

***Cultivating plurilingual repertoires:  
a whole-school approach***

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# Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown

320 pupils from 4½ to 12+ years

Most had little or no English when they started school



80% from immigrant families

51 home languages, most of them unknown to teachers

Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, Bangla, Benin, Bosnian, Cantonese, Cebuano, Dari, Estonian, Farsi, Foula, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Igbo, Ilonggo, Indonesian, Isoko, Itsekiri, Italian, Kannada, Kinyarwanda, Konkani, Kurdish, Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Malay, Malayalam, Mandarin, Marathi, Moldovan, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Shona, Slovakian, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Visayan, Xhosa, Yoruba

# Cultivating plurilingual repertoires: a whole-school approach

- Know the curriculum
- Know the characteristics and needs of the pupil cohort
- Engage with the whole school community
- Trust the teachers
- Trust the pupils

# Know the curriculum

## Principles underpinning the Primary School Curriculum

- *“...to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realize his or her potential as a unique individual”* (Government of Ireland, 1999: 7)
- *“...to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society”* (Ibid.: 7)
- Language *“helps the child to clarify and interpret experience, to acquire new concepts, and to add depth to the concepts already grasped”* (ibid.: 15)
- *“... the child is an active agent in his or her learning”* (ibid.: 8)
- *“... the life of the home is the most potent factor in [the child’s] development during the primary school years”* (ibid.: 24)

# Know the pupils

## Implications for the inclusion of EAL pupils (English as an Additional Language)

- The Primary School Curriculum assumes a strong link between school and home
- EAL pupils have lived their pre-school years mostly in a language other than English/Irish
- Their home language is central to their sense of self, the default medium of their discursive thinking, ever present in the unspoken stream of their consciousness
- To suppress home languages is cruel, foolish and doomed to failure (Little 2020)
- If EAL pupils are to “*realize their full potential as unique individuals*”, ways must be found of including their home languages in the educational process

# Know the pupils

## Implications for the inclusion of EAL pupils (English as an Additional Language)

- The Primary School Curriculum assumes a strong link between school and home

Dealing with linguistic diversity is less about new programmes and more about being flexible in using current practices to include what the learners bring with them, i.e., their home language. This is the cognitive tool that is their default means of learning, the cognitive tool that they cannot help but bring to their learning

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# Engage with the whole school community

- *“The exercise of democracy and social inclusion depends in part on language education policy”* (Council of Europe 2007: 9)
- To ensure that **all** pupils gain full access to education, which means helping them to become proficient in the language of schooling
- To exploit linguistic diversity for the benefit of **all** pupils by implementing an integrated approach to language education that embraces the language of schooling, languages of the curriculum (Irish and French), and home languages.



# Engage with the whole school community

Including teachers, ancillary staff, parents and Board of Management in dialogue leading to decision-making promotes social cohesion within the school and among the school community. With regular communication and authentic involvement of all interested parties, the opportunities for learning presented by linguistic diversity for *all* pupils become increasingly apparent

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# Trust the teachers

- *“When you bring in home languages, the lights come on!”*
- In Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) pupils are encouraged to use their home languages autonomously for whatever purposes seem to them appropriate, inside as well as outside the classroom
- Classroom discourse that includes home languages begins the process of activating the plurilingual repertoires of ***all*** learners
- When they are unknown to the teacher, home languages can perform three functions in classroom discourse
  - As the medium of reciprocal communication between pupils with the same or closely similar home languages
  - For purposes of display: “This is what we say in my language”
  - As a source of linguistic intuition and insight
- Benefits ***all*** pupils

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Inclusion of home languages and learning through dialogue supports secure identity formation of pupils, development of plurilingual repertoires, and learner autonomy

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  - As a source of linguistic intuition and insight
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# Trust the pupils

- Key features of the innovative approach to language learning developed in Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) are rooted in a view of primary education that is child-centred so 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
- When pupils are activated to be agents of their own learning, their ability to direct and evaluate their learning becomes increasingly apparent as they move through the school
- Finally, 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.

# Trust the pupils

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Even very young children can be trusted to know how to use their home language autonomously as a tool of learning. Developing oral proficiency, literacy and language awareness is a complex process, in which reading and writing support listening and speaking and *vice versa*. Language awareness is a tool to support learning but also one of learning's most valuable outcomes, and it develops spontaneously when pupils make autonomous use of the languages at their disposal.

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# Outcomes

## **Pupils**

- achieve high levels of age-appropriate literacy in English, Irish, French and (in the case of EAL pupils) home languages, this last without benefit of instruction
- develop unusual levels of language awareness
- undertake ambitious language-related projects on their own initiative

## **The Irish language**

- Raised status / pupils using Irish for communication purposes
- Because it is a new language for all pupils it creates a level playing pitch for all
- School ranked in top 12% nationally for teaching and learning of Irish

## **Social Cohesion**

Inclusion of home languages in the educational process promotes pupil self-esteem, well-being and social cohesion

## **Standardised tests**

In annual tests of Maths and Reading the school consistently performs above the national average

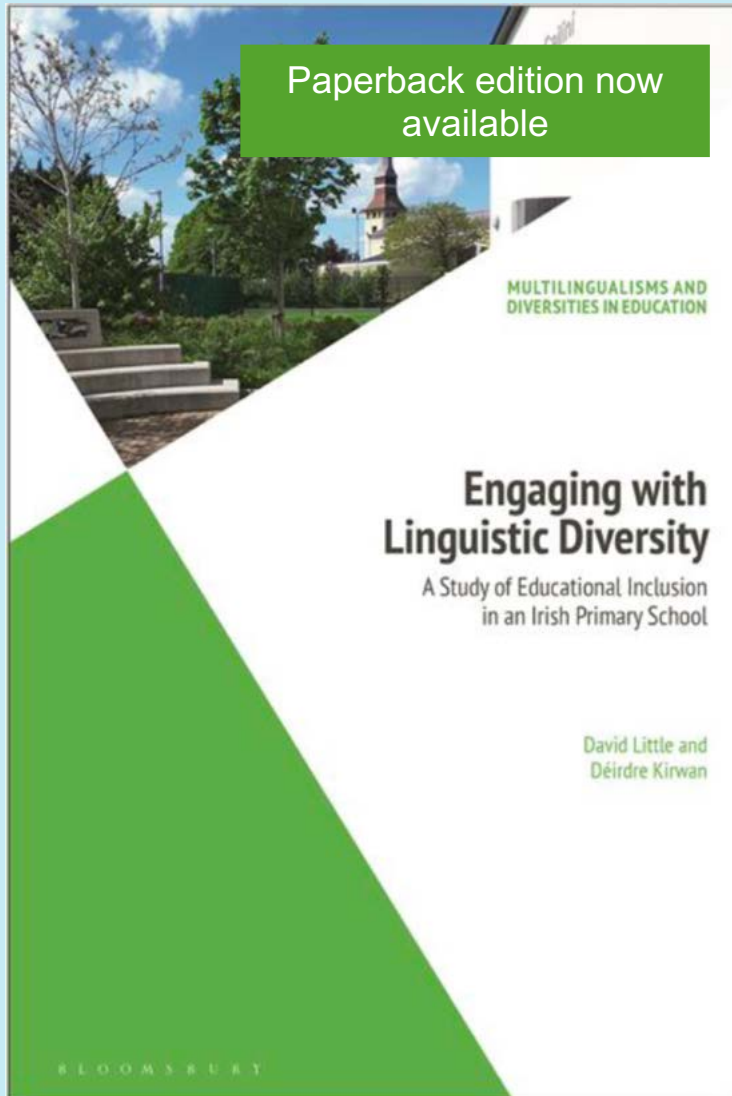
# Language learning in Europe

- 2017 the **European Union** confirmed the goal of **Mother Tongue + 2**
- 2018 **European leaders agreed** on this objective
- 2020 the European Commission **issued two reports:**

European Commission's (2020) NESET\* Report. *The future of language education in Europe: case studies of innovative practices*. The foreword, referring specifically to Ireland is on pp. 24, 25 and is entitled: Foreword: an example of innovative instructional approaches to language-sensitive teaching. \*Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training  
[https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NESET\\_AR\\_2020\\_Future-of-language-education\\_Full-report.pdf](https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NESET_AR_2020_Future-of-language-education_Full-report.pdf)

European Commission (2020) *Education begins with language*. The section on *Valuing linguistic diversity* also refers to work in Ireland on pp. 14, 15. Publications Office of the European Union  
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6b7e2851-b5fb-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-148560937>

# If you want to know more



- Describes the national context
- Traces the development of Scoil Bhríde's plurilingual approach to primary education
- Explores in detail the impact of this approach on classroom discourse, pupils' literacy development, and their capacity for autonomous learning
- Draws on a wealth of practical evidence to illustrate arguments, paying particular attention to pupils' and teachers' voices
- Considers issues of sustainability and replication and implications for teacher education



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