

## **One school, fifty languages: converting linguistic diversity into educational capital**

Déirdre Kirwan PhD

Former principal, Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown, Dublin

# 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

# What about home languages?

- Children's 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)
- *Iceberg* – Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis: transference of language skills and learning strategies to other languages (Cummins 1979)

# Two overarching educational goals

- *“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.

# School policy: four principles

- **Inclusive ethos:**
  - the school welcomes the diversity of its pupil population and acknowledges that each pupil has much to contribute to her own education (autonomy, identity, 'action knowledge')
- **Open language policy:**
  - no restrictions placed on pupils' use of their home languages at school, whether inside or outside the classroom (agency, 'action knowledge')
- **Strong emphasis on development of language awareness:**
  - home languages treated as a resource for all learners
- **Strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills in English, Irish, French and home languages:**
  - writing and speaking support one another in many different ways; importance of parental involvement in their daughters' literacy development.

# Outcomes

## **Language**

- 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

## **Learner autonomy**

Pupils undertaking ambitious language projects on their own initiative

## **The Irish language**

Raised status for Irish language

New perception of Irish language by children – using it for communication purposes

School ranks in top 12% nationally for teaching and learning of Irish

## **Social Cohesion**

The 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

# **Examples from the classroom**

## Junior Infants: age 4 - 5

- Teachers cultivate a secure, nurturing classroom environment
- Pupils encouraged to:
  - express themselves using whatever language comes naturally to them;
  - share words and phrases in their own language(s) relevant to topics under discussion;
  - use English, Irish, and/or their home language when carrying out tasks that support the learning of the various concepts encountered in primary school



# Senior Infants: age 5 - 6

Classroom displays include the home languages of pupils

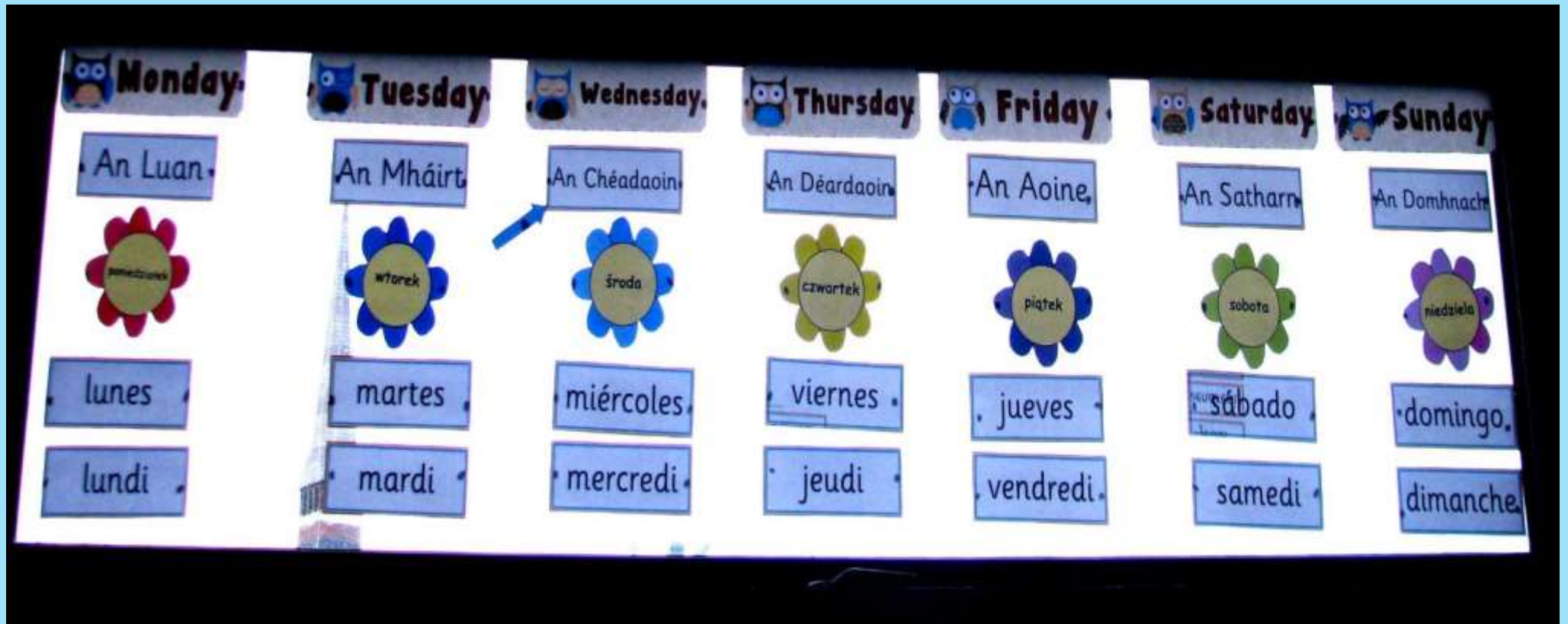
English

Irish

Polish

Spanish

French



Teachers provide worksheets that can be completed using English, Irish and home languages

Draw pictures of food.  
Write the names in Irish  
and English



Bread  
arán



Cornflakes  
gráinín



Egg  
ubh



Sugar  
súicr



Milk  
Bainne



Chocolate  
seachtóid

English  
and  
Irish




English and Polish

## First Class: age 6 - 7

- Translation of key words and phrases into home language(s) is a regular feature of classroom interaction
- Emergence of language awareness
- Texts in two languages: English and Irish; English/Irish and home language

Food Bia ഭക്ഷണം  
 I like to eat egg.  
 ഞനിക്കു മുട്ട തിന്നാൻ  
 ഇഷ്ടമാണ്  
 My favourite fruit is apple  
 ഞനൻ്റെ ഇഷ്ടഫലം ആപ്പിളാണ്  
 My favourite vegetable is  
cucumber  
 ഞനൻ്റെ ഇഷ്ട പച്ചക്കറി  
 കക്കരിലാണ്  
 Coconut comes from  
 my country. തേങ്ങകൾ  
 ഞങ്ങളുടെ നാട്ടിൽ നിന്നും വരുന്നു


 I am Seven years old  
 I am from Latvia and my town is called Riga  
 I Love To Wear a cap.  
 Я люблю есть яблочки.  
 Я люблю свою маму и папу  
 Мой Папа и Моя Мама любят меня тоже

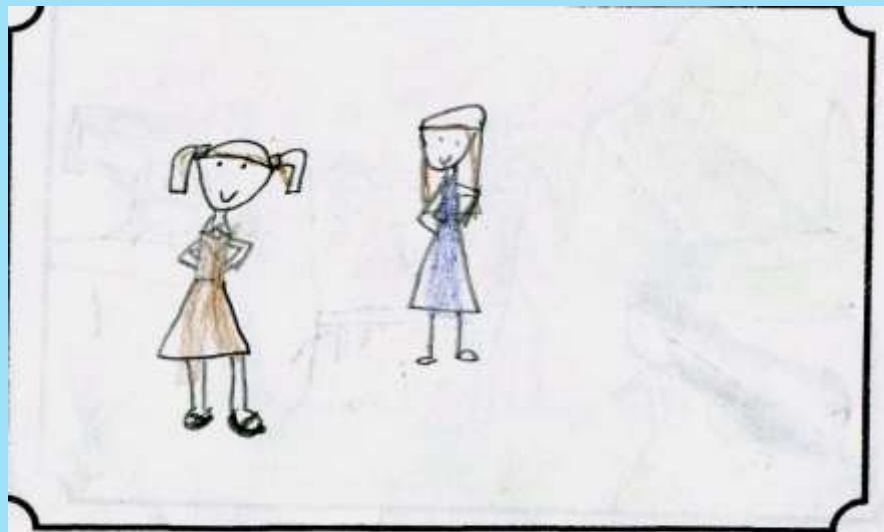
English and Russian

English and Malayalam

## Second Class: age 7 - 8

- A more elaborate approach to written composition in English
  - Choose a topic
  - Write a first draft
  - Revise the draft
  - Present it to the teacher for final correction
  - Read the draft aloud to the class
- Dual-language texts become more elaborate, e.g., extract from 'My Life'

## Extract from "My Life" in English and Spanish



I like to play.

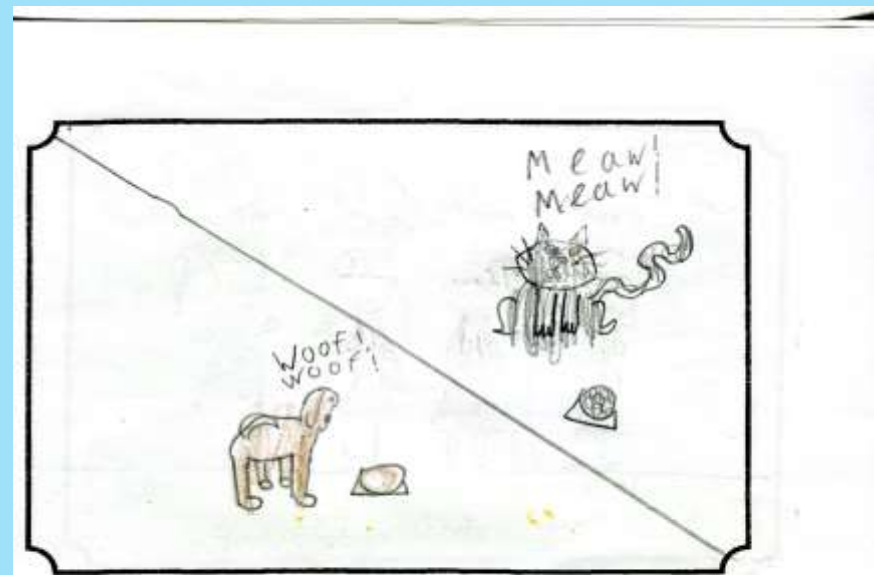
Me gusta jugar

I like my sister.

Yo quiero a mi hermana

I like to go to the zoo

Me gusta ir al zoológico



I like dogs and cats

Me gustan los perros y los gatos.

I like to sing

Me gusta cantar.

I have pet fish

Yo tengo peces



# Third Class: age 8 - 9

## Fourth Class: age 9 - 10

- Dual-language texts become disciplined and more elaborate
- Some children start to write in three languages
- Children from English-speaking homes show an interest in writing in three languages
  - They may get help learning a third language from an older sibling who is learning a foreign language at secondary school or from a fellow pupil

Bhí mé sa pháirc. Bhí  
mé ag scátáil. Thit mé ar  
an talamh. Bhí brón orm.

Thosaigh mé ag cas  
Thit mé ar maighéin  
cos agus ceann. Ghlac  
Mam 999. Tháinig an  
otharchair. Bhí mo ch  
Chuir an bhanaltra  
brindealóir mo rúitín. Chua  
mé abhaile agus shuigh  
síos sa seomra codlata.

Irish

I was in the park. I was  
skating. I fell on the  
ground. I was sad. I began  
to cry. I fell on my knees,  
ankles, foot and head. Mam called  
999. The ambulance came.  
My foot was  
put a bandage  
I went home  
down in the

English



A parkban vagyok. Épp görkorisom. Leestem. Szomorú  
Vagyok. Sírrok. Megvittém a: térdem, a bokám, hasam és a fejem.  
Anyá hívta a: 999-et. A mentő autó jött. Elköttem a  
lábam! A nővér be kötötte a lábam. Haza mentem és  
be ültem a szobámban.

Hungarian



A pupil from a Filipino family wrote her dog Oliver's diary in Irish

6.2.2015

Oliver 🐾 🐾

Oliver

Bhí Oliver sa pháirc.  
Bhí an cat sa pháirc freisin.  
Thosaigh Oliver agus an cat ag  
sugraoth, agus tith Oliver sa  
chóill.  
Déan deifir!" arsa Oliver.  
"Ag teacht!" arsa an cat.  
Tá éis tamail, chonaic an  
cat an feist ar an talamh.  
"Mama tá aras am" arsa an  
cat.  
Bhí Oliver foin gearr, agus chonaic  
se iora rua, agus chonaic an iora rua  
Oliver, Thosaigh Oliver ag tith.  
"Stop, stop!" arsa an cat.  
Foin an iora rua ar an gearr.  
Thosaigh Oliver ag tairn.  
Tá éis tamail bhí tairse ar  
Oliver agus an cat, agus bhí siad  
ina coddala.

Ok O. Loto achicha!

① Enuserem stu mpekele achicha.

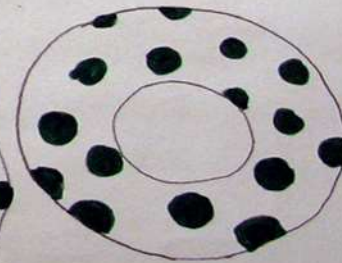
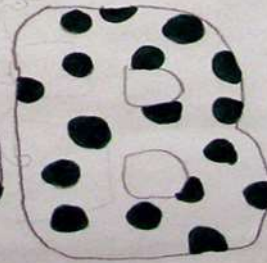
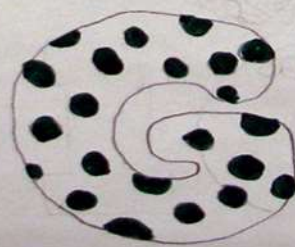
② Etinyerem ihe uto MManu na achicha.

③ Etinyerem Letus, tomato, ches na ham nime achicha.

④ Etinyerem stu mpekele achicha nielu.

⑤ Uglaua, enuserem .ok o. loto achicha maramma.

⑥ Uto!!!



Can you find the word in Igbo that means 'bread' in English?

Fifth Class: age 10 - 11

Sixth Class: age 11 - 12

### **Pupils**

- begin to learn French: another language in which to express curriculum content
- Pupils begin to teach themselves new languages
- Pupils improvise dramas to show how similarities between some languages allow speakers of those languages to understand one another
- Pupils draw on all the languages at their disposal to translate a Latin Christmas carol

ridere

Dormi Jesu

Dormi Jesu! Mater ridet

<sup>dolci</sup>

Quae tam dulcem somnum videt,

Dormi Jesu blandule!

Si non dormis, Mater plorat

Inter filia cantans orat

Blande, veni, somnule

dormitory

dormir

Mater Misericordiae

Maternity

சாந்த  
chanter

EN

12:17

19/11/2014



Curriculum content:  
French  
Irish  
English  
Romanian

# Map of France



4/2/12

## Le temps

An nord il pleut  
Sa tuisceart tá sé plúch  
In north it is raining ✓  
In nord plouă

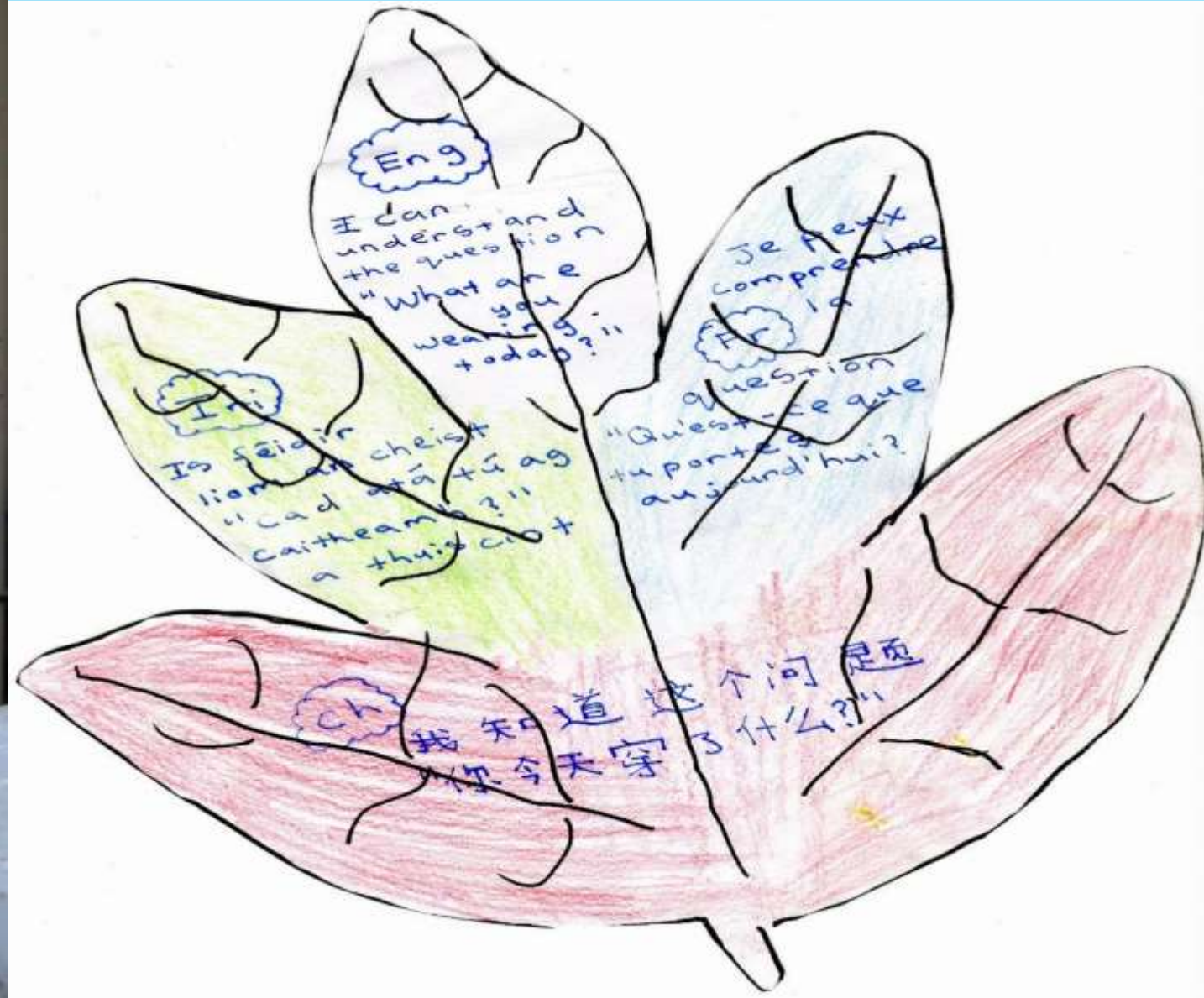
A l'ouest il y a du vent  
San iarthair tá sé gasfar  
In <sup>the</sup> west it is windy ✓  
In vest este vânt

Au sud il fait beau  
Sa deisceart tá an ghrian  
ag taitneamh  
In <sup>the</sup> south it is sunny and  
cloudy ✓  
In sud este înorat cu soare

A l'est <sup>il</sup> est nuageux  
San airthair tá sé ag  
scamallach ✓



## Self-assessment is introduced



## Report on a visit to the local post- primary school

### Cuairt ar an Meánscoil

Chuaigh mé agus mo chlann go dtí Pobal Scoil Mhín. Talagang yumao sa gabi. Nous avons vu beaucoup filles e garçons. 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 une piece . Thosaigh said ag scoilt ar na páistí. Si Rainmay, si Petra ,at si Anais 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 a propos de volcan sur le tableau . We also saw a bit of Romeo and Juliet . Four of my neighbours were part of the play.

English, Irish, French, Tagalog



Writing a  
story in  
English using  
as many  
French words  
as possible

### 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 successful. **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.



## A fictitious model described in English, Irish, French, and Mandarin

My name is Marceline. I am 15 years old. I am in Holly star High. I am not that girly. I do alot of sports.

My favorite Is mise Marceline. Tá mé cuicig bhliain

many trophies deag d'ois. Tá mé a

like the colour Star high. Nil fíor co

you think is liom spórt. Is aoibh

my friends! Bhuaigh mé a lán to

with them Is aoibhin liom na da

with them! aqua. Is aoibhin liom

of my story mé igronaí siopadóireac

agus ag scatail le m

Bain taitneamh astu!

Je m'appelle Marceline. J'ai

Je vais à l'école "Holly Star

J'aime le sport. J'adore le bas

J'ai gagné beaucoup de J'ad

couleurs bleu et aqua. J'adore

amis - je fais le magasin tou

Je vais avec mon ami

Amusez-

我的名字是 Marceline. 我今年 15 岁.

我在 "Holly Star High" 上学. 我不是一个

girly girl. 我很喜欢运动. 我最喜欢

的是篮球! 我 ying 了很多的 jiang

杯. 我很喜欢蓝色和水蓝色真

的很漂亮! 我非常喜欢我的同

学和朋友! 我 jing 常和我的同学出去

gou wu. 有的时候 hou 和他们 hua

bān.

Enjoy!

Pupils' reflections: without home language

*closed; not fair; terrible; not able to speak; empty;  
wouldn't understand; pretending; rejecting;  
devastated; shocking; without an arm or a leg;*

*a child without a language is a child without a soul*

Pupils' reflections: with home language

*possibilities; advantage; exploring; yes!;  
personal; friendship; knowledge; expanding;  
closer; warm; spark; point of view;  
perspective; together; help; learn; supports;  
great; speak out; be courageous*

- *[it allows us] 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. (Kurdish L1)*
- *Sometimes when we learn a language it's easier to learn other ones; sometimes it's not really about which language you're learning it's, like, how to learn a language. (English L1)*
- *When two people speak the same language there's a kind of bond between both of them (Yoruba L1)*

# Language learning in Europe

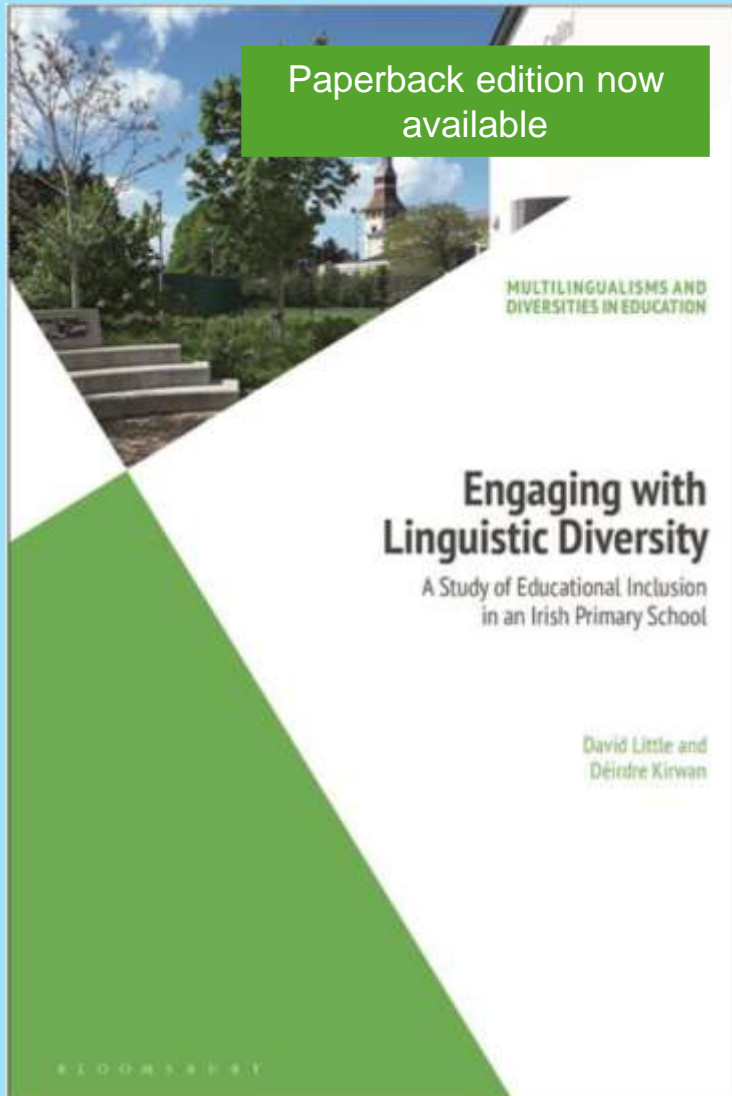
- 2017 the **European Union** confirmed the goal of **Mother Tongue + 2**
- 2018 **European leaders agreed** on this objective
- 2020 the European Commission **issued two reports:**

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

# References

Barnes, D. (1976) *From Communication to Curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe (2007) *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe

Cummins, J. (1979) 'Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children', *Review of Educational Research* 49 (2): 222-251.

Government of Ireland (1999) Government of Ireland (1999) *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*. Dublin: Stationery Office. <https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/93de2707-f25e-4bee-9035-92b00613492e/Introduction-to-primary-curriculum.pdf>

Little, David & Déirdre Kirwan. (2021 paperback) *Engaging with Linguistic Diversity: A Study of Educational Inclusion in a Primary School*. London: Bloomsbury.