the short term. Upon graduating, these professionals will then have the knowledge, skills and competencies to implement ETB into their practice. Additionally, ETB training should be offered to other professionals within the ECCE support infrastructure nationally, such as Better Start, County Childcare Committees, and Non-Governmental ECCE Organisations. These capacity-building recommendations would over time, help to reduce waiting lists, and free up SLT time. In the longer term, SLTs could reduce support for early childhood settings who may be able to run ETB independently, thus ensuring the sustainability of the programme.

Conclusion

Following the scale-up of the Early Talkboost programme in Ireland, the mixed methods evaluation involving multiple stakeholders indicates very positive findings for all concerned. Therefore, the wider rollout of the programme is recommended. The importance of supporting early language development, particularly for children with a language delay, cannot be overstated. The potential detrimental effects of such a delay may involve longer-term impacts on formal and informal learning, reading, and a variety of other psychological skills like social interaction (e.g., Reilly and McKean, 2023; Feldman, 2019). Rolling out the Early Talkboost intervention as part of the Equal Start model will ensure that the most vulnerable children will have access to a language support programme with a strong evidence base in relation to its effectiveness.

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Aistear and Your Local Library

Clara Maria Fiorentini[4]

Aistear and Your Local Library was a pilot project designed and facilitated by Clara Maria Fiorentini (Marino Institute of Education) in collaboration with Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Libraries, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Creative Ireland. This research project aimed to explore and increase opportunities for early childhood educators to engage with their local library to support their application of Aistear: The Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education to inform early literacy practices in early childhood education settings. This project aimed to build awareness of existing and new library supports for early childhood educators to increase engagement between local libraries and early childhood educators within the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown catchment area. Throughout the project, early childhood educators attended three professional learning workshops - each focusing on the application of the themes and principles of Aistear in promoting the use of shared reading and playful book use to support early literacy learning.

Keywords: *Aistear, early childhood education, early literacy, professional development, local library*

Introduction:

Aistear and your local library was a pilot project designed and facilitated by Clara Maria Fiorentini (Marino Institute of Education) in collaboration with Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Libraries, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Creative Ireland. This research project aimed to explore and increase opportunities for early childhood educators to engage with their local library to support their application of *Aistear: The Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education* (NCCA, 2009) and the provision of early literacy learning experiences. An underpinning aim of this project was to build awareness of existing and new library supports for early childhood educators to increase engagement between local libraries and early childhood educators within the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) catchment area. Throughout the project, educators attended three professional learning workshops - each focusing on the application of the themes and principles of Aistear in promoting:

- the use of shared reading and playful book use to support early literacy learning in the early childhood setting
- the role of the local library in developing early childhood educators' shared reading practices and playful picturebook use to support early literacy learning in early childhood settings

Literature Review

Research demonstrates that it takes social experiences in families and communities to engage in literacy and learning experiences, for the best long-term outcomes (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011; Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007). Literacy learning begins well before children are 'school aged' and young children benefit significantly from opportunities to explore and discover their

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interests in a variety of spaces, including at home, in the community, and public libraries (ALA, 2016). Libraries provide a unique space for children and adults to interact and engage in playful and informal language and literacy skill development through book handling, shared reading, and onsite events for children and caregivers. According to Cambell-Hicks (2016, p. 122), public libraries are 'well placed to play a prominent role' in early childhood and can provide valuable support in nurturing fundamental 'pre-reading skills and a love of reading'. Local libraries can play a valuable role in supporting our early childhood education (ECE) settings and ECE educators by:

- supporting educators in sowing the seeds of early and emergent reading development
- sharing resources, knowledge, and professional development opportunities
- building reading relationships
- creating accessible spaces for book-talk, 'book-blether' (Cremin, 2014, p8) and book-play
- creating communities of reading and creating communities of readers (Cremin, 2014; Commeryas, 2003)

Methodology

Within this qualitative pilot study, a design-based research (DBR) approach was employed, facilitating the use of a range of instruments including a pre-project questionnaire, coaching session feedback forms, and pre-, mid-, and post-study surveys. Ethical approval for data collection was sought and granted from the Ethics in Research Committee at Marino Institute of Education in November 2022. Data collection cycles spanned four cycles of implementation running from December 2022 until April 2023. According to Barab (2004, p.8), the goal of DBR is to 'directly impact practice while advancing theory that will be of use to others'. The grounding principles of DBR align with the aims of the Aistear & Your Local Library Project, which was ultimately designed to foster links between ECE educators and local library branches in the DLR catchment area. Additionally, the project provided an opportunity for ECE educators to avail of three, free evidence and research-informed professional development workshops on library use in the early years and early literacy learning. These workshops were designed and aligned to the emerging needs of participants. Design-based researchers view the subjects of their research (in this case, early childhood educators) as 'co-participants' (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 3) and 'co-investigators' (Collins, 1990, p. 4). In the case of this study, through their generous contributions, participating early childhood educators played a valuable role in supporting the refinement of cycle designs and iteratively moving the study forward. Ultimately, the research engineering and flexibility of DBR facilitated the monitoring of several variables (participants, experience, pedagogic knowledge, and research cycle stage) while affording opportunities for successive cycles that embraced systematic variation through revision and development as necessary (Cobb, Di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003). Adopting a design-based approach across four cycles ensured that educator's voice remained a priority across the cycles of the study.

Table 1 *Project Cycles Overview*

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
Dec. 2022 – Jan. 2023	February 2023	March 2023	April 2023
• Pre-project questionnaire • Needs analysis	• Early-project survey • Workshop feedback	• Mid-project survey • Workshop feedback	• Post-project survey • Workshop feedback

Cycle 1: Needs Analysis

A pre-project questionnaire was circulated to all ECE settings in the DLR catchment area. 47 early childhood educators completed the questionnaire between December 15, 2022, and January 15, 2023. Through an exploration of responses and emerging patterns in responses, a needs analysis was conducted. An effective needs analysis identifies underlying issues and provides the opportunity to create a bespoke solution, in this case, professional development workshops for ECE educators incorporating the most common requests or resources cited across the questionnaire responses (Legault, 2018). Those surveyed indicated a collective interest in availing of additional support from local libraries, including:

- increased availability of themed text sets
- resources highlighting links between children's literature and Aistear aims/learning goals
- bespoke 'early-childhood' friendly events in libraries
- availability of 'Story Sacks'
- professional development opportunities for ECE educators

Through the emerging themes established from the needs analysis, the direction and content for three professional development workshops were prepared. Evidence from the initial round of data collection indicated that while educators were familiar with processes surrounding visiting the library and borrowing books to support their practice, most were unfamiliar with additional supports on offer from DLRLibraries. This included awareness of existing online supports, such as the *Autism Spectrum Collection*, LOTE4Kids, Resources for Ukrainian Nationals, *DLR Scéal Trails*, Class sets, Tumble Book Library, Baby Book Clubs, and Moshi. While 72% indicated efforts to visit the local library to source materials to support their professional practice, 80% of participants were unaware that there were materials such as high-quality toys, instruments, story sacks and sensory resources, which are readily available for ECE educators to borrow too.

Cycle 2, 3 & 4: Professional Development Workshops

As part of the project, early childhood educators were invited to attend three, free professional development workshops on library use, early literacy learning and shared book reading. Monthly workshops were hosted in the Lexicon Library, Haigh Terrace, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. Each workshop ran from 6.30 pm to 8 pm across the months of February, March and April. 25 early childhood educators joined each session, which included read-alouds, practical exploration of library resources, an informative presentation on early literacy learning, and participant surveys. Data collected from the needs analysis of Cycle 1 assisted in forming a plan and structure of content for the workshops, ensuring the content was of relevance and need to the participants. Data was collected on project participation, library use, shared reading practices, and existing early literacy learning in early childhood settings.

Early Project Findings: Cycle 2

Feedback from participants in the early-project survey indicated that participants found it valuable to explore the links between shared reading and early literacy development and the role library engagement can play in supporting increased opportunities for shared reading practices and playful book use. Although book use was cited as a daily feature of most (76%) participants' daily practice, the majority (56%), of participants indicated that this book use is currently not linked or mapped to the aims or learning goals of Aistear. This indicated a possible disconnect in associating early years'

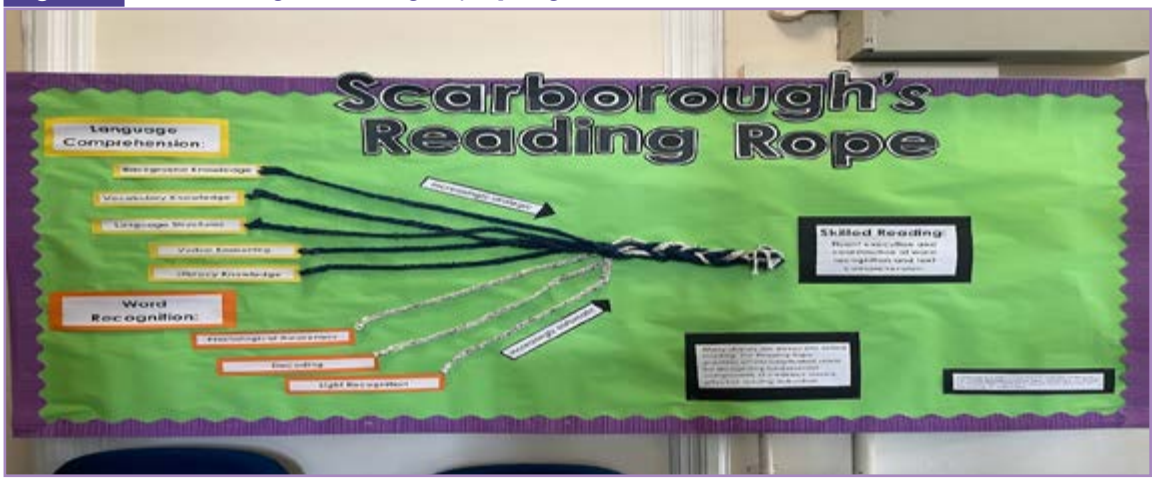
shared reading experiences as documented, meaningful, and purposeful early literacy learning experiences. As a result, participants found exploring the support materials designed for the *Story Sacks* particularly beneficial because it provided opportunities to consider the links and early literacy learning potential within picturebooks, for example, and their use for read-alouds and shared reading purposes.

Mid-Project Findings: Cycle 3

At the conclusion of cycle 3, 80% of participants indicated that they had visited their local library since attending the first professional development workshop in February. Following Workshop 1 and 2, all participants felt that their knowledge of additional library supports and services had grown significantly. Workshop 2 involved an exploration of 'tired texts' and provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their habits surrounding text choice. Following Workshop 2, it was evident that participants were keen to further explore the links between reading aloud and picturebook use as a means of developing early literacy skills in early childhood. Participants indicated that a beneficial factor of the project thus far, had been the opportunities to engage with and listen to the experiences of others. By this stage in the project, links were forming and being fostered between early childhood educators and local libraries. Simultaneously, an evident community of practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2020) was emerging through the conversations and interactions between educators across the workshops. Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this. Communities of practice can develop organically, are flexible, and are not limited by formal structures: facilitating connection-making amongst people across organizational and geographic boundaries (Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Although all participants were working across ECE settings within close proximity to each other, most had never met or liaised prior to engagement in the workshops. Participants highlighted the value of listening to the experiences of fellow educators and found the opportunities to share a lens into their practice beneficial. The opportunities to share and question arose through informal discussions and dialogue, which emerged organically through the topics and content explored in the workshops.

Cycle 4: Knowledge Development

Figure 1 *Scarborough's Reading Rope [Image source: Clara Maria Fiorentini, Marino Institute of Education, 2023].*



Dr. Hollis Scarborough's 'Reading Rope' (2001) was utilised to guide the content on early literacy learning throughout the workshops (see Figure 1 above). Snow (2021) considers Scarborough's model as an effective framework for early literacy as it clearly illustrates that many of the earliest events on the path to reading "are the acquisition of a lot about spoken language and a bit about print" (Seidenberg, 2017, p.106). The 'Reading Rope' model demonstrates the interactivity across literacy processes and skills development in a straightforward manner in line with the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tumner, 1986). Each strand of the 'Reading Rope' was unpacked and applied to practical contexts and routines for early literacy learning in early childhood settings. Under the following strands, background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition; workshop participants were provided with an opportunity to explore an array of practical routines and systems to develop and foster each strand. Guiding questions included opportunities for self-reflection and collaboration within the newly established community of practice:

- What am I doing already?
- How can I capitalise and build on existing practices?
- Do I recognise when these skills are being developed?
- How can I ensure early literacy learning experiences remain informal and age/stage appropriate?

Moving Forward: Bespoke Support Materials

Following Cycle 4, it was evident that workshop participants were keen to maintain their links with their local library and continue to avail of support for early childhood educators. As a result, a series of exclusive support materials and resources were designed to maintain engagement and to foster links with additional early childhood educators, childminders, parents, and primary infant teachers with an interest in early literacy learning and library support. Support materials included:

- The design of additional story sacks and accompanying guides detailing early literacy learning extension activities
- A suite of videos providing a condensed version of the workshop materials housed on the DLRLibraries website
- A condensed guide for early childhood educators outlining practical early literacy strategies and systems to support the development of the strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope

Support Materials: Story Sacks

As part of the project, a selection of bespoke Story Sacks were designed for early childhood educators. Each Story Sack contains a contemporary picturebook and extension resources. The extension resources include puppets, toys, games, and informational texts to support the theme of the story sack. The learning opportunities connected to the key text in each Story Sack were carefully mapped to the Aims and Learning Goals of Aistear. Each unique Story Sack contains support material outlining a variety of early literacy learning experiences, routines, and activities to support early childhood educators in developing children's fundamental early literacy skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, visual literacy, language comprehension, and knowledge development.

Limitations

Potential limitations of the study were addressed early in the planning stages. Not all educators who expressed interest in participation were in a position to commit to three face-to-face workshops. The workshops were held from 6.30 pm - 8 pm on Thursday evenings which may have been a challenging time for educators after a long day of work, those with familial commitments, and those who may have had limited time or capacity to travel to and from Dun Laoghaire on a Thursday evening. To address these challenges and to increase the reach of the support for ECE educators emerging from the project, a suite of videos was designed to encapsulate a condensed version of the workshops. Recorded onsite in Dalkey Library in July 2023, these videos were created to provide accessible, professional development support for ECE educators whilst maintaining links with the DLRLibraries network and their support for ECE educators. The three videos were recorded and edited by VideoWorks and have been available to access via the DLRLibraries website since December 2023.

Recommendations

- A number of proposed steps and plans have already been put in place to build on the progress made across this project arising from the recommendations of the researcher. DLRLibraries wish to continue and strengthen links and relationships between ECE settings, ECE educators, and their local library branches through the following efforts:
- The videos recorded as part of the project will be permanently housed on the DLRLibraries website to provide accessible support materials for early childhood educators.
- CPD workshops presented as part of the project will be re-run and facilitated again in spring 2025. A call for participants will be circulated across December 2024 and January 2025
- The development of *Story Sack* resources will be continued with increased efforts to broaden the languages represented within the resources and literature. Efforts will be made to seek out and create more Irish language-based story sacks and accompanying resources too.
- DLRLibraries will collaborate with Irish authors/illustrators whose materials are represented across the project Story Sacks. In-house events with such authors/illustrators will be organised specifically for ECE settings.
- As demonstrated across the project, participant feedback is valued and utilised. A document containing a QR code to provide feedback will be added to all existing and new Story Sacks to provide users with the option to provide feedback on the resources and make suggestions or resource requests.
- Aistear is currently under review and redevelopment. When the updated framework has been published in the coming years, the support materials within each story sack will be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- The design of a mailing list of local ECE educatiors and ECE settings will be prioritised. This will facilitate ease of contact and notification of upcoming events and projects pertaining to ECE and ECE educators. ECE settings will be invited to join the mailing list or nominate relevant 'Literacy Ambassadors' to be added.
- DLRLibraries wishes to maintain and develop the links fostered during this project and as a result it is intended that increased services and events will be organised for and highlighted to local ECE educators.
- Training will be provided to Library Staff across DLRLibraries for the purposes of building awareness of early literacy and early childhood education so library staff are equipped with the relevant language, terminology and understanding of appropriate early years' library provision.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate the continued need for bespoke early literacy supports and resources specifically aimed at Irish early childhood educators. With state funding for early childhood education in Ireland continuing to lag (ECI, 2022), local library services, such as those of DLRLibraries, provide a valuable opportunity to support early childhood educators in developing early literacy practices. Such support can be fulfilled through the provision of high-quality children's literature, educational resources, and toys for early childhood educators to borrow and utilise as part of their early literacy learning experiences. Mirroring longstanding patterns in Irish early childhood education, the study also demonstrates that there exists a continued need for early childhood educators to receive practical and meaningful support in their application of Aistear (Daly et al., 2014; Murphy, 2015) particularly in the provision of high quality, meaningful, and relevant early literacy learning experiences for young children.

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A Morphological Analysis Intervention (MAI) for EAL Students Experiencing Language and Literacy Difficulties: Translating Research into Practice

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Language and literacy development are tightly interwoven, and as students progress through school, literacy demands become increasingly challenging. Morphological instruction has been shown to benefit all students and to hold particular value for struggling readers and students experiencing language and literacy difficulties. While morphology has gained considerable attention with the science of reading movement, there is a paucity of empirical research which has examined this element of literacy instruction within the Irish context. The introduction to this paper explores the role of morphological awareness on school-aged language and literacy development. A brief review of the literature pertaining to morphological interventions is presented, alongside a discussion of the instructional practices which have been shown to promote literacy achievement and student engagement in the context of struggling readers. Next, the elements of a morphological analysis intervention (MAI), implemented as part of a small-scale action research study in an Irish primary school, are presented. The participants of this research study included 4th class students who were learning English as an additional language and who were experiencing significant, concurrent difficulties with language and literacy. The content and structure of this morphological analysis intervention (MAI) are discussed in relation to the instructional approaches employed to promote students' morphological awareness and support their application of a morphological analysis strategy to decode and infer the meaning of multimorphemic words. A framework for implementing morphological instruction as part of a structured literacy intervention is provided, with concrete examples of intervention activities drawn from the extant research literature.

Key words: *Morphology, morphological awareness, morphological analysis, intervention, structured literacy, struggling readers, EAL (English as an additional language), affixes, roots, base words*

Introduction

As children progress through the upper grades of primary school, reading and writing demands become increasingly challenging for students with and without language and literacy difficulties. Academic texts present complex, multimorphemic words and discipline specific vocabulary that are necessary to decode and decipher meaning, in order to gain comprehension from what is read. These challenges are magnified in students learning English as an additional language (EAL), who also present with underlying language and literacy difficulties such as dyslexia. With regard to intervention, Structured Literacy describes the 'what' and 'how' of instruction, as endorsed by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2016). While the term Structured Literacy is relatively new in nomenclature, the evidence-based instructional practices and skill areas it describes have been used to promote

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language and literacy development in struggling readers for many decades (Moats, 2019; NRP, 2000; Spear-Swirling, 2019). Structured literacy emphasises the explicit, systematic, sequential, and cumulative instruction of literacy at multiple levels, including morphology (IDA, 2016; Spear-Swirling, 2019). From third class onwards, many of the words students encounter in text are multimorphemic and are not easily decodable though letter-sound procedures. Development of morphological knowledge and the ability to analyse the morphological structure of words is critical for students to be able to read and comprehend academic texts (Jarmulowicz et al., 2008).

Growing research internationally substantiates the importance of morphology for literacy development (Reed, 2008, Bratlie, et al., 2022), including the impact of morphological instruction on language and literacy outcomes (Goodwyn & Anh, 2010). However, there is a paucity of research concerning the role of morphology in literacy instruction within the Irish context (Hannify & Raftery, 2023). The purpose of this paper is to present the key components of a morphological analysis intervention (MAI), developed for 4th class EAL students who experienced language and literacy difficulties. In the following sections, the theoretical and research bases for a morphological analysis intervention are delineated and the key principles which informed the design of the focus intervention, MAI, are discussed. Evidence-based morphological intervention strategies are presented, and practical examples of intervention activities are described in the context of small group reading instruction. This paper provides a framework for using morphology to explicitly address the literacy needs of struggling readers in the upper primary grades, within a structured literacy intervention.

Morphological Awareness and its Developmental Trajectory

Morphological awareness is the meta-linguistic ability to consciously consider and manipulate the smallest meaningful units of language (Apel & Diehm, 2014; Carlisle, 2000; Larsen & Nippold, 2007). These units are known as morphemes and include prefixes (e.g. un-), base words/roots (e.g. help) and suffixes (e.g. -ing, -er, -ful), which can be combined to form morphologically complex words, expressing different meanings, and serving different syntactic roles (e.g. unhelpful, helper, helping). Morphemes are further categorised as derivational or inflectional. When added to base words, inflectional morphemes alter the grammatical function of the word without affecting its word class. For example, when the past tense suffix '-ed' is added to the base word 'play' (verb) to form 'played' (verb), the word class remains unchanged. By contrast, derivational morphemes alter roots/base words by modifying their meaning and/or word class (e.g. fair to unfair, play to playful, care to careless).

Development of morphological awareness begins during early oral language acquisition and becomes refined through language and literacy experiences (Zhang & Koda, 2013). For native English-speaking children, awareness of English inflectional morphology emerges first and in a fairly consistent developmental sequence, which is typically well established upon entering school (Brown, 1973; Carlisle, 2003; Kuo & Anderson, 2006). Since morphemes are the fundamental building blocks of spoken and written words, these linguistic units provide important clues to the pronunciation, meaning, spelling and syntactic role of morphologically complex words that appear in text (Carlisle, 2003; Kirby et al, 2012). Unlike phonemic awareness which typically plateaus in development once children have mastered foundational reading skills (Berninger et al., 2010), morphological awareness is an unconstrained ability which continues to develop for all students across the primary years and beyond (Apel & Diehm, 2014). However, research had shown morphological awareness to be compromised in students with language and literacy-related difficulties (Apel & Lawrence, 2011; Catts, 1993; Tong et al., 2011), with this population demonstrating significantly lower recognition and spelling of derived words than their typically-achieving peers (Carlisle & Kats, 2006; Tsesmeli & Seymour, 2006). This challenge is further compounded for struggling readers who are also learning English as an additional language

(EAL). EAL students have more limited oral vocabularies and are less proficient in the syntax of English (August & Shanahan, 2010), which may exacerbate the difficulties they encounter in reading and comprehending grade-appropriate academic text.

Morphological Analysis and its Role in Literacy Learning

Morphological awareness is known to contribute to code-focused and meaning-based literacy skills. Contemporary models of reading depict word recognition and language comprehension as overlapping facets, and explicitly identify morphological awareness as a bridging process which connects these constructs (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). In an orthographically deep language such as English, morphological awareness is more strongly related to word reading than in an orthographically shallow language, where the spelling of words primarily reflects the phonological information (Lee et al., 2023; Mousikou et al., 2020). In English, morphemes carry information about meaning even when phoneme grapheme mappings appear inconsistent. For example, the inflectional suffix -ed retains a consistent spelling to denote the past tense, even though the pronunciation may vary depending on the base word (e.g. *called, helped, wanted*). Knowledge of morphemes therefore provides enhanced access to word reading and word meaning (Carlisle, 2000). English spellings preserve and reveal the morphological composition of words, despite changes in pronunciation (Lee et al., 2023; Nunes et al., 2006), and provide 'islands of regularity' in what is considered an opaque orthography (Rastle, 2018, p. 3).

The Morphological Pathways Framework describes the multidimensional role of morphology (Levesque et al., 2021). Operating as the binding agent between phonology, orthography and semantics, morphological knowledge may enhance the quality of lexical representations for complex academic vocabulary (Goodwin, 2015; Levesque et al., 2021; Perfetti, 2007). Knowledge of individual morphemes can also support readers to infer the meaning and pronunciation of unfamiliar words encountered in text, a process known as morphological analysis. The important and unique contribution of morphological awareness and conscious application of morphological analysis to vocabulary learning and reading competence has been well established in the research literature (Apel & Lawrence, 2011; Carlisle, 2003; Carlisle & Stone, 2005; Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Green, 2009; Wolter et al., 2009). In particular, the contribution of morphological awareness to reading comprehension appears to increase exponentially from third class in primary school, alongside the increasing complexity of academic texts (Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Carlisle & Fleming, 2003; Green et al., 2003).

Interventions for Struggling Readers and the Potential for Morphological Instruction

As students progress through primary school, reading instruction typically shifts away from teaching phonics and word recognition skills to a focus on understanding text (Wanzek et al., 2010). However, decoding persists as a key source of difficulty for a proportion of struggling readers (Toste et al., 2019) and the predominant focus on comprehension strategies in the upper primary grades may be insufficient in meeting the instructional needs of this subgroup of students. Word length and complexity increases steadily across the grades (Kearns, 2015; Toste et al., 2019) and from third class onwards, between sixty to eighty per cent of words in academic texts are morphologically complex (Anglin, 1993; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). These longer words may contain multiple layers of affixation (e.g. activation contains four morphemes) and often exhibit phonological and/or orthographic changes to their base word/root (e.g. admit to admission). Multimorphemic words frequently contain the meaning of content area texts (e.g. fugitive, refuge, refugee), which can only be discerned if the student can decode the word.

Integrating instruction of word meaning with word reading has been shown to be an effective support for older struggling readers (Austin et al., 2022). Research suggests that word meaning knowledge is particularly important for reading longer complex words (Goodwin, Gilbert et al., 2014; Reed, 2008; Reichle & Perfetti, 2003). Applying a morphological analysis strategy to extract the pronunciation and meaning of unfamiliar words may help to strengthen students' vocabulary lexicons and enhance their comprehension of academic texts (Bowers et al., 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2010; Ramirez et al., 2013). Comprehensive reading interventions which encompass word recognition and comprehension are endorsed by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2016) and Institute of Education Sciences (Vaugn et al. 2022). Morphological analysis interventions may provide a structure for integrating these crucial facets of reading instruction. Unlike typical phonics interventions that are geared toward the motivation and developmental levels of younger learners, morphological instruction offers more age-appropriate and motivating activities for older struggling readers, yet still supports the development of foundational reading skills (Wolter & Green, 2021).

Morphological Interventions: For Whom and How?

Extant research provides evidence for the efficacy of morphological instruction on language and literacy related skills (Bowers et al., 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2010; Wolter & Dilworth, 2014; Wolter & Green, 2013). Specifically, Goodwin and Ahn (2010) investigated the effectiveness of morphological interventions on literacy outcomes for students with literacy difficulties. This meta-analysis of seventeen independent studies found that morphological instruction led to significant improvements on a variety of outcomes, including phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and spelling. Effect sizes were greatest for interventions that focused on students with reading, learning, or speech and language disabilities, English language learners, and struggling readers, which suggests that morphological intervention may help to remediate phonological processing challenges. Other previous syntheses and meta-analyses also support the benefits of morphological instruction for literacy learning (Carlisle, 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Nagy & Townsend, 2012) and corroborate that morphological interventions may hold additional value for struggling readers (Bowers et al., 2010). Moreover, morphological interventions have been found to be most effective when instruction is provided in small groups and content is determined by the instructional needs of the students (Bowers et al., 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013), underscoring the importance of appropriately targeted literacy interventions (Vaughn et al. 2022).

Morphological Analysis Intervention (MAI)

While the benefits of morphological instruction for students with and without language and literacy disabilities are well established in the literature, there is a dearth of empirical research examining this element of structured literacy in the Irish educational context. The following sections of this paper examine the components of a morphological analysis intervention (MAI), implemented as part of a small-scale action research study in an Irish primary school (Hannify & Raftery, 2023). An overview of the procedure and key findings are presented next, followed by a description of the intervention and examples of instructional activities.

An Overview of the Procedure and Key Findings

MAI was implemented over a six-week period in term 2 of the academic year. Pre and post-testing occurred two weeks before the intervention and two weeks following the intervention. Participants were purposely recruited from 4th class and included twelve students who were learning English as an additional language, had performed below the twelfth percentile on school-based standardised

assessments for literacy, and had scored well below average on measures of receptive vocabulary and syntax, as indicated on baseline language assessments. Eight participants were randomly assigned to the intervention group and four participants to a comparison group, who received a 'business as usual' condition. Both groups of participants received a total of eighteen intervention lessons. The comparison group received small group reading instruction, but these lessons did not include a focus on morphology. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that the intervention participants showed greater gains on measures of vocabulary, word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension, although these gains were not found to be statistically significant.

The findings from this small-scale study suggest that MAI had a positive impact on literacy outcomes and the motivation of students experiencing language and literacy difficulties. For further details on the participant profiles, methodological procedures, and findings from this study, see Hannify and Raftery (2023). The following sections will examine the instructional components of this intervention.

The Content and Structure of MAI Lessons

Across multiple morphological intervention studies, a number of instructional practices have consistently supported the development of morphological awareness and related literacy outcomes for students with language or literacy difficulties (Bowers et al., 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Wolter & Collins, 2017; Wolter & Dilworth, 2014; Wolter & Green, 2013). Such research was used to inform the content and structure of MAI. A combination of prefixes, suffixes, and Latin roots (bound bases), which have high utility and potential for transferability across content areas, were selected for instruction (Baumann et al, 2003, 2002; White et al., 1989). Consistent with previous research (e.g. Carlise, 2010; Manyak et al., 2018), MAI focused on four key objectives: (1) to build students' awareness of the morphological structure of words, (2) to expand their knowledge of frequently-occurring morphemes, (3) to develop their understanding of how distinct morphemes contribute to a word's meaning, pronunciation, spelling and/or grammatical function, and (4) to apply the morphological analysis strategy to infer the meaning and pronunciation of unfamiliar multimorphemic words. To enhance student motivation and engagement, a detective theme was integrated into MAI lessons, with students encouraged to 'analyse clues' in order to 'crack codes' and 'solve mysteries' in their application of the morphological analysis strategy (Wolter & Dilworth, 2013). Motivation is a key priority in providing reading interventions for students beyond the early primary grades (Collins & Wolter, 2017; McKenna et al., 2012), and previous morphological intervention studies offer evidence for the benefits of problem-solving and playful pedagogical approaches on student engagement and motivation (Bowers et al., 2010; Goodwin et al., 2012, Wolter & Dilworth, 2013). Intervention lessons followed a consistent six-step sequence (see Table 1), informed by evidence-based practices for struggling readers (Sperling-Stern, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2022). Students received explicit instruction in the spelling and meaning of target morphemes, with repeated opportunities to actively reflect on and talk about the meaning of morphemic units in derivations (Manyak et al., 2018; Wolter & Collins, 2017). New morphemes and concepts were taught systematically and cumulatively, using hands-on, engaging, and multi-modal learning approaches (Collins et al., 2020; Moats, 2019). Guided practice in the application of a morphological analysis strategy supported students to successfully break down multimorphemic words to infer word meaning and pronunciation (Gibson & Wolter, 2015; Goodwin & Perkins, 2015). In addition to word study activities where students analysed the morphemic structure of words in isolation, morphological analysis was also practised within the context of instructional level texts (Wolter & Collins, 2017). The integration of authentic reading experiences not only highlighted the use of multimorphemic words in context but provided opportunities for students to parse the meaning of unfamiliar words contained within complex syntactic structures and build their understanding of how morphology influences syntax and semantic meaning (Collins et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2016; Goodwin &

Perkins, 2015). Extension activities were incorporated into lessons to foster active student participation, heighten students' interest in morphemes, and to provide repeated exposure and opportunities to use and discuss multimorphemic words and their respective meanings. The following section presents specific examples of some of the extension activities used within MAI.

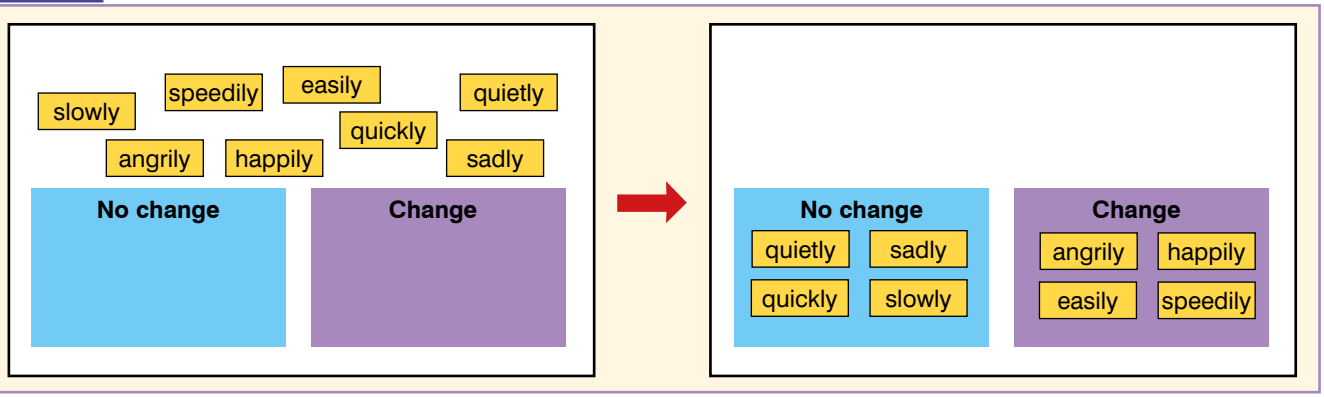
Table 1 *MAI Six Step Lesson Structure*

Lesson Step	Sample activities
Step 1: Review: Daily recap on previously taught morphemes	Review the morpheme wall. Word building: Using colour-coded morpheme cards, teachers and/or students construct multimorphemic words. Word segmentation: Given multimorphemic words, teachers and/or students deconstruct words by morpheme. For example, the word 'previewing' is segmented into pre+view+ing.
Step 2: Sharing learning intentions	The focus of the lesson and the learning intentions are shared with the students. Students are reminded why it is important to learn about morphemes and how morphological analysis can make reading and spelling easier overtime.
Step 3: Introduce new morpheme	Explicit instruction in the meaning and spelling of the focus morpheme. Sample words containing the focus morpheme are provided by the teacher and generated by the students.
Step 4: Morphological analysis strategy	Consistent with the gradual release of responsibility process, students are guided in the application of the morphological analysis strategy using multimorphemic words presented in isolation. Students are encouraged to box the root/base word and circle the prefix and/or suffix. See example below for the multimorphemic word 'previewing'. 
Step 5: Authentic reading experience	Students engage in reading an instructional level text containing the target morpheme and previously taught morphemes.
Step 6: Extension activities	A games or collaborative activity concludes the lesson and provides extended opportunities for students to actively reflect on morphemic units and consolidate their learning. Extension activities include word sorts, word webbing, find the imposter, morpheme jeopardy, and word hunts.

Extension Activities

Word sorts. In the context of MAI, students were presented with categories of multimorphemic words with contrastive relationships, and for the purpose of highlighting word similarities and differences, were required to sort words according to the appropriate category. For example, in Figure 1, the word sort depicts a variety of adverbs containing the suffix '-ly'. This collection was sorted by students according to derived words in which the base retains its spelling and pronunciation (transparent derivations) versus derived words in which the base undergoes a spelling or pronunciation change (opaque derivations). Word sorts like this provided students with opportunities to actively analyse and identify the morphemic structure in words (Wolter & Collins, 2017). Moreover, engaging collaboratively in word sorts promoted student dialogue about the morphemic patterns within words, while simultaneously building their linguistic pattern recognition abilities. Promoting students' awareness of orthographic patterns and their connection to meaning can support students to successfully apply derivational endings in their spelling of multimorphemic words (Gibson & Wolter, 2015).

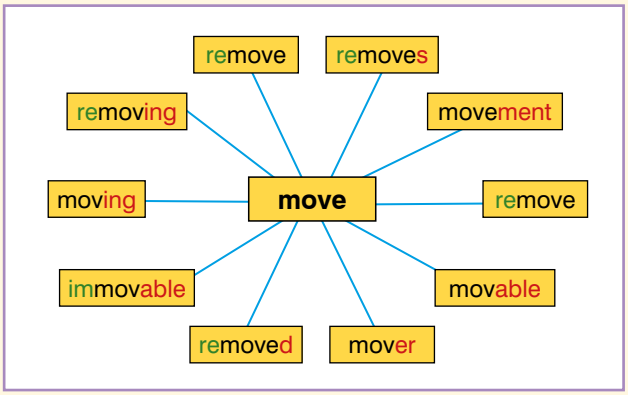
Figure 1 *Word Sort for Suffix '-ly'*



Note: This figure demonstrates a sample word sort used in MAI. Students are required to sort words according to whether the base underwent a spelling or pronunciation change.

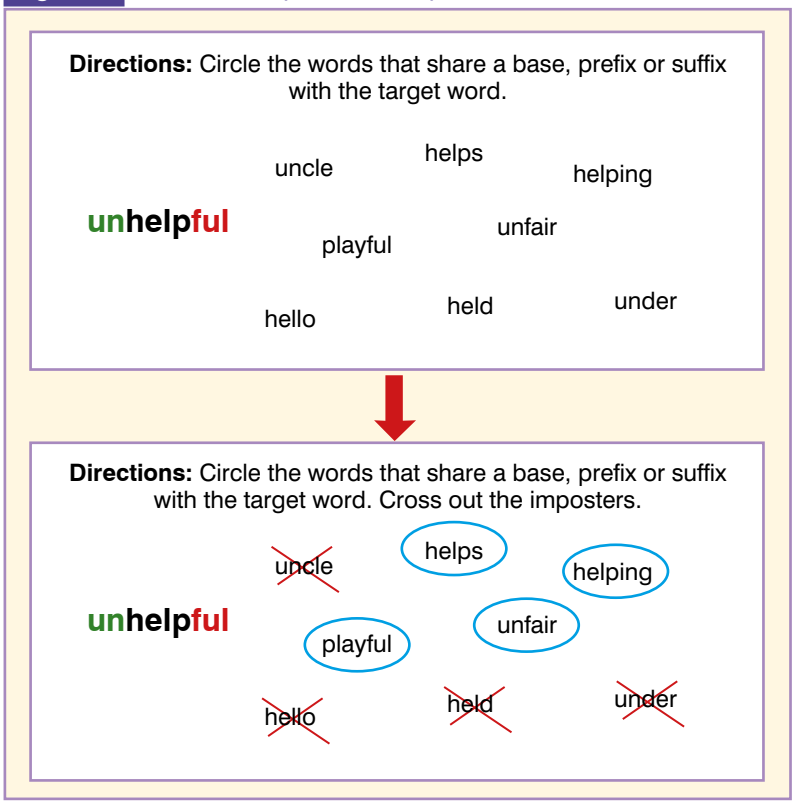
Word webbing. Given a target base word/root (e.g. move), the students in MAI were asked to write as many morphologically related words as possible in one minute (i.e. *remove, moving, moved, moves, removes, movement, immovable*). An example of word webbing is shown in Figure 2. This activity can be further extended by engaging students in a discussion about the meaning of the words generated and the syntactic category to which they belong (i.e. remove - verb, movement - noun, movable - adjective). The purpose of word webbing was to promote higher quality lexical representations of words by assisting students to think about words within networks of morphologically related words. Previous research has found that students' ability to produce morphological relatives for root words contributes to higher quality lexical representations (Goodwin et al., 2014).

Figure 2 *Word Webbing Example*



Find the imposter. Given a morphologically complex word and a selection of related words, students were required to identify those words which overlapped morphologically with the target word. In the example provided in Figure 3, where the target word is 'unhelpful', the students circled the words which contained either the base word 'help' or one of the affixes 'un-' or '-ful' (*i.e. helped, unfair, playful*) and crossed out any 'imposters' (i.e. words that overlap orthographically, but do not share common morphemes, such as *uncle* or *held*). Find the imposter was incorporated into MAI to promote student engagement through collaborative learning and playful approaches. This game provided students with extended opportunities to apply their knowledge of morphemic units and to look beyond words which overlap phonologically and/or orthographically to determine if words share units of meaning (Goodwin & Perkins, 2015).

Figure 3 *Find the Imposter Example*



Note: In this example, students are required to identify words that overlap morphologically with the target word 'unhelpful' and cross out words which do not.

Conclusion

Given the exponential growth of morphologically complex words in academic texts from third class onwards (Nagy & Anderson, 1984), explicit instruction of high-frequency morphemes and guided practice in the strategic use of morphological analysis can support all students to decode and infer the meaning of complex academic vocabulary (Baumann et al, 2002, 2003). Morphological awareness is known to contribute significantly to decoding, spelling, vocabulary and reading comprehension (Reed, 2008). Therefore, morphological analysis interventions may provide an optimal way to support students who struggle with code-focused and/or meaning-based literacy skills beyond the junior primary grades when foundational reading skills (such as phonics) are no longer a feature of tier one classroom instruction. The components of MAI shared in this paper demonstrate how students' morphological awareness was promoted through explicit instruction of high-frequency morphemes, repeated practice in the application of morphological analysis, and extended opportunities to actively reflect on and discuss the morphemic structure of words and their relationship to phonological and orthographic patterns. The literature reviewed provides a strong rationale for the inclusion of morphological instruction as a valuable component of literacy interventions. This paper offers a framework for teachers, with concrete and practical ways to integrate morphological instruction into comprehensive structured literacy interventions for struggling readers.

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In Pursuit of Critical Literacy: Understanding the Experiences of Teachers in Northern Ireland

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Critical literacy has been intensively researched and become widely known in academia but has not yet taken root in classrooms and schools in any significant way. In this paper, we build on critical literacy scholarship by reflecting on Key Stage two and three teachers' engagement with a critical literacy teaching resource and associated project that was created by one of the authors. Findings of this qualitative study show that teachers' critical literacy perspective spans a continuum from emergent to pre-existing. We contend that reflexive skills can be taught and learned by acquiring an active set of tools, such as the tendencies and sensibilities associated with critical literacy.

Keywords: *Critical literacy, social justice*

Introduction

In this paper we reflect on Northern Irish teachers' perceptions of critical literacy following an eight-week critical literacy media project that was designed by one of the authors. We consider the extent to which engagement with the teaching materials developed or enhanced participants' conceptual knowledge and understanding of critical literacy and its associated concept, social justice. We conclude that there is a need to put critical literacy on the education agenda with the aim of developing teachers' critical literacy perspective. This argument is illustrated with analysis and discussion of data from participant questionnaires and semi-structured interviews post project. We begin with a brief outline of the project.

Context of the Study

The award-winning critical literacy teaching resource used for this project was created by Hazzard (2021) in association with a national newspaper in Northern Ireland. In the academic year 2021 approximately 130 schools and 9,000 pupils in Northern Ireland participated in the project. The aim was to provide teachers with a model of literacy as a social practice with an emphasis on the critical dimension. In reframing literacy in this way, the aim was to:

- Encourage interest and engagement with the principles of critical literacy.
- Help teachers see what critical literacy theory looks like in practice.
- Present a model of critical literacy that is both accessible and useful to teachers working in a range of contexts.
- Raise knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the concept of critical literacy and by implication, social justice.

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The project ran annually for eight weeks in the spring of each academic year. Participating Key Stage two and three pupils received their own weekly copy of a national newspaper, providing the primary text for the critical literacy work undertaken. Materials were divided into three sections. Section one provided an overview of critical literacy and an explanation of the theoretical framework (discussed later in the following section). Sections two and three contained the range of pupil tasks and accompanying resources respectively.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Literacy Overview

Freire (1970) foregrounded the understanding that critical literacy is both a philosophy of education and a teaching approach, when he said that critical literacy is not an instructional practice, but a mindset, a way of viewing and interacting with the word and the world. Somewhat ironically this research evaluates the impact of a critical literacy resource that formed the basis of an annual eight-week project. Though technically not an instructional practice, it is our consensus that providing teachers with critical literacy resources and frameworks which they can adapt to their own context, far from being fundamentally spurious, is a crucial step in ensuring that a critical literacy perspective is enabled (Luke, 2000; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Importantly, Freire's (1974, p. 34) educational objective for his students was that they become active subjects in their own lives and 'perceive themselves in a dialectical relationship with their social reality'. Shor (1999, p. 1) captures the essence of this objective:

> *We are what we say and do. The ways we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through speech and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us. We can remake ourselves, and society if we choose, through alternative words and dissident projects. This is where critical literacy begins - words that question a world not yet finished or humane.*

There are four key points to be extracted from Shor's thesis (Hazzard, 2021). Firstly, 'we are what we say and do'. Being critically literate depends upon our everyday relations with ourselves and with others. Being aware of our own contradictions, inconsistencies, and biases allows us to understand how we, and others, are 'positioned with inferences, interpretations, and conclusions' (Mulcahy, 2015, p. 22). For example, the way in which we view ourselves as teachers, how we understand the education system, and the beliefs and values we hold about learners and their families will have a direct impact on our ability to effectively support children's learning (Twiselton, 2006).

Secondly, 'the ways we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. We build ourselves in a world that is building us' (Shor, 1999, p. 1). Here Shor is alluding to the structured social world. Understanding how the dominant class acts as an arbitrary agent of the dissemination of hegemonic ideas, beliefs, and values requires complex critical thinking (Kincheloe & Weil, 2004). Complex critical thinking is about unveiling reality to make the invisible visible to provide a feel for the game (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). We are then better prepared to enact a more positive and equitable pedagogy.

Thirdly, Shor alludes to Freire's (1993) concept of critical praxis, namely that 'we can remake ourselves, and society if we choose, through alternative words and dissident projects' (Shor, 1999, p. 1). Teachers and teacher educators for example, might ask how does where I come from influence

how I see and think about this issue, student or parent? Am I contributing to the underachievement of pupils who are different from me? (Cumming-Potvin, 2009, p. 94). The key theme here is reflexive action (Bourdieu, 1977).

Fourthly, '*critical literacy begins [with] words that question a world not yet finished or humane*' (Shor, 1999, p.1). Problem-posing and problem-solving lie at the heart of critical literacy but without critiquing and analysing power relations and the root causes of social inequalities 'risks disguising those relations as natural, as the way things are and should be' (Fairclough, 2002, p. 163).

The above four tendencies and sensibilities associated with critical literacy are fundamental to a social justice orientation, a brief explanation of which follows.

Social Justice

Social justice issues are framed around what Young (2014) calls the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, cultural imperialism, powerlessness and violence. The concept of teaching for social justice broadly speaking embraces a belief that, 'education and society are intrinsically interrelated and that the fundamental purpose of education is to improve social justice' (McArthur, 2010, p. 1) by working in the interests of the most disadvantaged. This is achieved by educating children against any form of prejudice or oppression and in having positive regard for difference (Gale & Densmore, 2000). It means identifying oppression in its numerous forms and acting in the classroom to challenge this oppression (Adams et al., 2010; Russo, 2006). Pedagogically this requires dialogic interaction underpinned by critical literacy about controversial issues, beliefs, values and attitudes. The concepts of critical literacy and social justice are intrinsically linked as Ayers et al. (2009, p. 30) explain:

> *A social justice classroom should demonstrate a curriculum and classroom practice that is grounded in the lives of students, critical in its approach to the world and itself, hopeful, joyful, kind, and visionary, pro-justice, activist, academically engaging, rigorous, and culturally competent.*

Our critical literacy perspective depends on our capacity to develop the above tendencies and sensibilities. For educators, the development of these dispositions might seem at first daunting, but everyday classroom texts and contexts offer safe spaces for doing critical literacy.

Doing Critical Literacy

Several reviews have set out to bridge the theory practice gap and to identify the essential features of classroom critical literacy. These include conceptual frameworks by McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), Jones (2006) and Rogers et al. (2009). The models provide useful interpretive reference points for teachers and the nuances that distinguishes one framework from the other are tacit. The model adopted for this research project was Freebody and Luke's (1990) influentially worldwide Four Resources Model (*figure 1*).

Figure 1 *Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model (1990)*

Code breakers:	Meaning makers:
The literate learner is a text participant forming and communicating their own intrepretation through their knowledge of the vocabulary, punctuation, grammar and structure of texts.	The literate learner uses knowledge of literal and inferential meanings, background information, prior knowledge, and previous experience to make meaning.
Literate Learners	
Text users:	**Text analysts:**
The literate learner understands that purpose and audience help to determine the way text is constructed and uses this knowledge as they read, listen, view and create texts.	The literate learner knows that texts are not neutral but that all text is constructed for a purpose. They know reading is not a passive act but an interaction between the text and reader.

Freebody and Luke's conceptual framework involves mastering a series of four competencies that allows teachers to situate literacy practices. The competences are (Govender, 2019):

- Code breaking (textual competence)
- As code breaker, the reader is interested in how texts are built using sounds, letters, words, phrases, sentence types, paragraphing structures and so on.
- Meaning making (cognitive competence)
  To make meaning from the code the reader must have semantic or cognitive competence to interpret the text and infer the author's intentions.
- Text using (pragmatic competence)
  As a text user, the reader is fundamentally connected to the genre: the purpose, intended audience, form/structure, and function of texts.
- Text analysing (critical competence and social awareness)
  Here, the reader asks questions relating to issues of power. For example, who is included or excluded? Whose interests are served by the text? How might this text be used to reproduce or challenge certain social norms?

The Four Resources Model features a strong emphasis on explicit and metacognitive knowledge of how texts work, as part of an understanding of what texts are trying to do ideologically, politically, and culturally (Luke, 2000). The model is not in any sense hierarchical, prescriptive, or mandatory. It is an invitation to embrace Freire's (1993) axiom to read and understand the 'word and the world' and in today's post-truth era, this is needed more than ever before.

The Importance of having a Critical Literacy Perspective

Two major events in 2016, Brexit and the United States election were defined by mis- and disinformation that subsequently gave rise to the term post-truth era (Barton, 2019). Information became harder than ever to trust. This signaled a profound and seemingly fast-moving problem, a post-truth hellscape of mis-, dis- and mal-information, of individuals too willing to make unscrupulous

use of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology, of the rise of online scamming, conspiracy mentalities, and toxic influencers (Hazzard, 2024). Texts are never neutral. In all their forms they provide insights into and are reflective of, our social world. These insights can empower visions of groups and individuals, practices and structures but they can also advance prejudice, racism, sexism, and questionable values. The aim of critical literacy is to encourage discriminating readers, writers, speakers, listeners and thinkers who analyse how discourses work and the need for such skills has never been more relevant. Comber explains:

> *Critical literacies involve people using language to exercise power, to enhance everyday life…and to question practices of privilege and injustice. This sounds grand, but often, perhaps usually, it may be in the more mundane and ordinary aspects of daily life that critical literacies are negotiated.* (2001, p. 173)

Comber's point is that being critically literate can help us better negotiate our everyday lives, and in a globalised world with ever more complex forms of text production, reproduction and dissemination being critically literate is an imperative (Janks, 2014).

Pupils need to be given the tools to critically analyse media and to understand the structures of power behind texts (Barton, 2019). This requires being taught by teachers who have a critical literacy perspective, who value social justice, and who have a sense of the cultural context in which they work (Dozier, et al., 2006).

Research Design

The study was guided by the following research question: Did the experience of engaging with the Young News Readers Critical Literacy Project enhance teachers' knowledge, awareness and understanding of the concepts of critical literacy and social justice?

Methodology

Data collection in this qualitative, multi-method study comprised of an online questionnaire (N= 200 teachers) and participant semi-structured interviews for which sampling was self-selective and therefore random (N=7). Ethical consent was implied by submission of the online questionnaire. This was articulated in the welcome address along with a Plain English Statement outlining the purpose of the study, the use of data, and the parameters of the data collection. Participants were invited to provide a contact email address should they wish to participate in a semi-structured interview. All those who volunteered were interviewed. Consent was emailed to the lead researcher (Markham & Buchanan, 2015). For the convenience of the interviewees, the interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Following transcription, records were participant checked. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identity. Thereafter data were thematically coded following a modified version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model. Data were maintained safely and confidentially in accordance with BERA's (2018) ethical guidelines.

Measures of goodness were secured by using well-established research methods, random sampling, triangulation, assuring participants that they could withdraw at any time, establishing rapport, identifying context and culture at the outset, emphasising the independent role of the researcher, member checks, and employment of an external critic (Fontana & Frey, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Guba, 1981). The employment of a critical friend ensured data was examined through another lens, thereby validating findings.

Limitations and Tensions

Though the participant group was sufficient for the purposes of this research, a larger and more diverse sample would have helped make conclusions more reliable. Secondly, to minimise the influence of 'researcher effect' (Denscombe, 1995), every effort was made to remain self-aware and 'conscious of moments in the researchers' own thinking' (Alverson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 270). In undertaking thematic analysis of the data, the difference between primary and secondary interpretations were 'pulled apart' in what we considered to be a careful and thorough process (Dean et al., 2018:277).

Findings

Four key themes emerging from the data are discussed below. Anonymity is protected with the use of interviewer codes and participant pseudonyms.

Theme 1: Literacy Enrichment

The following data extracts show how the pupils' literacy competence, attitude and engagement towards reading were stimulated:

> '*What was incredible was how the children so easily incorporated domain specific language into their vernacular.*' [DH2: Marie]

> '*The project allowed me to stretch their reading in a way that I would not have been able to do before.*' [GMC1: Ann]

> '*It definitely promoted reading for pleasure.*' [DH4: Jen]

> '*Having a global framework enabled the pupils to forage their way through the media texts to create meaning for themselves. Responses from the children were more authentic.*' [DH2: Marie]

The data extracts above suggest that participation in the project enriched pupils' engagement with authentic, everyday reading in the form of real-world news. This subsequently enhanced the pupils' coding or textual competence, specifically their vocabulary, and their semantic or cognitive competence. Marie for example, describes how her pupils 'foraged' their way towards meaning making.

Theme 2: Connectedness

Fundamental to a critical literacy perspective is an understanding that situates us within society and culture. Jen, Grainne and Pat's comments below reflect reading as a contextual and cultural practice and shows how their pupils were engaged as sociocultural beings (Ayers, et al., 2009).

> '*One benefit is the relevance of it. For example, when Martin Magennis died, we were in the middle of the project. This generated a lot of interest because of its relevance.*' [DH4: Jen]

> '*The big benefit was that the children were engaged with the world around them. They were not only reading the news but talking about it.*' [DH1: Grainne]

'*As a result of the critical literacy project, the children were keen to keep abreast of what's going on in their world. It stimulated their curiosity and introduced them to the fact that newspapers are one of the main ways you find out about what is going on in the world*' [GMC2: Pat].

'*Some of the children would talk to their parents about topics discussed in the newspaper. I think the children felt more connected.*' [GMC2: Pat]

'*Some pupils would say, I want to show my mammy that article that we talked about.*' [DH4: Jen]

These comments suggest that the work facilitated discussion both in the classroom and at home. Teachers described the pupils as feeling connected to the world in a way that it seems was intellectually stimulating. Our interpretation of this is that the ideational content produced substantive engagement with the pupils' lived worlds and experiences. Marie described it as, 'very deep, profound learning' and said that 'it is exactly how you would like people to be engaging with texts' [DH2: Marie].

Theme 3: Analytic Capacity

Participants' critical literacy perspective spanned a continuum that ranged from emergent to pre-existing. The term pre-existing here refers to anecdotal information whereby participants were already enlightened and indicated personal and/or professional interest in politics or social studies for example. The following representative data excerpts from Grainne and Jen signal a high degree of analytic capacity:

'*Critical literacy for me is not only asking what is happening, but why and how.*' [DH4: Jen]

'*At the end of the day, we are trying to teach our young people to be discerning individuals, to have the ability to manage information from whatever media form, while at the same time being able to pick up the subtext, the discrimination, the power balance between writer and reader and get to that point where you can see how the writer runs through it. It's also about how the reader brings their own perceptions and experiences to the text.*' [DH1: Grainne]

Jen recognises that by interrogating texts by asking 'why' and 'how', the reader is seeking to unveil the power relationships at work. This will occur when the reader is specifically required to question how words and concepts are commonly used to create worldviews and ideologies. Grainne's comments convey an internalised framing of literacy cognisant with the tendencies and sensibilities associated with a critical literacy perspective as discussed in section 3.1. Grainne for example, explains how different people with different frames of reference will perceive, experience and understand the same text differently (Kincheloe & Weil, 2004, p. 11).

Both Jen and Grainne's comments show awareness that there are power relationships at work in texts, power relationships that can construct us and therefore must be questioned. Though neither participant used the conceptual terminology associated with critical literacy, they both understand the need to develop meta literacies, such as complex critical thinking (Kincheloe & Weil, 2004).

In contrast, other participants conflated critical literacy with critical thinking. For example:

'*Critical literacy is having good skills of understanding, thinking, text analysis, opinion forming, and being able to express our own ideas about what we have read.*' [DH2: Marie]

'*It's [critical literacy] about grammar, reading, and comprehension activities.*' [DH3: Paul]

Critical thinking and critical literacy, though interrelated, are not synonymous, yet both Marie and Paul's conceptualisation of critical literacy focuses on critical thinking (comprehension) and grammar. Critical literacy is understood by Marie as the ability to analyse the ideas and arguments presented in texts and reflecting on those ideas in the form of opinion (Mulcahy, 2015, p. 26). This is potentially ideologically limiting in that the approach is unquestioning. Critical literacy on the other hand involves moving towards a socio-political orientation with the aim of exposing the power-related dynamics in texts and contexts. Marie and Paul's conceptualisation of critical literacy is perhaps best described as emergent as they omit the critical (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

Likewise, there were indications that participants had pre-existing and, in some cases, emerging knowledge and understanding of the concept of social justice. The following representative data extracts reflect these dispositions:

> '*Social justice to me is how we organise ourselves as a society, how we care for our vulnerable. For example, in one of our critical literacy tasks, we talked about an image and how the media constructed social justice in the presentation of the image. It provided a very good platform for creative and imaginative writing, where the pupils put themselves into the picture.*' [DH4: Jen]

> '*For me critical literacy for social justice is making sure that there are no social or economic barriers to access and participation. It is about equity and fairness where everyone has a responsibility for everyone else.*' [DH1: Grainne]

A crucial aspect of critical literacy is the 'externalisation of literacy' (Luke, 2000), that is, a shift in thinking of literacy as knowledge and skills in peoples' heads to understanding literacy as a social construct embedded in social practices. Both Jen and Grainne demonstrate a pro-justice orientation (Ayers, et al., 2009). Jen's comment importantly intimates the concept of privilege and how we use it, 'how we care for our vulnerable'. Grainne's explanation echoes Chubbuck's (2010, 2016) thesis of social justice as fairness and equity. In contrast, other participants struggled to frame social justice productively.

Theme 4: Challenges

By taking part in the critical literacy project and becoming involved in this research, the teacher participants showed keen interest and commitment. However, as Grainne and Pat point out (and the data above shows), teacher professional knowledge, understanding and commitment to the philosophical principles of critical literacy were variable.

> '*How much critical literacy is developed depends on the individual teacher. You need buy-in from teachers who care enough.*' [DH1: Grainne]

> '*Teacher interest and background is significant. For example, the teacher who is engaged with politics will engage with critical literacy.*' [DH1: Pat]

In a context in which critical literacy has been intensively researched and become widely known in academia, it has not yet taken root in classrooms and schools in any significant way (Lee, 2011). Encouragingly, Grainne and Pat make the point that there are of course teachers whose interests and/or subject disciplines purposefully situate them in the direction of critical literacy. This raises questions about how we capitalise on this but also of how we create a critical mass of educators who are committed to critical literacy. While there is no consensus on this, we feel that there is potential for us do much better, as Grainne said:

> '*There is going to be a point where we must prepare teachers to teach critical literacy, because otherwise we are going to have generations of robots.*' [DH1: Grainne]

Changing Possibilities

Data reflected strong coding and semantic competence and varying levels of critical competence (Freebody & Luke, 1990). This is not surprising, as coding and sematic approaches reflect important dimensions of literacy that teachers are already prepared for (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Whereas the critical, sociopolitical dimensions of literacy, that is, text analysis (criticality) and text using (transforming and redesigning texts) do not traditionally form part of teacher preparation. Hall et al. (2003, p.357) argue that this is 'insufficient for proper literacy today and suggest that all dimensions of literacy need to be learnt together'.

Bourdieu's (1977) contention is that reflexive skills can be taught and learned by acquiring an active set of tools, such as the tendencies and sensibilities associated with critical literacy. These tendencies and sensibilities include a particular set of beliefs, values and attitudes about oneself and others (Shor, 1991; Mulcahy, 2015), praxis or social agency (Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2004), the ability to problem-pose and problem-solve (Shor, 1991), and the capacity for complex critical thinking (Kincheloe & Weil, 2004). The overall response to critical literacy demonstrated by the participants in this study showed a positive orientation and lack of contestation. However, the data showed that the teachers' capacity to develop these skills, along with subject knowledge and understanding was variable. This is not in surprising and any perceived lack or limitation was not their fault as they did not receive any professional development in this domain other than the resource information. Presenting teachers with resources in the absence of effective, high quality professional development to accompany the materials is largely ineffective. If we are serious about promoting critical literacy then there is a need to create time, space and opportunity for teachers to learn about transformative literacy practices such as critical literacy. This needs to begin in teacher preparation programmes.

According to Habermas (1972) there are three aspects of knowledge required by pre-service teachers, the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. For the teacher educator the challenge is how to accomplish a balance between the teaching of critical literacy as emancipatory knowledge with teachers' need for technical and practical knowledge (Habermas, 1972). There are several observations to make here. Firstly, though it is our contention that developing teachers' critical consciousness should be the focus of their preparation to teach, importantly, students should not be forced into critical literacy, for instance by making it the focus of assessment. This would go against the principles of the discipline. This will require a new paradigm of thinking about teacher preparation programmes that offers a balanced and thoughtful programme that meets students' needs in learning to teach while providing them with an experience that is meaningful, purposeful, and emancipatory. Secondly, as Fennimore (2000) suggests there is a need for teacher educators to commit to and embrace the philosophy of critical literacy before applying its principles to their practice. Commitment to the philosophical principles of critical literacy is pivotal. Knowledge is not enough, and knowledge, as Freire (1993) argued, should not be taught by itself in the hope that critical perspective would emerge.

Thirdly, there is a need to create a discursive space in teacher professional development for systematic research into critical literacy. This will allow educators to enhance their own critical literacy perspective by mobilising their professional knowledge, skills and understanding as well as their analytic capacity. This is important as critical literacy is a personal and professional mindset and set of values that infuses how we think and what we say and do as educators (Shor, 1999).

The ability to think critically is not some kind of higher intellectual faculty that only the truly gifted among us will ever really reach. Rather, reflexive positioning must and should be an aspiration for us to have for all educators, and we can and should be doing more to support teachers in cultivating their critical literacy perspective. The above suggestions are made in the context that critical literacy cannot

be imposed. This would go against its very nature. That said, it is our responsibility to educate, inform and sow cognitive seeds. Though the challenges may seem huge, we believe that critical literacy is an attainable goal. It is making a start that is often the hardest thing to do but as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado says, 'Se hace camino al andar'; the road is made as you walk (Hazzard, 2021, p. 14).

Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to Eithne Kennedy, Dublin City University. Eithne acted as a critical friend to ensure data analysis was honest and impartial. She provided wonderful support throughout the research and especially during conference presentations.

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Supporting pupils' plurilingual repertoires: benefits for all learners

Déirdre Kirwan[7]

The theme of the Literacy Association of Ireland Annual Conference in 2023 was *Celebrating Languages and Literacies: Unpacking Practices and Exploring Possibilities.* This was with a view to raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits presented by linguistic diversity, how to ensure that children's linguistic repertoires are valued and how the needs of individual literacy learners may be supported. In addressing these issues, this paper draws on the response of Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) (SBC) primary school to the enrolment of pupils who spoke a Home Language (HL) other than Irish or English. It describes key issues involved in using an integrated plurilingual approach to language teaching and literacy learning. It shows how teachers, pupils, and parents cooperated in the development of an innovative approach to supporting the HLs of *all* pupils, including those whose HL was English. Minority language pupils developed literacy in their HLs. Parental involvement was an essential element in realising this goal. The outcomes of SBC's integrated plurilingual approach to language policy and practice are also presented.

Keywords: *plurilingual, language awareness, literacy, education*

Introduction

From the mid-1990s, a growing number of pupils in SBC came from immigrant families. By 2015, 80 percent of the school's enrolment was comprised of pupils who had little or no English on enrolment and were learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). During this time more than 50 home languages (HLS) were identified in the school. In this milieu of increasing linguistic diversity, teachers could not possibly know all the languages of their pupils. Despite this, it was clear that a way had to be found to support the learning of children whose home language (HL) was other than English or Irish. Equally important was how this could be accomplished in a way that would benefit *all* learners.

In response to this challenge, two overarching goals defined the school's language policy. The first was to ensure that *all* pupils gained full access to education, which meant helping them to become proficient in the Language of Schooling (English). The second was to exploit linguistic diversity for the benefit of *all* pupils by implementing an integrated plurilingual approach to language education that embraced English, languages of the curriculum (Irish from the beginning; French, the Modern Foreign Language (MFL), in the final two years), and pupils' HLs.

Four principles informed the school's policy:

- An inclusive ethos that welcomed the diversity of the school's pupil population and acknowledged that each pupil had much to contribute to her own education

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- An open language policy that placed no restrictions on pupils' use of their HLs at school, whether inside or outside the classroom
- A strong emphasis on development of language awareness that treated HLs as a resource for *all* learners
- A strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills in English, Irish, French and HLs, using writing and speaking to support one another in many different ways. The vital importance of parental involvement in their children's literacy development was also acknowledged.

The development of the integrated plurilingual policy and pedagogical approach taken by SBC was influenced by:

- the 1999 Primary School Curriculum (PSC), (Government of Ireland, 1999)
- the work of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) (IILT, 2003) commissioned by the Department of Education in 2000 to provide support for teachers dealing with EAL pupils
- qualitative research undertaken by the then principal of SBC (Kirwan, 2009).

Consultation and shared practice among teachers was an important and valuable element of the process, as was the support of the Board of Management and involvement of parents.

SBC's approach to language learning has been referenced in the national strategy document *Languages Connect* (Department of Education 2017, p.30) and in the Primary Language Curriculum support materials (Department of Education, (n.d.), p.107–122). Two reports from the European Commission have identified the school's approach as an example of good practice (European Commission 2020a; 24–25; 2020b, p.14–15).

The Underpinning Principles of Language Education

Informed by a child-centred ethos, the 1999 Primary School Curriculum (PSC) states that "the child's existing knowledge and experience form the basis for learning" (Government of Ireland, 1999. p.8). If pedagogy is to be guided by this principle, account must be taken of the child's HL, the medium through which their learning has taken place to date. Similarly, if the child is to continue as "an active agent in his or her learning" (ibid., p.8), the HL must have a role.

In 2022, the Council of Europe (CoE), issued Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture. Encouraging "school principals, directors and managers to implement whole-school policies and practices that welcome and valorise linguistic and cultural diversity, promote language learning and the development of plurilingual repertoires" (CoE, 2022, p.9), it unequivocally states that "Individuals' home languages – the languages in which their identity is most deeply rooted – are necessarily the starting point for all learning" (Ibid., p.30). It goes on to say that "…it is necessary to find ways of including those languages in the individual's educational experience in ways that benefit all pupils/students" (Ibid, p.25).

The Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) – including draft Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) acknowledges and supports the languages of all children, while also "encouraging the use of other languages spoken in the home and in primary schools" (PLC, 2024, p.5) thus enabling the development of children's plurilingual competence "where all knowledge and experience of language feed into and support learning" (Ibid.:5).

Implications for Inclusion of Home Languages

The PSC, CoE, and PLC assume a strong link between school, home, and HLs. As EAL pupils have lived their pre-school years mostly in a language other than English or Irish, it is through the medium of their HL that their learning to date has been acquired. If it is on this foundation that their ongoing learning is to be built, it is clear that HLs must, in some way, be included in curriculum delivery. Each EAL learner's home language is central to their identity**.** It is the default medium of their discursive thinking, and the cognitive tool they use for learning, ever present in the unspoken stream of their consciousness (Little cit. European Commission 2020a, p.14). "To reject the child's language in the school is to reject the child" (Cummins, cited in European Commission 2020a, p.14). If EAL pupils are to "realize their full potential as unique individuals" (PSC, 1999, p.7), ways must be found of including their HLs in the educational process (European Commission 2020b, p.24-25). Valuing pupils' HLs also means seeing and hearing these languages throughout the school (Figure 1).

Figure 1 *Posters with welcoming greetings in every child's language are visible throughout the school.*

Plurilingualism

Where all the languages of the classroom are included, children develop high levels of metalinguistic awareness and 'a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact' (CoE, 2001, p.4). The essence of plurilingualism is that it comprises a fully integrated communicative and reflective repertoire that defines the individual's linguistic identity and is the channel of his or her agency. The pedagogies needed to support the development of plurilingualism are grounded in language use, engage learners' identities and agency, and use pupils' existing linguistic repertoires to support the learning of new languages.

When pupils experience this kind of language teaching, they are motivated to take on ambitious tasks using their individual plurilingual repertoires to work on projects that allow them to use their HL and the languages of others. They do this because they are interested and confident in the knowledge that they can. When children begin to work autonomously, their motivation to engage in classroom discourse, ask questions, and actively find solutions is enhanced. They display interest and enjoyment in their ability to use more than one language. This enthusiasm can have a positive effect on the use of Irish among pupils whose HL is English. These pupils often show an increased interest in Irish, perceiving it as their second language, and using it for purposes of communication in school and in

their production of dual language texts. It is important that at all levels of the school, learning activities that pupils undertake on their own initiative should be encouraged and affirmed.

Developing Plurilingual Literacy

One of the most important aspects of using an integrated plurilingual approach to language learning is that minority-language learners develop literacy skills in their HL. Parents of pupils in SBC were encouraged to read with their children in their HL. A language support teacher in SBC found that by writing in the copybooks of EAL pupils who were already literate in their HL, *exactly* what they had said in English, those pupils were able to identify their spoken words in writing (Little & Kirwan, 2022). This was equally effective with younger children, when helped by the teacher to read their own words, spoken in the HL and written in English. Writing *exactly* what the child says, without correction, points to 'the importance of children's own language productions as a bridge from oral to written language" (Stahl & Miller, 1989, p. 88). The sense of achievement, visible on the faces of young learners as they realise that what they have *said* can be *written*, and *read*, is a powerful motivator for developing literacy and confidence in learning.

It was in the production of parallel texts in English and Irish /HL that the transference of skills between English, Irish, MFLs and HLs proved to be most successful (Cummins, 1979). These texts are parallel in that their structure and content are the same in each language used. Children know and understand what they have written in English, in school. Bringing home their work, they read and translate it for their parents who then help them to write the equivalent word or sentence in their HL. The following day, pupils are given the opportunity to read aloud their dual language work for the teacher and classmates. In this way, each language helps the other. The sense of pride that pupils take in knowing that they can read and write in two, or more, languages is a great source of pride and achievement. Some examples can be seen in Figures 2-10 below. An experienced teacher in SBC said:

A number of years ago if you had asked me about this, I would have had a different answer because I would have said … written work, no, the oral is the most important …. [But now] I think that if they form their thoughts with pen and paper first, it gives them the confidence then to go and speak (Little & Kirwan, 2019, p.124)

Figure 2 *Dual language texts written in English and Polish (Senior Infants).*

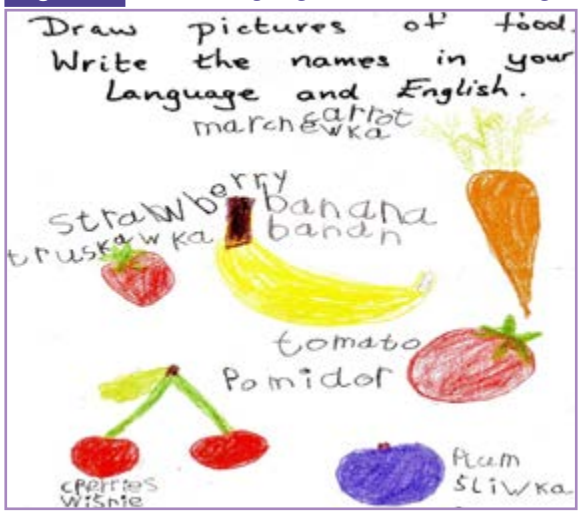


Figure 3 *English and Tagalog (Senior Infants).*

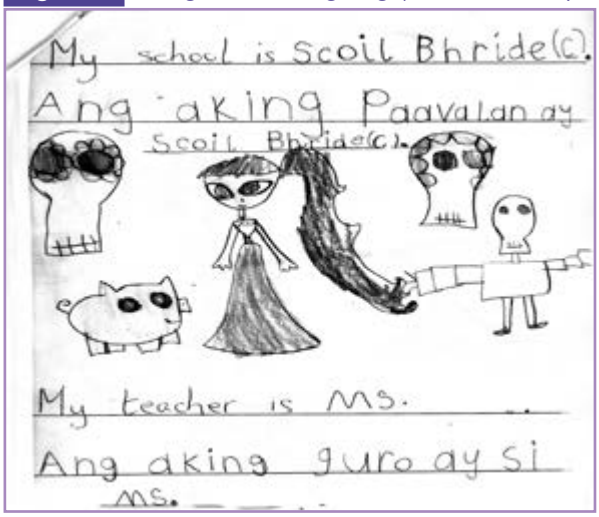


Figure 4 *Dual language text in English and Spanish, written unaided, in school (First Class).*

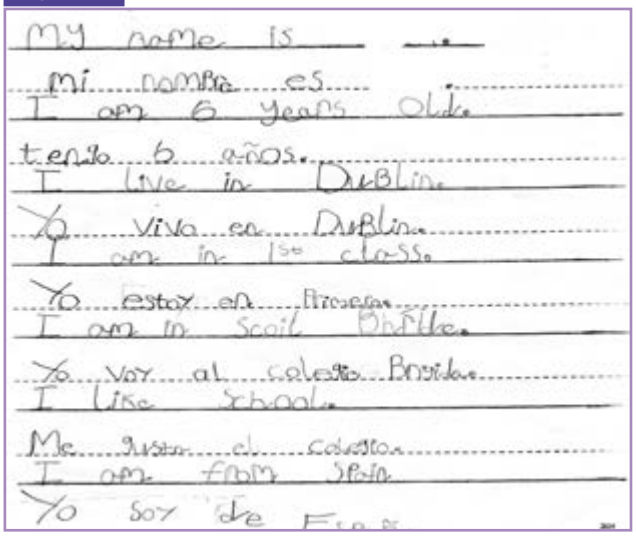


Figure 5 *A dual language diary written at home in English and Irish (Second Class).*

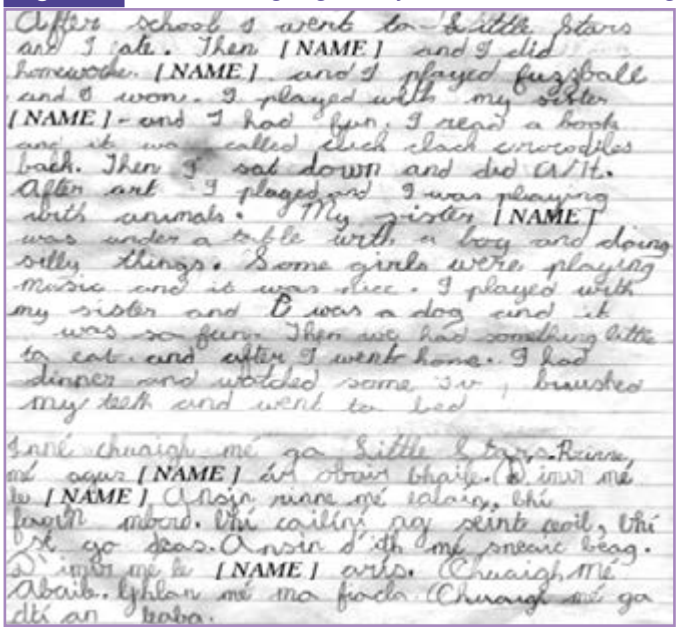


Figure 6 *In Third Class texts become more elaborate as pupils begin to write in three languages. This account of an accident in the park is written in Irish, English and Hungarian.*

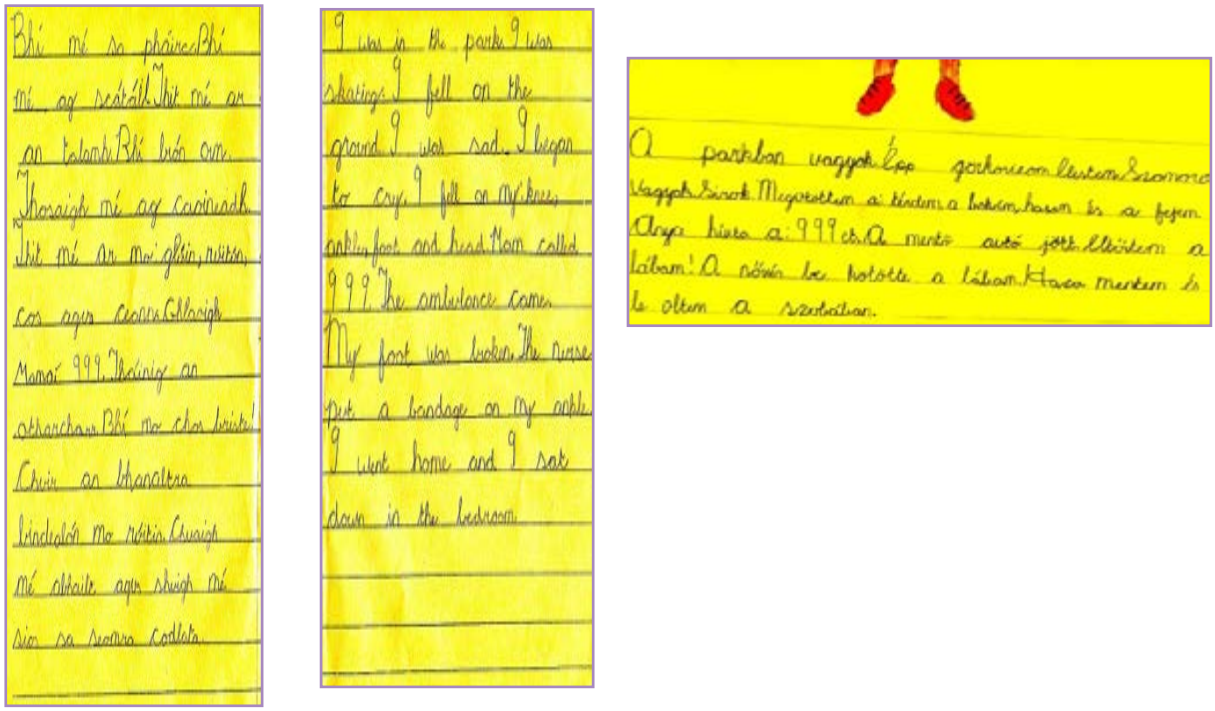
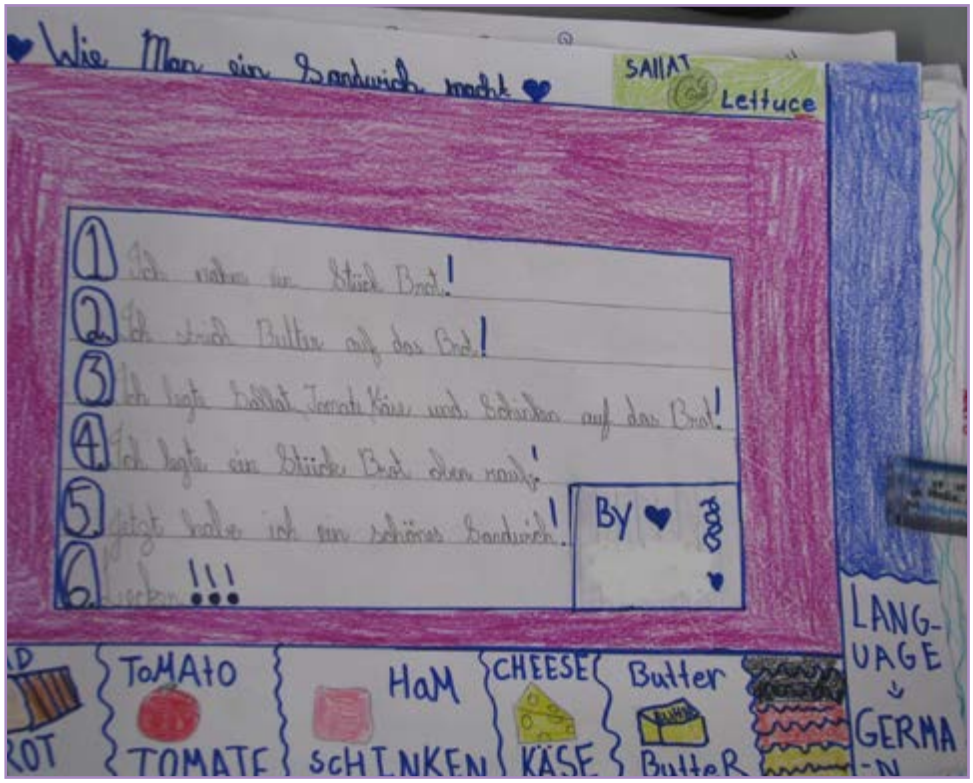
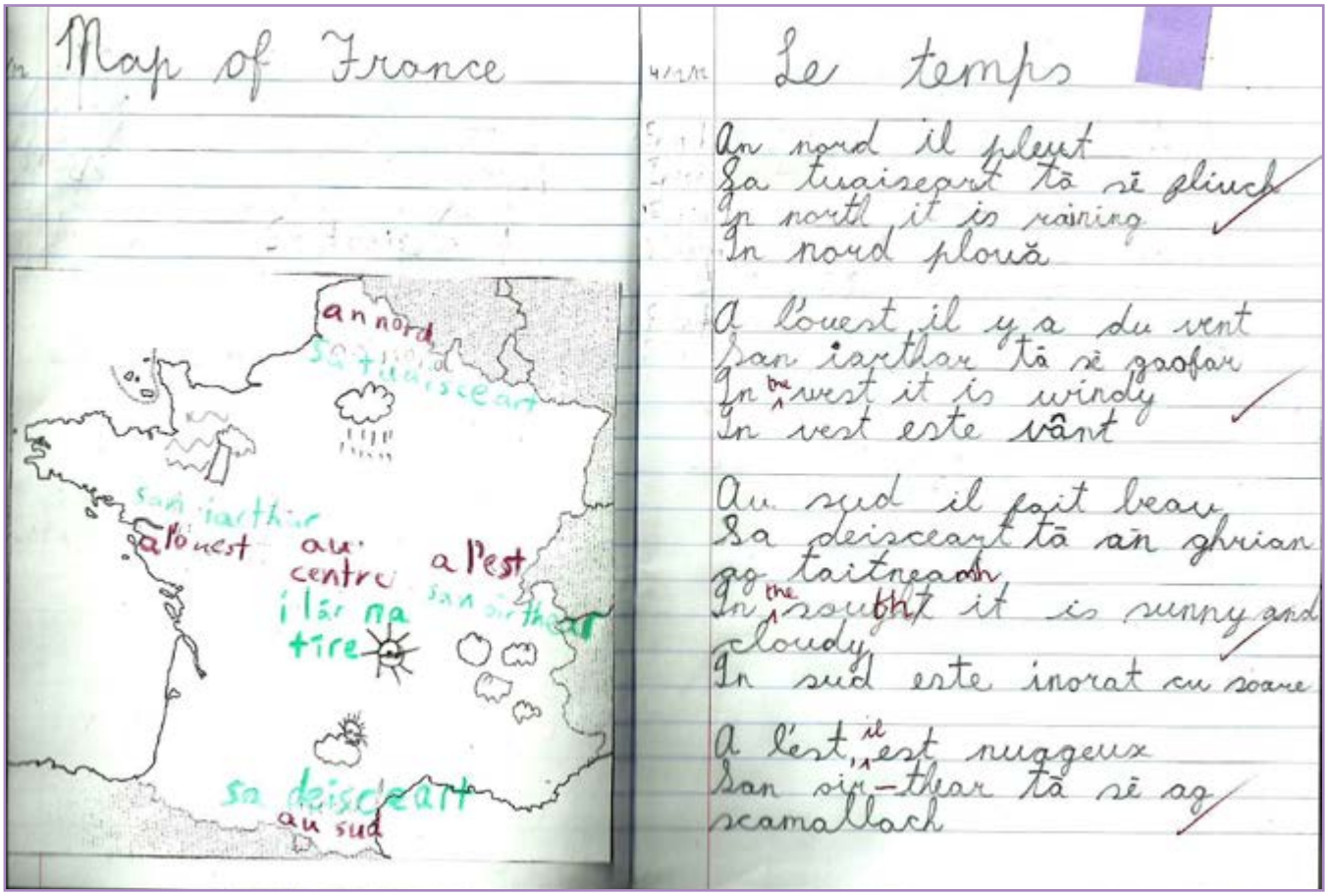


Figure 7 *After a lesson in Irish on how to make a sandwich, EAL learners translated the procedure into their HL (in this case, German (Fourth Class).*



In Fifth Class, French is added to English, Irish and HLs and is learnt by using it as an alternative medium for exploring curriculum themes.

Figure 8 *A text in French, Irish, English and Romanian describing the different kinds of weather in the North, South, East and West of France (Fifth Class).*



In Sixth Class, pupils engage in sophisticated language play and write confidently in English, Irish, French and their HL.

Figure 9 *A story in English using French words (Sixth Class).*

A Story in English Using French Words!

Madame and her fiancé went to the café. Madame ordered café au lait and a baguette. Her fiancé got creme du lait and a croissant. Madame said, "Bon Appetit!"

After that, another woman gave a brochure about the new manicure shop across the road. Madame was so excited but her fiancé wasn't! So he decided to buy her a bouquet of flowers while Madame was getting her nails done.

When they were both finished, they met at a restaurant. Madame was very happy. She then decided to open her very own boutique. It was called Madame's Boutique. Her store was unique. She gave strangers brochures of her boutique and it was succesful. Madame and her fiancé were very happy.

Every Monday Madame went to ballet lessons in a studio. There was a cuisine next to her boutique. The chef was called Alexandre. He was very strict chef.

Figure 10 *An account of a visit to a prospective post-primary school written by a pupil whose HL was Tagalog. The text switches coherently between Irish, Tagalog, English, and French (Sixth Class).*

Cuairt ar an Meánscoil

Chuaigh mé agus mo chlann go dtí Pobal Scoil Mhín. Talagang yumao sa gabi. Nous avons vu beaucoup filles e garcons. Thosaigh an phríomhoide ag caint. The whole room started to quiet down. We were told that all the sixth class children were to make their way to the door. Ensuite, une fille a amenée nous dans la piece. Thosaigh said ag scoilt ar na páistí. Si Rabia, si Duska, at si Ana at ako nag paghati-hatiin sa isang grupo. We went into one of the English Classes and we did a Volcano Quiz. Une femme a demandé une question difficile et facile apropos de volcan sur le tableau. We also saw a bit of Romeo and Juliet. Four of my neighbours were part of the play.

Dialogic teaching and learning inform the development of plurilingual literacy

Exploratory talk in class creates a learning conversation that is *dialogic*: the teacher controls this learning conversation and pupils have the right to offer ideas and suggestions (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In the case of EAL pupils, this right is confirmed by encouraging them to use and draw on their home languages. This allows them to use their agency to make a unique contribution to classroom discourse. Irish and MFL lessons give teachers the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary, idioms, etc. that they will then make use of in their other lessons. As classroom routines, procedures and activities are mastered in English, they are transferred to Irish, EAL pupils' home languages, and in due course French. Dialogic and exploratory classroom talk facilitates the development of pupils' integrated plurilingual repertoires through processes of language socialization – "learning … though observation, participation, and performance" (Duff & Talmy, 2011: 96) and these processes of socialization also foster the pupils' inborn autonomy.

Exploratory classroom talk can also be used to activate pupils' language awareness when the teacher invites pupils to share the connections and similarities, they find using all the languages of the classroom. An example of this occurred when a teacher of Third Class associated *fraction* with *fracture*, and pupils offered the synonyms *break*, *split.* The teacher then asked if anyone knew words for *break* in other languages. A Romanian pupil offered *rupt*, which pupils quickly linked to the *eruption* of a volcano, *interruption* and *disruption.* All this enrichment of vocabulary occurred during a Maths lesson.

Home languages Benefit *all* Learners and Performs Three Functions in a Classroom

Home languages in the classroom can be used in three ways. Firstly, through reciprocal communication with other pupils who have the same or a closely related home language, when at play at the beginning of the school day and in the yard. It also happens in pair and group work where pupils may use their HL for the task in question but report to the teacher and class in English.

HLs are also used for non-reciprocal purposes of display. Pupils love to tell their classmates, "This what we say in my language". This can happen in junior classes when learning to count, working with shapes and colours, with songs and action games. Any aspect of the curriculum can become a multilingual activity. Using HLs in this way scaffolds the learning of English and Irish.

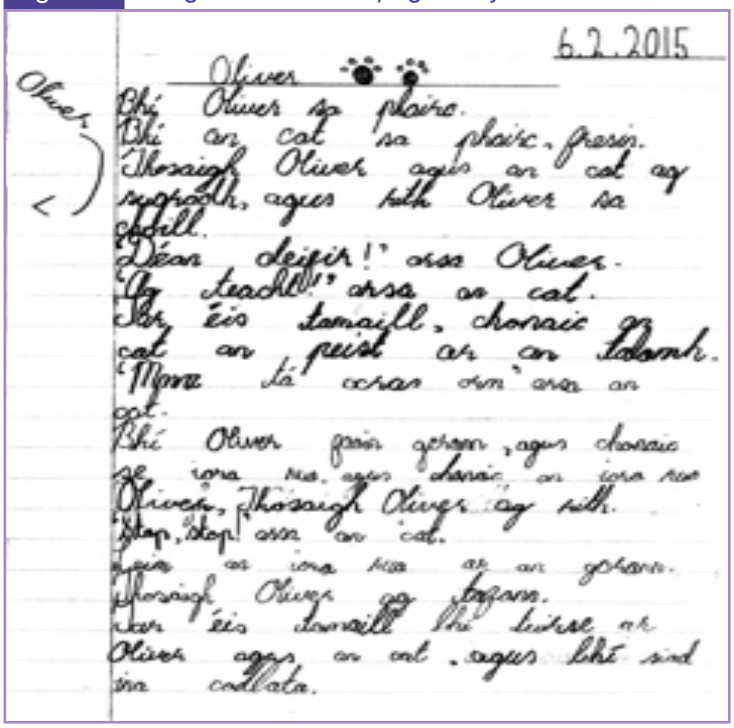
HLs also provide a source of intuitive linguistic knowledge that individual pupils make available to the teacher and the rest of the class. This enriches curriculum content and supports consolidation of curriculum learning.

Learning Outcomes

The presence of additional languages in SBC had a positive impact on the learning of Irish. Its use as a means of communication developed in the school as a result of the plurilingual environment that was created. Like their classmates, pupils whose HL was English wanted to be able to use two languages as well. Irish provided a level playing field for all pupils and SBC ranked among the top 12% of primary schools for achievement in Irish (DES, 2018).

Another asset in terms of using plurilingual repertoires resulted in pupils undertaking ambitious autonomous learning initiatives from an early age (Figure 13).

Figure 12 *Page one of a four-page diary written autonomously in Irish by a Filipino pupil in Third Class.*



The inclusion of home languages promoted well-being, self-esteem and social cohesion. An EAL pupil in Sixth Class said:

> "*Using our home language helps us to get personal into each other's cultures and languages; it's very useful for friendship, for knowledge, so in many ways we're all expanding…it makes you feel closer because you have a perspective on that person's point of view*" (Little & Kirwan, 2021: 6).

In the standardized tests of English and Mathematics that pupils take each year from First Class to Sixth Class, the school performed consistently above the national average. As a result of the strong emphasis on writing, pupils developed high levels of age-appropriate literacy in English, Irish and French and in their HL.

Conclusion

Using an integrated plurilingual approach to language learning means that reflective and analytical dimensions of learning are firmly rooted in what pupils themselves contribute. Because classroom interaction takes account of their existing knowledge, skills and interests, pupils tend to be fully engaged. Pupils are agents of their own learning: as they progress through the school, their ability

to direct and evaluate their learning becomes increasingly apparent. The development of literacy in English as the principal language of schooling feeds into, but also depends on, the development of pupils' literacy in their home language, Irish and (in Fifth and Sixth Class) French.

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Communities of Student Teachers as Readers (CoSTaR) Project

Clara Fiorentini[8] & Geraldine Magennis-Clarke

Reading is a complex and dynamic process that involves a depth of knowledge and a myriad of sophisticated skills, which teachers need to master themselves, as well as teach to others. Consequently, the read-aloud may appear deceptively easy. For read-alouds to positively impact students' reading abilities, teachers must carefully plan for them to be effective. Factors, such as teacher knowledge, confidence, the use of varied pedagogy, and planning are key to getting the most out of reading aloud. Additionally, the quantity of opportunities provided matters immensely, however, the quality of the experience within these opportunities matters even more so. The CoSTaR Project is an innovative, cross-border initiative between two Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions on the island of Ireland. Its basic goal was to facilitate the establishment of a community of practice among first year primary student teachers as effective teachers of read-aloud through the use of reading clinics, student-led planning sessions, school placement practice and reflective tasks. The longer term aim was to help cultivate their professional identities as impactful teachers of such an instructional methodology. Tentative results reveal that participants' conceptual understanding of the read-aloud methodology has expanded to encompass a much more complex and dynamic interplay between teacher and pupils. This emerged alongside a realisation that a wide and detailed 'book' knowledge is required to deliberately plan and artfully teach using the read-aloud approach. In other words, participants' read-aloud identities began to shift from being merely deliverers of stories to knowledgeable and skilled artisans.

Key words: *read-aloud, student teacher identity*

Introduction

Literacy in Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Literacy education modules are prominent features on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) degree programmes across the world. Content heavy and often constrained by semesterisation or scheduling limitations, literacy modules in particular, tend to be extremely intensive courses spanning across a very broad continuum of learning. Delivering the necessary theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of practice often prove time-consuming. Thus, limited time is left for dialogic learning experiences and practical, collaborative exploration of the more heuristic strategies and approaches fundamental to teaching the content of the literacy curriculum in the contemporary primary classroom. From the student teachers' point of view, the complicated and dynamic nature of this endeavour is captured by Caena (2014) who states that pre-service 'is an intensive experience that requires student teachers

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to be both learners and teachers simultaneously – being supported in learning how to teach and supporting pupils in how to learn' (p.311). Therefore, choosing any practice must be done so carefully, with impact in mind, and this begins with the acquisition of a strong theoretical knowledge base. This compels us to address the scientific evidence in the field.

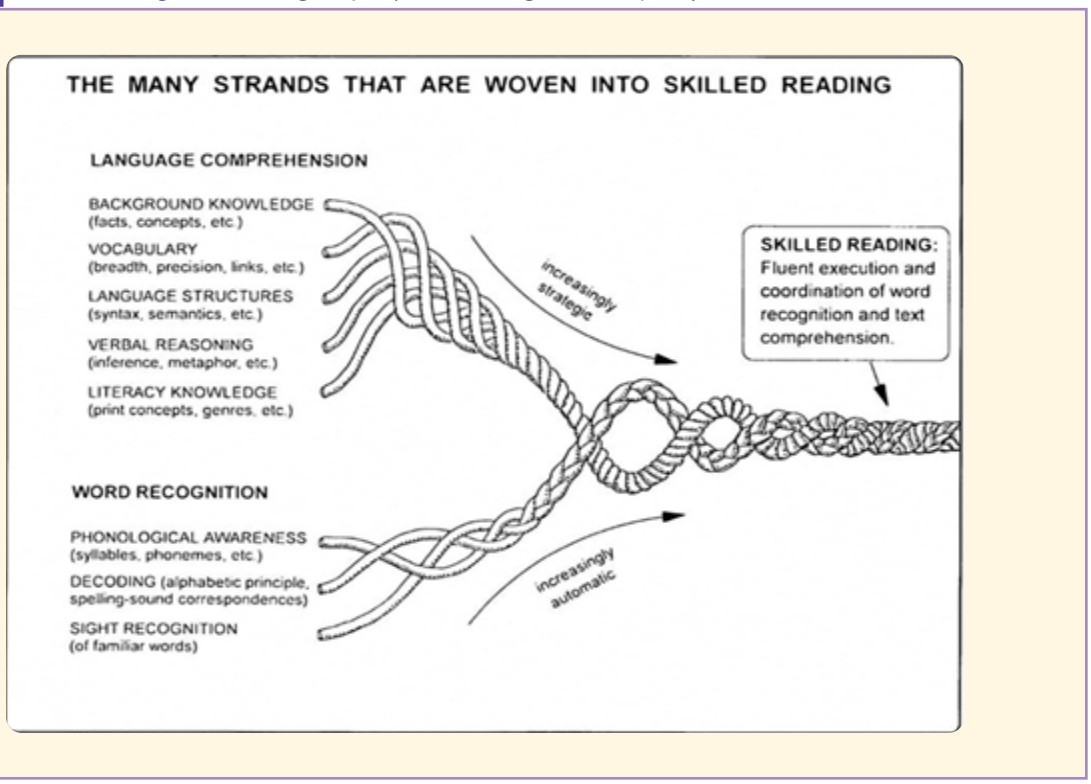
Literature Review

Read-Aloud and the Reading Brain

Decades of research have resulted in the establishment of a wide body of reading evidence referred to as the *Science of Reading*. Through multidisciplinary research, more is now known than ever before about the 'reading brain' (Wolf, 2007; Dehaene, 2009). The neural circuitry which is necessary to successfully carry out the act of reading is created primarily through rich, explicit and contextualised instruction. Consistent, high-quality read-aloud opportunities have a pivotal role to play within an evidence-based, systematic approach to literacy learning.

Developing an awareness of accurate and relevant theoretical models of reading is essential. Framing the project with models such as the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tumner, 1986) and, as can be seen in Figure 1, Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) supports students in realising the interconnectedness of components across the continuum of reading development and 'in understanding what essential elements need to be taught and developed as children learn to read' (Stewart, 2020, p.5).

Figure 1 *Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001, p.97)*



An adept awareness of the components of language comprehension and word recognition is necessary before student teachers can holistically focus on the specifics of their instructional intent and emphasis during a read-aloud.

Defining Read-Aloud as a Methodology

Various and some long-standing definitions of read-aloud exist, however McCormick's 1977 (p.140) definition perhaps describes it most comprehensively as:

> 'an instructional practice where teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children. The reader incorporates variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery.'

Perhaps more notably, is how much space is afforded in the literature to the myriad of benefits linked to the use of read-aloud in the primary classroom.

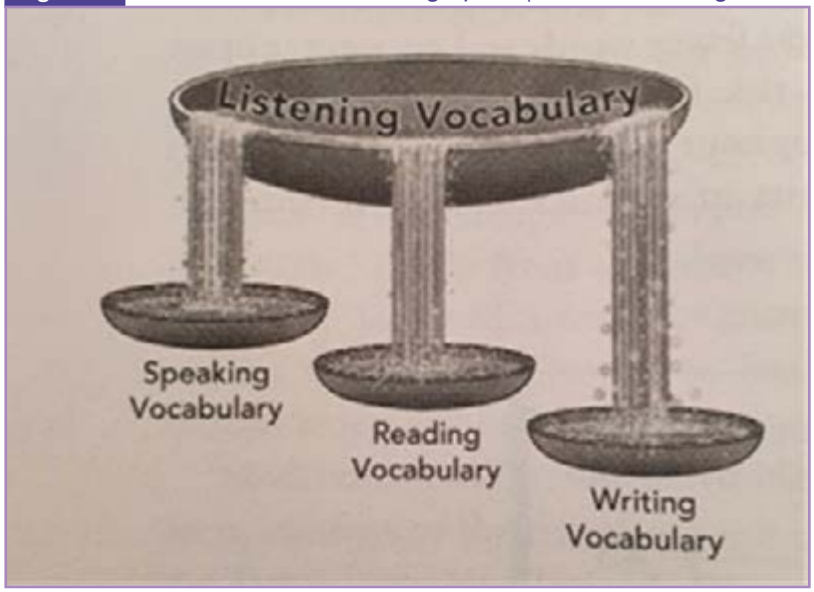
The Value of Read-Aloud

Reading aloud (read-aloud) is much more than just a simple and enjoyable reading experience. This was heralded in the publication of the seminal report *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, in the United States in 1985 (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985) which highlighted that reading aloud to young children was the most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading. Richardson (2000) purported that read-alouds are central to modelling expressive, enthusiastic reading, transmitting the pleasure of reading while possessing the power to invite listeners to be readers. This was galvanised further by Walther who foregrounds her recent book entitled *The Ramped-Up Read Aloud* (2019) by outlining 10 benefits to using the read-aloud as a method of effective instruction. Among these include:

- The facilitation of collaborative and meaningful conversations,
- The promotion of efficient readers' strategy use,
- The expansion of vocabulary,
- Encouragement to take others' perspectives and to empathise, and,
- Support mechanisms for learning to write.

Trelease and Giorgis (2019) likens the cascading effect of the read-aloud to the child's very own Lake Pontchartrain as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 *Lake Pontchartrain infographic (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019, p.10)*



McGee and Richgels (2003), note that 'the books teachers read aloud promote deeper understanding and interpretation of a story, allow children to take an active role in understanding the text, and prompt children to start using mental activities that will become automatic as they begin reading independently' (p.23). Read-alouds' not only act as vehicles for the delivery of much of our curricular learning, but they are also a significant means of fostering positive, nurturing relationships between teachers and children. However, knowing the benefits of reading aloud as an effective instructional method and delivering it via purposeful planning and practice are two different things.

Planning for Effective Read-Aloud Instruction

A holistic and multifaceted depiction of the read-aloud must be provided for student teachers to move beyond the notion that a read-aloud is a transition tool, a time-filler or something that we 'just do' to begin or end the school day. It is essential that student teachers realise that the read-aloud is a fundamental practice for supporting the development of the many concurrent components of reading development. Research shows that 'good read-alouds do not just happen by chance' but, rather, 'are created through conscientious planning' to optimise their full potential (McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2015, n.p.) both within literacy and cross-curricularly. Without a clear focus for read-alouds, children remain on the periphery, resulting in reduced engagement, making fewer connections with the content and necessary skills to progress their literacy. Fisher et al. (2004) compares this kind of approach to 'channel surfing' (p.9). Reading a book or story, which follows or ends with an abrupt switch to a new activity or lesson is not a read-aloud.

It is easy to believe that the central skills required to perfect the art of reading aloud can be acquired expeditiously. However, this is untrue. Such skills must be unlocked, fostered and nurtured through dialogic, reflective, collaborative and celebratory practices; practices which support student teachers in discovering their identities as teachers who read aloud as a primary methodology and who choose to do so to instruct and inspire.

This project has been designed to support student teachers in developing their identities as teachers who read aloud and read aloud well. According to Kerry-Moran (2015), 'Preparing preservice teachers to approach read-alouds with knowledge, confidence, and a seriousness of purpose is a central responsibility of teacher educators' (p.661). This project aims to bridge the gap between research and everyday read-aloud practice through training student teachers for planning, preparing and practising high-quality read-alouds in the classroom, and equipping these students with the skills necessary to create curated, intentional read-aloud experiences for their teaching placements and beyond. The read-aloud has long been presented to student teachers as a methodology, transferable across the curriculum. However, for a variety of reasons, often opportunities to practise the act of reading aloud, is not always facilitated, therefore leaving this to the individual student teacher. Some will prepare and practise, many may not.

Methodology

Research Design

A design-based research (DBR) approach was employed, facilitating the use of a range of instruments including coaching sessions, collaborative planning clinics, creative response tasks and questionnaires. The data collection cycles spanned four cycles of implementation running from October 2022 until May 2023. Educational research is often detached from practice (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2002), however, the goal of DBR is to 'directly impact practice while advancing

theory that will be of use to others' (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 8). The principles of DBR align to the aims of CoSTaR, which was designed to build on the professional confidence and competences of student teachers as artful and skilled 'reading teachers' (Cremin et al., 2014) who locate the read-aloud as a central and transformative methodology in everyday practice. The flexibility of DBR facilitated the monitoring of several variables (i.e. students, reading identity, pedagogic knowledge and research cycle stage), affording opportunities for successive cycles which embraced systematic variation through revision and development as necessary (Cobb, Di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003).

Data Collection

Participants' responses, reflections and experiences were used to support, challenge or develop existing beliefs and misconceptions about reading aloud as a methodology. In order to address our research questions, and to tailor the bespoke coaching session content, data were drawn from five specific sources: pre- and post-project questionnaires, reflective response tasks following each coaching session and planning clinic, a post-project creative task and reflective journals. The research team engaged in practices of self-study (Schuck & Russell, 2005; LaBoskey, 2004) through the keeping of reflective journals. Ethical approval was garnered in September through MERC: Marino Ethics in Research Committee, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. The project ran for eight months, from October 2022 until May 2023, spanning four cycles of implementation.

Towards a Community of Student Teachers as Readers (CoSTaR)

Cycle 1: 'CoSTaR Call!' - Call for participants

Twenty five participants from first year in the Bachelor of Education (BEd1) and first year in the Professional Masters in Education (PME1) joined the project in October 2022. An anonymous pre-project questionnaire was circulated to all participants, affording an invaluable insight into student teachers' existing knowledge of reading aloud and its significance as a meaningful methodology in the primary classroom.

CoSTaR Participant Packs

Committed participants received a CoSTaR Participant Pack, which included a selection of high-quality children's literature and stationery. Packs included carefully chosen, multifunctional picturebooks (PB), novels (N) and novelettes (Nv) to support teaching and learning at all stages across the primary years.

Each pack included:

- Perfectly Norman by Tom Percival (PB)
- The Sea of Tranquillity by Mark Haddon (PB)
- The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Rauf (N)
- Rigatoni the Pasta Cat or Barking for Bagels by Michael Rosen (Nv)
- Martha Mayhem and the Witch from the Ditch by Joanne Owen (Nv)
- Brainy Boris by Laurence Anholt (Nv)
- Penguin by Polly Dunbar (PB)
- Hairy Maclairy by Lynley Dodd *or* A Piece of Cake by Jill Murphy (Nv)

Figure 3 *CoSTaR Participant Pack*

Cycle 2: 'Let's get ready': Coaching Sessions

Participating student teachers (STs) attended five online coaching sessions facilitated on Thursday evenings from 5pm to 6.30pm across a fortnightly basis. An informative presentation was presented to the STs and read-alouds were modelled by the facilitators to begin and close the sessions. Student teachers completed a small, anonymous response task following each session to provide an insight into their learning and development as 'Reading Teachers' - readers who teach and teachers who read (Cremin et al., 2014). Cycle two spanned November, December and early January. Coaching sessions followed a specific theme.

- Coaching session 1: Introduction: The Art of the Read-Aloud
- Coaching session 2: The Anatomy of the Book
- Coaching session 3: Choosing & Using Texts
- Coaching Session 4: Intentional Read-Alouds & Re-reading
- Coaching Session 5: Building Engagement

Cycle 3: 'Let's get steady!' - Planning Clinics

Across January and February, STs participated in four online planning clinics. These collaborative planning clinics afforded STs with meaningful opportunities to work with their peers to plan for read-alouds with common texts. STs utilised the texts provided in the CoSTaR packs to plan collaboratively for meaningful read-alouds connected to teaching and learning experiences ahead of their upcoming placements. Planning clinics were facilitated on Thursday evenings from 5pm until 6.30pm. STs utilised bespoke CoSTaR planning templates in which they could decide on meaningful intentions and

purposes for utilising particular texts across three read-aloud experiences. STs examined texts together and planned for bespoke opportunities to teach key vocabulary, build on children's previous related knowledge and engaging 'hooks' to draw young learners into specific read-aloud experiences. STs planned for opportunities to facilitate meaningful integrated learning. A focus was placed on planning for dialogic interactions to facilitate effective high quality questioning and critical thinking. STs planned for engaging opportunities to extend pupils' learning through the planning and discussion of potential connected activities and tasks.

Cycle 4: 'Let's go!' - Placement & Beyond

STs across both institutions were required to engage in compulsory blocks of school teaching placements across the months of February, March and April 2023. On return from placement, STs joined a final recap clinic. STs shared insights from their placement experiences and successes or struggles with strategies and methodologies they gained through participation in CoSTaR. Students completed a post project questionnaire and a post-project creative response task.

Data Analysis and Findings

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to analyse the data collected across the project providing the researchers with opportunities to gain valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants, to inform the design and development cycles two, three and four, and to refine the research model for future iterations of the project. Findings were coded under four themes - reading aloud, reading identity, teacher knowledge, and practice.

Reading Aloud. "*Before this project I thought that reading aloud was just straight forward reading aloud to the class but it is so much more than that*." [ST 1]

Through engaging with this project, participants' conceptual understanding of the read-aloud methodology expanded to encompass a more complex and dynamic interplay between teacher and pupils. It was a central goal for the researchers that STs developed a firm understanding of the potential of the read-aloud method, particularly for the benefit of language and literacy learning (DeJulio, 2023).

Reading identity. "*Since starting the project I have a love for picturebooks that I did not have before and I am raging with my mam for giving away most of my old picturebooks. One of my friends finds it hilarious that as a 23-year-old I now buy so many picturebooks; so when she was on holidays recently she bought me a picturebook thinking it was funny - I was delighted!*" [ST 2]

As teacher educators, the researchers believe that it is of the utmost importance to explore and support pre-service teachers in recognising their reading identities, to foster positive dispositions and to enhance their awareness of the consequence of being a reading role model in the classroom (Cremin, 2021). The project provided consistent opportunities for STs to reflect on their own reading and read-aloud identities. STs were consistently invited to consider their knowledge of children's literature. This enabled reflection on text use, text preference and existing reading habits, and how these can influence our practice as reading teachers (Cremin et al., 2014; Commeyras et al., 2003). Over the course of the study, participants' read-aloud identities began to shift from being merely deliverers of stories to knowledgeable and skilled artisans.

Teacher knowledge. "*I have a much better understanding of read-aloud now because I was able to practise the skills.*" [ST 3]

While a wealth of research on read-alouds' exists, little is still known about teachers' beliefs surrounding read-alouds' or teacher knowledge on the facilitation of read-alouds (DeJulio et al., 2023). CoSTaR provided a valuable opportunity to explore ST's existing knowledge on read-alouds' and how this knowledge developed and grew throughout their involvement in the project. ST's went from possessing a rather surface level interpretation of reading aloud as just 'something you do' as a teacher, to developing a deeper appreciation of the read-aloud as an essential, strategic, dynamic and highly effective method of instruction.

Through attending the coaching sessions and participating in the collaborative peer planning sessions, STs explored and practised a variety of read-aloud strategies to support the delivery of engaging and intentional read-alouds (Laminack, 2017) which fostered confidence and competence in the use of the read-aloud method to engage and instruct on their respective school placements. Through the evident community of practice, which emerged through the collaborative planning sessions, STs recognised the benefits of professional collaboration and shared knowledge development.

"*Having several other students to brainstorm with was really excellent. It helped jog memories of what we learned in lectures.*" [ST 4]

Read-aloud practice. "*I did several read-alouds on placement and I felt more practised and confident having had an opportunity to focus on the art of reading aloud during CoSTaR. I slowed it right down and used the read-aloud across the curriculum.*" [ST 5]

The most significant impact of project participation for STs was the development and fine-tuning of their read-aloud practice. STs came to recognise that effective read-alouds must be planned; that they as teachers must be prepared and make meaningful, responsive, and relational choices about interactions, discussions, and experiences to extend the learning beyond the actual reading of the text. This emerged alongside a realisation that a wide and detailed 'book' knowledge is required to deliberately plan and artfully teach using the read-aloud approach.

Moving Forward

A successful initial iteration of this research project offered opportunities for the review and extension of the project for the subsequent academic year. An additional institution has been incorporated facilitating collaboration with Sharon Pratt and Indiana University Northwest, USA to enable a 'cross-Atlantic' phase of the CoSTaR Project. Limitations will be addressed by expanding participation, which will be widened to include additional first year education students in the respective institutions of the researchers.

Conclusion

CoSTaR demonstrates the valuable role in providing practical support for STs in the art of reading aloud and its value as a teaching method. The method itself is something frequently referred to across initial teacher education and something teachers are expected to do, yet opportunities for practice or deeper exploration of the method are often limited or non-existent. By facilitating such coaching and knowledge development to first year STs, we are enabled to support STs in getting read-alouds' right from the beginning of their journey as future teachers and supporting their refinement of the art of reading aloud from the outset of initial teacher education. While the read-aloud will always exist as an experience between teacher and class, it must be recognised, that rather than remaining as a solo endeavour for teachers, effective planning for read-aloud experiences are enhanced through meaningful collaboration and dialogue with knowledgeable others. Fostering STs' confidence and

competence in the method will only further develop their literacy practice and enable the read-aloud to become a chosen and central methodology as opposed to continuing to run the risk that it becomes rendered as the peripheral time-filler.

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Early Engagement in the Say Yes to Languages (SYTL) initiative at a Senior Primary School: Exploring teachers' experiences and school-level developments

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This paper draws on teachers' experiences of participating in the Say Yes to Languages (SYTL) initiative in Autumn 2023 with the purpose of informing language T&L practice at school level. The reflections on MFL language teaching and learning re-engagement at school level are articulated with reference to current language education policy and practice. The exploration of local practice in relation to emerging national policy serves to identify and inform how language policy 'plays out' at local level, and how professional school engagement can inform and enhance school language practice as an iterative process. Firstly, the context of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at primary level is outlined with reference to policy and practice in Ireland (Post-Primary Languages Ireland, 2023). Secondly, the SYTL framework is explored in the context of supporting education (NCCA, 2023) and language policy (NCCA, 2019) and practice (Inspectorate, 2022). The school context is then introduced detailing MFL language teaching and learning practice to date. Teachers' experiences of engaging with the SYTL programme in Autumn 2023 are explored and discussed. Emerging themes include the importance of previous experience to support initial school engagement, lesson flow and curricular accommodation, exploration of a plurilingual approach, and the potential initiation of a community of practice. While at an early stage of SYTL involvement, striking school-level developments include the organic nature of teacher participation in the programme, and the development of school-level partnerships with external organisations connected to language education. It is intended that the teacher-led school-level exploration of early-stage MFL engagement and practice in the context of emerging (education and) language policy for language and literacy teaching at school level can inform optimum MFL practice for the participating school- and other school contexts- in order to develop and enhance the teaching of MFL as part of schools' future broader language and literacy remit in Ireland.

Keywords: *language education; modern foreign languages (MFL); Say Yes to Languages; primary school*

Introduction

This article explores initial engagement with the *Say Yes to Primary Languages* (SYTL) initiative at a senior primary school in North Dublin, Ireland. It explores the first steps taken by a school staff on taking up the programme during the Autumn term of 2024 in the context of teaching and learning languages at primary and exploring whole-school approaches to pedagogical initiatives. Firstly, the teaching and learning of languages at primary level in English medium education (EME) is discussed in the context of recent and relevant policy. The specific school context of the situated practice is then introduced. In terms of SYTL engagement, school engagement is discussed in terms of (i) teachers'

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experiences of SYTL engagement and (ii) school-level developments. Teachers' experiences reflect the importance of previous experience to support initial school engagement, lesson flow and curricular accommodation, exploration of a plurilingual approach, and the potential initiation of a community of practice. While at an early stage of SYTL involvement, school-level developments include the organic nature of teacher participation in the programme, and the development of school-level partnerships with external organisations connected to language education. It is intended that the teacher-led school-level exploration of early-stage modern foreign language (MFL) engagement and practice in the context of emerging (education and) language policy for language and literacy teaching at school level can inform optimum MFL practice for the participating school- and other school contexts.

Languages at Primary: Teaching and Learning Context

The Teaching and Learning of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at Primary Level

In this study, the school undertook to participate in the *Say Yes to Languages* (SYTL) programme in the school year 2023-24. The SYTL is a language programme aimed at primary schools across Ireland to foster engagement modern foreign languages whereby schools opt in to teach an introductory module of language lessons over a number weeks at senior primary level. Facilitated and led by the Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI, 2024), and emanating from the national languages in education policy *Languages Connect* (Department of Education, 2017), the initiative is in its third year (2023-24) of the programme. The current year saw over 1200 participating schools and over 84,000 students take part (PPLI, 2024), which indicates a significant increase in uptake during its inception year two years ago (500 schools and 40,000 children in 2021-23 (Department of Education, 2023).

The SYTL initiative is considered an important opportunity to engage with MFL given the intention stipulated in the recent Primary Curriculum Framework (2023) to introduce MFL at senior primary level as part of an integrated languages curriculum. The draft MFL curriculum (NCCA, 2024) proposes the introduction of MFL from 3rd class onwards, with a focus on developing language awareness at 3rd and 4th class level which draws on children's existing linguistic funds of knowledge, and then progresses to a language competency model at 5th and 6th class whereby a school L3 is also introduced. The revised draft primary language curriculum to include MFL is one of five primary-level curriculum areas open to public consultation in the second quarter of 2024 (Department of Education, 2024).

Prior to Say Yes to Languages, MFL engagement at primary level is largely associated with the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI), a national MFL pilot initiative for primary schools which evolved over a 14-year period from 1998 to 2012. Schools/teachers at primary level opted in to teach French, German, Italian, or Spanish at 5th or 6th Class level on a weekly basis over the school year. The option of availing of a language tutor should a school not have capacity to teach languages was also available. Over 500 schools participated over the course of the initiative. During this time, a report exploring the feasibility of introducing MFL to the primary curriculum (NCCA, 2005) recommended a prudent approach to MFL introduction to the curriculum, and the implementation of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum before a recommendation could be made. Later, a review of the MLPSI (NCCA, 2008) advised against the continuation of the programme given the challenges to replicate the model across all schools, and concerns in relation to curriculum overload at that time. The introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy (Department of Education, 2011) prioritised curricular fundamentals as opposed to curricular expansion. In the context of these combined curricular considerations and developments, and amid challenging fiscal environment at the time, the MLPSI was brought to a close in 2012.

In a measured approach to curricular change, the feasibility report (NCCA, 2005) also committed to carrying out research in relation to English, Gaeilge (Irish), and modern languages in schools with a view to informing future recommendations in relation to language curriculum.

Indeed the primary curriculum review (NCCA, 2008) and synthesis of research on effective language teaching (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012), informed the initial integrated Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) in 2015 for English and Gaeilge evolving to the current PLC (2019). The question of MFL introduction at primary level was expertly explored in the background paper *Integrating modern foreign languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum* (Keogh-Bryan, 2019) which informed the current draft MFL curriculum and implementation.

European-level developments and guidance in language education (Council of Europe, 2018) also inform policy and practice in member states and beyond. More recently, the Council of Europe's recommendation on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education (Council of Europe, 2022) adopted by EU member states encourages a holistic approach to language education beyond language competence. The plurilingual approach recommended in the 2024 draft MFL curriculum (NCCA, 2024) is reflective of this.

School Context

The participating school, Scoil Chrónáin Senior National School is a coeducational senior primary school. Scoil Chrónáin is a progressive and dynamic school with a student cohort of 570 students. A large school with 24 classes across from 3rd to 6th, an additional three classes with smaller numbers support children with additional needs, Scoil Chrónáin is an inclusive school that also values linguistic and cultural diversity. 80% of students speak English as a first or shared first language at home and includes children of dual nationality. 20% of our pupils speak one or more home languages other than English. A quarter of the school's multilingual cohort are relatively new to Irish education, the majority of whom hail from the Ukraine. Children's and parents' countries of heritage include: Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Brazil, India, Bangladesh, Chile, China, Japan, Nigeria and the Philippines. The school community collectively boasts a wide range of linguistic repertoires and cultural funds of knowledge.

In terms of MFL engagement, the school participated in MLPSI in the late noughties, whereby a visiting teacher taught Spanish to children in 6th Class. The school had also initiated a programme of language taster classes for 6th class students towards the end of the summer term with a view to igniting MFL interest ahead of secondary, school, in addition to diversifying the 6th Class programme at a time when other curricular programmes are completed. The language taster programme is organised and taught by teachers on the staff who volunteer to teach an introductory lesson in a given MFL.

Participating Teachers' Experience of Say Yes to Languages

This section reflects on teacher engagement with the SYTL participation in the early part of the inaugural Autumn term. A new programme and school undertaking by a team of teachers across class levels, it was advised to stagger class level involvement over the three terms of the school year rather than all teach on the programme during a single prescribed term simultaneously. To that end, the initiative required team members to kickstart the school's graduated uptake. Two teachers in 5th class volunteered to engage with the programme at the beginning of the Autumn term which constituted the commencement of schoolwide project. Aspects of (i) SYTL engagement at class and school level and (ii) MFL pedagogy are explored in relation to the teaching experiences of both teachers who were the early adopters of the SYTL programme locally.

MFL Teaching Experience as Leverage in SYTL Early Engagement

Firstly, both teachers who undertook the SYTL initially drew on past experience of teaching an MFL at ab initio level for primary students. One teacher had been actively involved in the MLPSI teaching French over a number of years for example, while the second teacher had taught French as an extra-curricular activity at primary in recent years. Experience in MFL pedagogy and practice was thus evident in the teachers who were early adopters of the programme at school and class level. In setting about planning the sampler module, both teachers could readily review and adapt the PPLI resources available for SYTL, and critically engage with each other's evolving approaches and programme engagement as the weeks progressed. Drawing on each other's linguistic and pedagogical funds of knowledge and expertise at the outset, and as the weeks progressed, supported both teachers' early engagement with SYTL.

Lesson Flow and Curricular Accommodation

Navigating an already packed primary curriculum, a challenge at the outset for teachers was to squeeze the programme into the weekly timetable, and where possible align with the primary language curriculum, in addition to seeking opportunities for integration across the curriculum. The lesson time of one hour was integrated differently across the two fifth classes by each teacher. One teacher opted for a one-hour lesson inclusive of introductory music and song, and a language competency focus thereafter. Alternatively, a structure of two sessions- a forty-minute competency-based lesson early in the school week, followed by a brief revisit, and cultural min-lesson for 20 minutes later in the week was piloted in the second 5th Class. The overarching challenge lay in adjusting the weekly timetable to identify both integrated and discrete time for MFL whereby both teachers discussed and negotiated literacy and discretionary time allocations. This exploration resulted in establishing professional conversations in relation to negotiating the curriculum in terms of timetabling, and the lesson structure and flow of MFL teaching and learning both for the Autumn term, and in terms of informing and supporting school-level MFL planning and engagement.

Exploring a Plurilingual Approach

Having reviewed the objectives of the SYTL initiative (Department of Education, 2023), which in the context of school-level implementation underline the importance of generating awareness of the many languages spoken by fellow students at school and in the local community which in turn could "support greater inclusion and appreciation of diversity in society" (Department of Education, 2023, p.1). This overarching objective reflects the broad linguistic and cultural remit of SYTL whereby it acts as vehicle not merely to engage with one new language, but in doing so, to weave in the linguistic repertoires of participating classes and school communities. While both teachers undertook to teach different languages (French & Japanese), both programmes of teaching and learning were underpinned by the intention to also develop children's language awareness and intercultural competence in a holistic capacity whereby the new language was a catalyst of and support to the exploration the languages and cultures of each class.

Thus a plurilingual approach, as advocated by the Council of Europe Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018), provided common ground for both teachers to explore the linguistic diversity of their students in terms of lesson planning and structure. It is noted that if a plurilingual approach in language teaching and learning is to become a reality "each language taught at school must be a fully integrated part of each pupil's communicative experience from the very beginning" (Little & Kirwan, 2021, p.8). Supporting resources created by the Post-Primary Languages Ireland Primary Team (Post-Primary Languages Ireland Primary Team, 2021a; 20121b) provided a

framework and starting point for both teachers to enrich the introduction of a new class language. Both teachers utilised the Language Passport (Post-Primary Languages Primary Team, 2021a) in an integrated approach throughout the module and drew upon the supporting teacher notes and lesson ideas (Post-Primary Languages Ireland Primary Team, 2021b) which provided a menu of ideas and activities to further support the teaching of both French and Japanese in each class.

Initiating a Community of Practice

Both teachers' experience in MFL pedagogy empowered early engagement with the SYTL programme. Working collaboratively at this critical stage of school engagement, and ongoing programme engagement as the weeks progressed thereafter, provided the basis of a critical friendship. A dialogically- rich partnership which enabled each teacher to share emerging ideas and consider them in a "questioning but supportive manner" (Sullivan et al., 2016, p.53) was a constructive endeavour for both teachers' teaching progression and student experience of the programme. It is noted that teachers who participate in a professional learning community strive to improve student learning and achievement by engaging in collegial conversations about teaching and learning (Wennergren, 2015). This had occurred in the case of the two initiating teachers, which supported the co-construction and new knowledge (Dooly, 2008) in terms of emerging MFL pedagogy and practice at class level, and progressing to a shared responsibility and engagement with MFL practice at year group level. The collaborative professionalism of both teachers working together demonstrated potential as a starting point for the development of a future school MFL community of practice over time.

Emerging School-level developments Say *Yes to Languages* engagement

This section seeks to explore the evolving MFL practice at school level from a broader perspective inclusive of the school management team in order to identify emerging school-level developments to date. The principal developments observed include the organic nature of the progression of MFL practice in the school and the potential for teacher collaboration therein, and the development of partnerships between the school and external organisations connected to language teaching and learning.

An Organic, Bottom-Up Approach to SYTL Engagement

It was observed that the school's progression to the SYTL was an organic process. The preceding teacher-led language taster initiative for 6th classes was indicative of teachers' willingness to draw on their MFL skills and support the end-of-year programme for 6th Class students. In terms of the prospect of participating in SYTL which was shared with teachers in the summer term, the school witnessed a high level of response to the expression of interest with nine teachers coming forward voluntarily. This number increased further during the Autumn term.

Thus SYTL was initiated in the school through the formation of a team of willing practitioners to explore a new curricular area. The SYTL programme provided the platform to develop and explore collaborative practices and collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) amongst a newly emerging MFL community of practice. Given the challenges of lesson preparation and resource creation in MFL at primary (Malone, 2022) in addition to the newness of the proposed structure of an eight-lesson programme, the potential of collaborative practices as demonstrated by the initial two-teacher engagement sought to be explored further at school level.

Development of School-Level Partnership with external organisations to support SYTL engagement

The commitment of a team of initially nine teachers to participate in SYTL in 2023-24 led by early engagement with the programme by two fifth-class teachers, has culminated in the school's growing recognition of commitment to language education and the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages at primary level in Ireland. Post-Primary Languages Ireland extended support to the school cognisant of the fact that the school had the highest number of class-based teachers engaging with SYTL nationwide. For example, a PPLI Team Member attended a MFL meeting at the school in the Autumn to meet with and support participating and prospective teachers. The partnership led to further collaboration on MFL engagement, which progressed the co-writing of an article on the school's engagement in the programme (O'Toole et al., 2024). The school management team also supported a school membership of the Literacy Association of Ireland from Autumn in order to enrich and nourish the staff's engagement not just in MFL, but in language and literacy education more broadly. Members of the school team presented at the LAI annual conference in Autumn in relation to the school's evolving engagement with the SYTL programme. Finally, the school has also developed partnerships that have emanated from teaching and learning of specific languages as part of SYTL. The Embassy of Japan in Ireland for example, has collaborated with the school and acknowledged and celebrated engagement with Japanese as part of SYTL at the school. Partnership events include a visit by the Ambassador of Japan to the school to see a Japanese lesson and engage in a discussion with students, a sushi-making workshop for students organised by the Embassy, and a choir performance by the school choir at an official Embassy cultural celebration. This partnership has enriched the teaching and learning of Japanese for students by extending their learning beyond the language lesson to real-life participation with cultural events and integration with the community of Japanese language learners, and the Japanese community in Ireland.

Conclusion

This paper explored a senior primary school's early engagement phase with the SYTL programme. Developments in relation to MFL teaching at primary level in Ireland were firstly discussed prior to the introduction of the specific context of the participating school. The experience of participating teachers in SYTL engagement was then explored in relation to previous MFL experience of teachers, lesson flow and curricular accommodation, the exploration of a plurilingual approach and initiation of a community of practice. Emerging school-level developments were also examined. These included the observance of and support of the organic nature of SYTL programme uptake and participation by teachers, and the development of school partnerships with external organisations connected to language education. The exploration of teachers' experiences serves to inform fellow teachers who intend to engage with MFL via SYTL, and later as a curriculum subject, in addition to informing school-level practice, planning and policy. Furthermore, developments at teacher level and year level may evolve to influence school level practice- for example, the expansion of critical friendship between pairs of teachers to small groups of five or six teachers is recommended as step towards greater teacher collaboration (Wennergren, 2015). School-level developments underline the richness of the nature of the school team's voluntary engagement with the project within a school culture that supports teacher agency and collaboration. In addition, the early establishment of developing partnership with supporting organisations and agencies in language education serves to enrich MFL practice and policy at school and community level. Continued teacher reflection, school-level support, and constructive and enriching partnerships augur well for increased language and MFL engagement in the school- both in terms of evolving SYTL participation, and a longer-term commitment to readily engage with MFL as a curricular subject at senior primary level from 2025 in Ireland.

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Oral Reading Fluency in First Class: An Action Research Study

Aisling Cannon[10] & Gene Mehigan[11]

This paper examines the efficacy of teaching oral reading fluency in the context of mainstream classroom instruction in First Class and determines the impact of a fluency building programme on pupil's reading development. It is based on research carried out during a six-week intervention which sought to investigate the effects of introducing fluency building lessons on pupils' reading performance in First Class. The research was designed using an Action Research methodology where both quantitative and qualitative data informed the findings. Data were collected in the form of pupil baseline and progress assessments, feedback from pupils, parents and colleagues and a reflective journal kept by the researcher. The key findings indicated that fluency building instruction helped pupils to improve oral reading fluency and become more confident readers when introduced to discrete oral reading fluency development lessons. The teaching approaches examined in the study also had a particularly positive impact on children who were struggling to learn to read. As a result, teachers in First Class continue to incorporate the simple practices established in this research as part of regular reading instruction.

Keywords: *Oral Reading Fluency, First Class, Action Research*

Introduction

Reading fluency is an integral part of the complex reading process. The ability to read in a fluid and unrestricted manner requires the simultaneous coordination of various cognitive, linguistic and affective competencies. These competencies are typically developed in the early years of primary schooling when readers gradually learn to decode words rapidly and accurately. When reading aloud, fluent readers sound like they are talking. Their reading is accurate, quick, and has proper expression.

The organigram presented in Figure 1 provides an overview of the essential components of reading. It highlights the central role of reading fluency, alongside other crucial areas such as phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development and comprehension. In Figure 1, fluency is further broken down into its key features of accuracy, rate and prosody/expression. Hasbrouck and Glaser (2019) define reading fluency as **accurate** reading, at an appropriate **rate** and with suitable **expression**.

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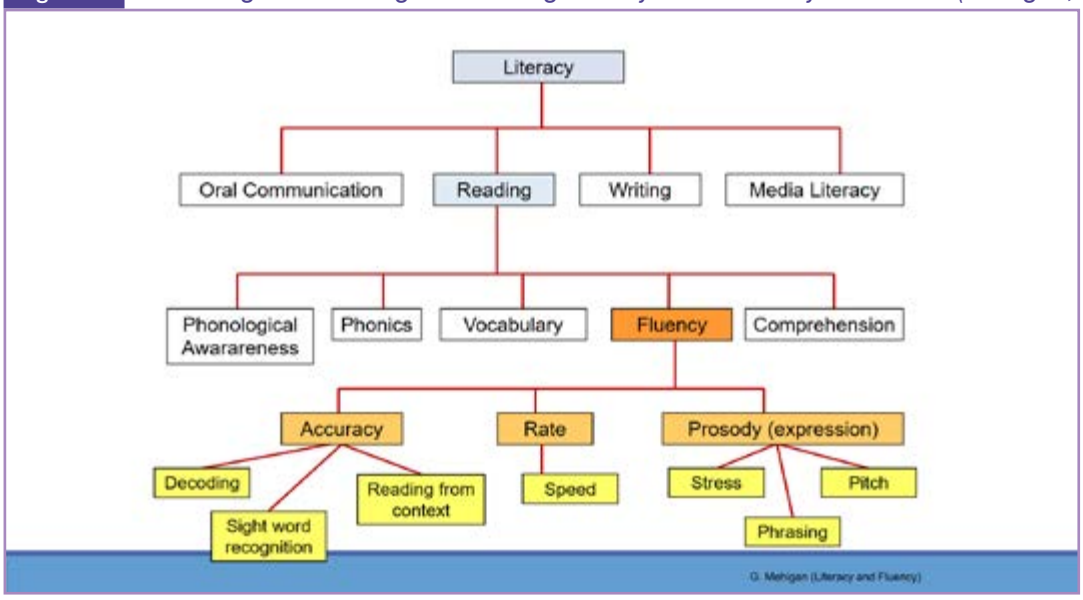
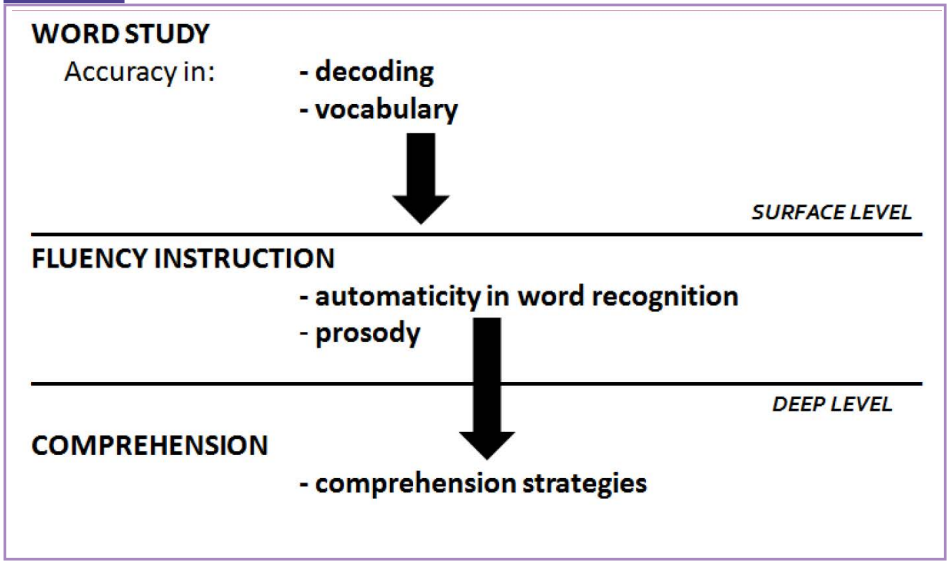
Figure 1 *Locating and defining oral reading fluency within literacy instruction (Mehigan, 2020)*



The teaching of reading fluency along-side other key elements of learning to read is important for two main reasons. Not only does it free up cognitive space to understand the text that has been read, but it also serves as a bridge from phonics to comprehension (Rasinski & Samuels, 2011). Less fluent readers need to allocate more resources to decoding in order to be able to read a piece of text. This can detract from the cognitive resources available to them to comprehend what they have read. When a child reads with fluency they have more resources available for comprehension (Kuhn et al., 2010; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Logan, 1997). In order to read fluently, readers need to be able to cohesively combine reading elements that ultimately allows them to obtain meaning from their text. It can be argued that fluency acts as a link between word study and comprehension. If we regard accuracy in decoding and vocabulary as *surface level* knowledge in the reading process and comprehension as *deep level* knowledge then instruction in fluency through attention to automaticity and prosody becomes the link between the two levels. Reading fluency is sometimes referred to as the 'bridge' from word recognition or word study to comprehension in early readers. This is best captured in Figure 2 where the arrows indicate the link from accuracy in decoding to comprehension (Mehigan, 2013).

Figure 2 *Oral Reading Fluency: Link between word study and comprehension (Mehigan, 2013)*



By the time children reach First or Second Class, they move from individual word decoding towards 'fluent-speech like reading' (Mehigan, 2020, p.2). A consistent finding is that beginning readers often spend much more time focusing on learning skills from a bottom-up approach, with the emphasis on phonics skills and decoding rather than oral reading fluency (Rasinski & Samuels, 2011). With that in mind, First Class is an optimal time to ensure high quality instruction is delivered in reading fluency, along-side other key components of reading. The next section of this paper describes a classroom-based study carried out in 2022. This study sought to determine whether a specific focus on oral reading fluency, at a whole class level, would have any impact on children's reading. The benefits will be discussed later. The paper concludes with offering some suggestions for teachers and practitioners who may wish to implement similar approaches in their own contexts.

Research Question

What are the effects of introducing discrete oral reading fluency lessons on pupils' reading fluency in First Class?

Research Methodology

The research was designed using an Action Research methodology where both quantitative and qualitative data informed the findings. Data were collected in the form of pupil baseline and progress assessments, pupil, parent and colleague feedback and a reflective journal kept by the researcher. The nature of this research project involved the researcher generating living theory (Whitehead, 2009) within their own educational context. This process involved the researcher learning new information about oral reading fluency from both theoretical and practical perspectives and then presenting the resulting ideas and concepts in the form of theory.

Action Research is known as practical research legitimising teachers' points of view of their own work. It is about creating new knowledge from what has been learned while also sharing this learning with others for evaluation and critique (Whitehead & McNiff Jean, 2011). Glenn et al. (2016) note that, 'it is important also to remember that an action research project is cyclical and, very often, rather than having a nice, neat solution at the end of the project, a whole new set of questions has emerged instead' (Glenn et al., 2016, p. 58). It is true that life is rarely predictable and, as teachers and researchers, we must always be prepared to accept and embrace the idea that our work is never complete. Through Action Research, we can learn to take on questions that may arise which offer us the opportunity to arrive at new levels of understanding, if they are pursued. With that in mind a simple three step research study was designed and pursued to offer some answers to the research question posed.

Research Study Procedure

Baseline fluency scores were established using the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) and Multi-Dimensional Fluency Rubric (MDFR) assessments.

Fluency building sessions took place each day for 10-15 minutes over a period of six weeks.

End of project data were collected using the ORF and MDFR and examined against the starting baseline assessment.

Key Findings of the Research Study

Fluency building instruction helps pupils to improve oral reading fluency.

In both assessments, there were improvements for all 22 children in the class who opted to have their results recorded for the purpose of the study. The average number of words read correctly per minute improved from 56 to 80, a difference of 24 words on average over the six-week period. This indicated that accuracy and rate in reading had improved in a relatively short amount of time. Referring back to the definition of oral reading fluency, as **accurate** reading, at an appropriate **rate** and with suitable **expression** (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019), expression in reading also needed to be quantified. To achieve this, the Multi-Dimensional Fluency Rubric (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) was administered. This assessment measures key features of prosody in reading such as, expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace. In all areas, improvements for all children were recorded. Most notable gains were made by the children who struggle most with reading at the beginning of the six week period.

Pupils became more confident and enjoyed reading when they were introduced to discrete oral reading fluency development lessons.

Using the reflective journal, the affective elements of reading were captured. This is an important piece of the research because the affective elements of reading have a direct impact on a child's motivation to read (Mehigan, 2020). Some of the comments captured in the reflective journal which give an insight into how the children, parents and colleagues were experiencing the intervention are included below. They give a snapshot of the joy and increased confidence in reading experienced by everyone participating in the study.

The children were content, happy and relaxed. I was struck by the children who have struggled with the transition to reading, volunteering to participate. (Colleague Feedback, 04/2022)
I went to my brother's training last night and I was practising (my reading) down the back because I knew it (the Fluency Café) was today. (Pupil Voice, 04/2022)
*I like reading with poems because we all want to make it good because we are going to do stuff with them (fluency café). (*Pupil Voice, 05/2022)
Thanks so much for bringing her out of her shell, it's been amazing to see her grow in confidence. She tells me she felt a 'party in her body' when she finished reading aloud! (Parent Voice, 04/2022)
Anna enjoyed 'directing' the script and assigning readers. It was very interactive and a different way to hear the story. (Parent Voice, Readers Theatre Script, 05/2022)

Pupils were inspired to write as a consequence of participating in oral reading fluency lessons.

Shanahan states, 'The key to adding fluency, or any other important element, to a classroom routine is to ensure that all the other essentials are addressed, too' (Shanahan, 2012). This link occurred somewhat organically as the children started to use the texts taught during fluency sessions as a springboard for their own writing. They creatively wrote their own versions of the texts entirely unprompted, making linkages from reading to writing naturally.

A Practical Approach: How to use Fluency Building Lessons in First Class

There is evidence in the present research study that providing instruction on oral reading fluency can improve children's accuracy, rate and expression. Further, children can experience benefits in the affective elements of learning to read, leading to increased motivation for reading (Mehigan, 2020). Below, details are shared on how the intervention worked in the current study.

To facilitate fluency lessons, each child had their own special fluency scrapbook where they pasted in their new text each day and read from for lessons and reading aloud.

Four new pieces of complete texts were used each week on Monday – Thursday, these included poems, songs and reader's theatre scripts.

Each day, for 10-15 minutes, specific fluency instruction took place using the Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) as set out in Figure 3 (Rasinski, 2003).

Each Friday morning, the classroom was transformed into a pretend café, complete with juice and biscuits. The teacher acted in role as a host and the children were invited to read aloud their chosen piece of text from that week, keeping in mind the features of expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace.

Figure 3 *Fluency Development Lesson (Rasinski, 2003)*

The FDL employs short reading passages (poems, story segments, or other texts) that students read and reread over a short period of time. The format for the lesson is:

1. Students read a familiar passage from the previous lesson to the teacher or a fellow student for accuracy and fluency.
2. The teacher introduces a new short text and reads it to the students two or three times while the students follow along. Text can be a poem, segment from a basal passage, or literature book, etc.
3. The teacher and students discuss the nature and content of the passage.
4. Teacher and students read the passage chorally several times. Antiphonal reading and other variations are used to create variety and maintain engagement.
5. The teacher organizes student pairs. Each student practices the passage three times while his or her partner listens and provides support and encouragement.
6. Individuals and groups of students perform their reading for the class or other audience.
7. The students and their teacher choose 3 or 4 words from the text to add to the word bank and/or word wall.
8. Students engage in word study activities (e.g. word sorts with word bank words, word walls, flash card practice, defining words, word games, etc.)
9. The students take a copy of the passage home to practice with parents and other family members.
10. Students return to school and read the passage to the teacher or a partner who checks for fluency and accuracy.

All lessons in the study were based on the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) which involved the teacher taking most of the responsibility for the reading at the beginning of the lesson, gradually working towards the children doing most and sometimes all of the reading by the end of the session.

In each fluency lesson, the Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) format (Rasinski, 2003) was employed to achieve this objective. The FDL is designed to help each child achieve fluency in a short space of time using a new text each day and it works well because of the high level of support involved. This is supported by the findings of Kuhn et al. who stated that 'It is the scaffolding of challenging texts provided through the FORI, Wide FORI, and FDL approaches, whether through repetition or modelling (e.g. the use of echo, choral, and partner reading), that allows students to read text that would otherwise be considered frustrating' (Kuhn et al., 2014, p. 79).

Echo reading refers to a teacher reading a line and the children reading it back, choral reading is where all children in the group/class read aloud together and antiphonal reading is where the class is divided into groups and each group is assigned a different piece of text to read aloud. In every lesson, repeated reading was used, and the same piece of text was read and re-read multiple times. The children then read aloud at home for their families each evening.

Conclusion

While a single study should not be used to exclusively inform reading practices of teachers, there are elements contained within this paper that may prove useful for teachers hoping to improve oral reading fluency in their classrooms. Introducing simple fluency strategies into regular classroom instruction such as echo reading, choral reading and antiphonal reading may help improve the reading fluency of children, leading to greater confidence, motivation and self-esteem in reading.

Action research is a helpful approach which prompts teachers to become curious about their own classroom approaches. We are reminded of the importance of slowness in a world which sees increased productivity as a standard to be achieved. There is merit in taking time to reflect and consider your own values in relation to your life and your work, particularly as a teacher (Glenn, 2021). Honoré (2013) emphasises that the more we become creative and emotionally engaged with our work, the more productive and satisfied we tend to become.

More than two years have passed since the initial research study and as we are once again reminded by (Glenn et al., 2016) a whole new set of questions emerge, and work is never complete. The work on oral reading fluency is still ongoing in the researcher's school with school policy now incorporating direct fluency instruction for all children in First and Second Class alongside all other essential components of learning to read. This continues to be monitored and assessed to measure the impact of fluency building lessons.

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