



*Newcomer pupils in the  
post-primary context*

*Challenges and opportunities*

Joint North South conference  
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Malahide, Co. Dublin

A North South initiative  
funded by



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# INTRODUCTION

Since 2004 there has been ongoing north south collaboration focused on the needs of newcomer pupils and students, their teachers and the school communities of which they become members. This collaboration, initially between the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), began by examining the situation in primary education.

Following consultation with principals and teachers from both sides of the border, including meetings, a conference and workshop, *A Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School (2007)* was produced jointly. This became the first educational resource to be distributed to every primary school on the island of Ireland by the Department of Education (N.I.) and the Department of Education and Science (R. of I.).

The current collaboration, between the Inclusion and Diversity Service (N.I.) and the English Language Support Programme of the Trinity Immigration Initiative (R. of I.) builds on these earlier activities with the focus now upon post-primary education.

We wish to thank SCoTENS for providing the funding which initiated this rich collaboration and has allowed us to continue with this important work.

The Trinity Immigration Initiative (English Language Support Programme) also thanks Allied Irish Banks for their funding support; Gill and Macmillan for their cooperation and permission to reproduce text from their publications; and ASTI for supporting and promoting the ELSP.

**Mary Yarr** (Inclusion and Diversity Service) **Barbara Lazenby Simpson** (Trinity Immigration Initiative)  
**Ray Gilbert** (Inclusion and Diversity Service) **David Little** (Trinity Immigration Initiative)

# PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT



## Inclusion and Diversity Service

[www.education-support.org.uk/teachers/ids/](http://www.education-support.org.uk/teachers/ids/)

The Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) is an amalgamation of the previous EAL / Ethnic Minority Teams from the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland. It is responsible for supporting schools (both primary and post-primary) in providing for the needs of pupils and parents for whom English is not the first language.

Support is provided both regionally and to individual schools. At a regional level the IDS informs and guides Beginning Teachers, Boards of Governors, and Classroom Assistants. It is also responsible for the rollout throughout Northern Ireland of the Primary Toolkit, Post Primary Pilot as well as developing Intercultural Awareness and participating in International Collaboration.

The IDS also provides school-based support in relation to the pastoral needs of newcomer students, basic language needs, the deployment of personnel, curriculum support and assessment of students' progress.

## Trinity Immigration Initiative

### English Language Support Programme

[www.elsp.ie](http://www.elsp.ie)



The English Language Support Programme for Post-primary schools (ELSP) is part of the Trinity Immigration Initiative: a Research Programme on Diversity, Integration and Policy ([www.tcd.ie/immigration](http://www.tcd.ie/immigration)) which is based in Trinity College Dublin.

The ELSP follows work carried out by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (2000-2008) and was motivated by concerns that, for migrant students entering post-primary education, the challenge of subject learning through English imposed considerable constraints on the ultimate potential of the students as well as creating additional pressures on subject teachers.

In order to address this challenge the ELSP has developed a website which is openly available to all teachers and which contains a large collection of subject-based and language-based resources for post-primary use. The development of this website is ongoing.

The English Language Support Programme also published a report in May 2009 entitled *A report on English Language Support in Post-Primary Schools* by Zachary Lyons and David Little.

# CURRENT SITUATION NORTHERN IRELAND

The School Census conducted in October 2007 by the Department of Education (DE Northern Ireland) reported a total of 5665 pupils in all schools for whom English was not their first language. This total included pupils at all levels, from nursery to post-primary schools, and included special schools. The majority of pupils fell within Years 1-7 of primary education. At the time of the census there were 1714 pupils in post-primary schools who 'have significant difficulties with the English language and require additional support' (source of definition [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk))

The Inclusion and Diversity Service commenced operation in September 2007 as a regional support service which aims to build capacity within the education system to support newcomers at all levels in all schools. In developing a strategic plan for the service, existing expertise, resources and examples of good practice were adopted as a foundation. In addition, further important services were put in place. These included translation and interpretation for schools, teacher training, and the Education Support website which is available in all the main home languages of newcomer families. In January 2008 Inclusion and Diversity Coordinators were based directly in more than 90 schools.

The Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School, developed on the basis of north south collaboration, was launched in 2007 and has been rolled out across primary schools in Northern Ireland.

The Post-primary Programme began in January 2008 with the establishment of 9 cluster groups of schools. The Programme, which involves working with teachers from the schools, has taken thematic areas as the focus for development. The themes include *A whole school approach*, *Induction and the Early Days*, *Cross-curricular monitoring and provision*, and *Preparation for examinations*. Professional development has also been provided for Heads of Departments in schools on the challenge of ensuring curriculum access to subject learning for newcomer pupils.

Funding for the Inclusion and Diversity Service is provided by the Department of Education. In addition *per capita* funding is provided to schools to support the development of human and educational resources. The Department of Education has recently published a policy document entitled 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils'.

# CURRENT SITUATION

## REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The population census carried out in 2006 indicates that there were 117,635 young people under 19 years of age in Ireland who were not born in the state (CSO, 2006). This increase in population is not evenly distributed. Schools in some parts of the country are experiencing a fall in enrolment, while others have difficulty in coping with the increase in demand for places .

In February 2008, the then Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, pointed out that post-primary schools in Ireland were educating over 17,000 students from 160 nationalities. Between them these students spoke 150 different languages. This situation brings both a fundamental change and a challenge to Irish post-primary education.

Educational policy requires that all children between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend full-time education and are entitled to continue their education until the age of 18.

Newcomer students entering post-primary education are, in accordance with policy, entered into the age-appropriate year. If their English-language proficiency is considered insufficient to allow them to engage with learning at this level, they may be placed one year lower. The Department of Education and Science distributed an Assessment Kit to all post-primary schools early in 2009. This Kit is designed to support assessment of students' English-language proficiency on entry to the school as well as providing a means of monitoring progress.

The Department of Education and Science allocates additional hours for the provision of Language Support teachers in accordance with the number of students requiring such support in the school. Language Support may be carried out in the classroom or on a small-group withdrawal basis. DES Circular 0053/2007 states that key features of effective language support provision include a defined whole-school policy in relation to the identification of pupils requiring support, assessment of pupils' levels of language proficiency, programme planning, recording and monitoring of pupils' progress, and communication with parents.

Success and achievement in education is dependent on the ability to use the language of instruction to engage with formal curriculum learning; to carry out self-study; to perform appropriately in informal tests and formal examinations; and to develop a well-rounded personality through socialization with peers and all others in the community of the school.

Newcomer students spend the greater part of their week in subject classrooms. It is clear that a priority, and indeed an educational right, is the acquisition of the English-language skills which will allow them to perform in accordance with their overall academic ability.

The English Language Support Programme of the Trinity Immigration Initiative has launched a website, which is freely available to teachers, as a means of making language and subject support material available to language support teachers, mainstream subject teachers and students.

For further information see Lyons, Z. and Little, D. *English Language Support in Irish Post-Primary Schools Policy, challenges and deficits*. Trinity College Dublin, May 2009. [www.elsp.ie](http://www.elsp.ie)

# CONFERENCE RATIONALE

Sharing experiences and ideas on a north south basis provides a rich and inspirational platform with obvious potential for further collaboration. There are many similarities in the challenges faced by the educational systems of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There are also differences in approach which provide food for discussion and reflection.

The purpose of the conference was to bring together school principals, teaching practitioners, curriculum designers, materials developers, researchers and lecturers in the area of post-primary education as a means of sharing, discussing and examining mutual challenges.

The conference programme was designed to allow exploration of a number of different issues ranging from the broader whole-school level to the more detailed level of individual actions and projects.

## Speakers and sessions

Welcome:	Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies
Keynote Speaker:	Joseph Sheils, Head of Department of Language Education and Policy, Council of Europe, Strasbourg
A Whole School Approach:	Ethna Kelly, Vice-Principal, St. Benedict's College, Randalstown
An Irish Medium Perspective:	Dr. Seán McCorraidh, Adviser for Irish Medium Education, NI
Workshops:	Dr Zachary Lyons, Trinity Immigration Initiative: English Language Support Programme Joanne Glasgow, Inclusion and Diversity Service Ethna Kelly, St. Benedict's College, Randalstown Glenda Crockett and Katie Loughran, Inclusion and Diversity Service
Plenary summary and discussion:	Professor David Little, Trinity College, Dublin

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Joseph Sheils**, Head of Department of Language Education and Policy, Council of Europe, Strasbourg

The keynote address set the scene for the entire conference with a challenging and thought-provoking presentation.

The speaker highlighted the conflicts which may exist in educational systems between opposing forces such as humanistic and utilitarian goals and national traditions and the internationalisation of education. He emphasised that full access to the school curriculum entails mastery of the language of schooling. He reminded us that language learning is always part of subject learning, and vice versa, so that learning the subject content of any subject requires specific language competences. He drew attention to the differences between the language necessary for Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and the time that a language learner requires to develop these different language skills.

Based on PISA and other studies, he pointed out that immigrant students are motivated learners with positive attitudes towards school; they tend to perform less well in science, mathematics and reading; and will often lag one year to eighteen months behind the native-speaking peer group.

Research into migrant policy has shown that successful educational outcomes arise from the provision of systematic language support, with clearly defined goals and standards, from kindergarten to post-primary level. Curriculum documents should be based on language development frameworks with benchmarks to promote and monitor progress.

Joseph Sheils also drew attention to the importance of a student's mother tongue. The Council of Europe recommends that home languages should be supported. They are important markers of identity. Evidence also shows that the implementation of bilingual programmes has no adverse affect on academic development in the majority language.

He pointed out that language competences are expected by the curriculum and students are entitled to have appropriate learning experiences and opportunities. They have a right to appropriate forms of evaluation and to support for the development of their plurilingual repertoire.

In conclusion he proposed that there should be an overarching vision of language education with a holistic and coherent approach to all languages. He viewed the school Principal as having a key role in promoting a coherent language policy at school level which would ensure that language would become a transversal instrument for learning.



# PLENARY PRESENTATION

**Ethna Kelly**, Vice-Principal , St. Benedict's College, Randalstown

Ethna Kelly's presentation entitled 'Developing a Whole School Approach' explained in detail how St. Benedict's College has addressed the challenge of creating an inclusive environment which has had a positive impact on many aspects of school policy and management.

Starting with the induction process for new students, she described how information and communication with parents is supported by documentation which is clear and easily accessed by non-English speakers. The physical environment reflects the inclusive ethos with the use of appropriate signage and the availability of bi-lingual dictionaries. Interpretation and translation services are used and school assemblies promote diversity, equality and inclusion.

Students are supported in the early days through classroom interventions which include the use of visual timetables, keyword booklets and on-going observation of each student's ability to interact from the earliest time.

Staff throughout the school are involved and have roles to play in promoting school policy. Contact is also made with feeder primary schools so that the transition of pupils is carried out with the least possible disturbance to their progress and educational development. Throughout, parents are seen as key participants in the educational process.

Language support is provided for newcomer students on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The language support teacher maintains records of each student's progress and liaises with the Co-ordinator and other support teachers. St. Benedict's College is part of a cluster group of similar schools where examples of good practice are shared. Learning intentions and success criteria are also shared. Where appropriate, alternatives to statutory English examinations are provided.

In relation to assessment, teachers are involved in adapting Schemes of Work to meet the particular needs of newcomer children. Arrangements are made for choices to be made at the end of key stages/ cycles of learning and visits by careers officers and outside agencies support students in making decisions about the future.

The school promotes and celebrates all its languages and provides opportunities for students to share cultural experiences and use their home languages.

# PLENARY PRESENTATION

**Dr Seán Mac Corraidh**, Regional Advisor on Irish-medium Education for the Education and Library Boards

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh began his presentation by drawing comparisons between the context of Irish-medium education and the situation of newcomer students in majority English-speaking schools. He pointed out that students are studying the local curriculum; already have literacy skills in their first language; are translating from a weaker to a stronger language in the process of constructing learning; and they are obliged to construct and express in oral and written form their learning, opinions and feelings through a language which they are in process of acquiring.

He introduced the concept of obligatory and compatible/complementary language. Obligatory language is the essential items of language without which students cannot understand or master the content of a lesson. Compatible/complementary is that language necessary due to the nature of the content of the lesson.

He pointed out that learning and teaching in immersion programmes are both highly experiential with a strong focus on meaning. However, students must also consider the form of the language. This means that attention must also be paid to grammatical structures and rules.

While many students experiencing education in an immersion situation will develop their receptive skills to a high level (reading and listening) their production (speaking and writing) of language presents a different challenge. Therefore it may be necessary to provide alternative ways for them to express ideas, opinions and possibilities.

There is also an inherent challenge for teachers. Ideally they should have developed awareness of the learning processes for bilinguals and second language strategies. In addition, they must develop the ability to integrate content and language learning; the ability to simplify content so that it is more accessible to students; and the awareness to offer high level and extended intervention as necessary.

In conclusion Dr Seán Mac Corraidh highlighted the fact that planning obligatory and complementary language objectives involves the investment of time by teachers so that they will present their subject confidently and in a form which all students can use in mastering the particular curriculum content.

# WORKSHOPS

Four workshops were run twice in parallel sessions, allowing participants to attend two different workshops.

## **Dr Zachary Lyons**, English Language Support Programme, Trinity Immigration Initiative **Post-primary English Language Support at the curricular level**

The focus of this workshop was the website [www.elsp.ie](http://www.elsp.ie) which provides a substantial resource for language support teachers, subject teachers and students. Dr Lyons outlined the background to the project, and described the process of developing the units of learning.

The units are entirely based on the range of textbooks used in post-primary schools in the south for the main curriculum subject areas. First all textbooks were analysed in order to provide lists of key words for each individual topic in each subject textbook. A range of language learning activities, at A1, A2 and B1 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages were developed on the basis of 1) activating students' previous knowledge of the topic; 2) building language learning and engagement with curriculum subjects and 3) encouraging use of textbooks and other learning supports. At this time there are 80 units on the website focussed on Junior Certificate materials and examinations. Units for the Leaving Certificate will be added for the next school year.

The workshop group examined in detail some examples of language support units for the History curriculum. The feedback from the group was very positive. It was noted by those present that these units could be useful for all students, and their use would not apply exclusively to newcomer students.

## **Joanne Glasgow**, Inclusion and Diversity Service **Preparing post-primary ESL learners for examinations**

This workshop was in two parts. First participants were engaged in activities aimed at raising their awareness of the challenges faced by students in coping with the language of examinations. Conclusions drawn from the activities focused on how to make examinations more accessible. The following suggestions were made:

- There is a need for familiarization with the wording and format of different types of exam questions/different subject demands
- It is necessary that students learn the specific vocabulary (e.g. action verbs) associated with exam questions and understand what type of answers are required and how these may be structured for different subjects
- It is essential that they practise answering sample exam questions and know what are the assessment criteria for the different subjects and how to apply these to their own answers
- They also need to understand the importance of the context of use and be aware of the fact that the same lexical items can have different meanings across different subjects.

Based on the above conclusions, participants were then invited to suggest practical suggestions for the classroom. Suggestions included a classroom activity in which students construct exam questions and an exercise in which students evaluate sample exam answers against the formal assessment criteria. These activities were considered to enhance the transparency of the assessment process.

The workshop underlined the linguistic challenges posed by examination questions and stressed the importance of ensuring that students understand and know how to use exam-specific language, structure their answers appropriately and use assessment criteria to evaluate and improve their answers.

# WORKSHOPS

**Ethna Kelly**, Vice-Principal, St. Benedict's College, Randalstown

## **Whole School Planning**

This workshop allowed participants to pursue many of the issues that emerged from the plenary presentation by Ethna Kelly. Among the topics that arose for discussion were concerns about how programmes for English as a Second Language are perceived by other teachers and students; and a sense that these programmes are generally undervalued within the school.

The difficulties faced by mainstream subject teachers were identified and, equally, the problems created by teachers' lack of awareness of the challenges facing their students in acquiring an adequate level of proficiency in the English language required for different subjects.

It was suggested that in the area of multicultural education and, in particular, in identifying and addressing racism within the school community, expert training for all school personnel is necessary.

Concern was expressed about the absence, generally, of a platform for parental involvement and input.

The support of the principal was identified as key to the implementation of a successful ESL programme; to the development of an inclusive culture within the school; and to the professional development of all staff.

**Glenda Crockett and Katie Loughran**, Inclusion and Diversity Service

## **Raising Intercultural Awareness through use of Dual Language Texts and Modern Technologies**

Participants were introduced to 'The World of Gaelic Games', a dual language text which captures the experiences of young people from different countries in coming to Ireland and becoming involved in Gaelic Games. A number of podcasts were shown which were produced to accompany the stories.

Participants were then asked to analyse activities from the booklet 'Classroom Ideas' which was developed to accompany the dual-language text. They then discussed how the activities could be incorporated into different subject areas in the school. It was agreed that they could be used in any or all of seven different curriculum subjects.

The activities were then reviewed to identify how they might be used with different age groups within post-primary education.

It was generally agreed that the approach presented in this workshop created many positive opportunities for students including working in teams; independent and peer learning; the promotion of oracy, effective communication and first language use; opportunities to compare and contrast cultures as well as celebrating cultural identity; raising the awareness of English speaking students to the challenges faced by others; and generally fostering a sense of belonging in the community of the school.

# PARTICIPANTS

The conference was attended by 31 participants from Northern Ireland and 33 from the South. They represented the following aspects of the educational systems:

- School principals
- Teachers
- Education Centres
- Education support services
- The inspectorate
- Curriculum design units
- Educational research and development
- Teacher training and universities
- Teachers' unions
- Representatives of Parents' Councils

Comments from participants included the following:

*Well structured and thought provoking. Good to have time to be informed and to think about the key developmental issues.*

*Thank you for a very useful conference and the opportunity to network with like-minded people. Content all useful and will be used.*

*Very interesting and particularly useful to meet with colleagues from the South to discuss their work and issues.*

*Overall a very informative day and most enjoyable.*

*Lots of food for thought and plans for action.*

*Three excellent speakers whose thoughts and views dovetailed perfectly to give us all cause for thought.*

*Great opportunity to network and find out about provision in Northern Ireland.*

## Evaluation by participants

Participants were asked to evaluate the conference under the headings Facilities, Organisation of Programme, Content of Input, and Workshops.

93% of participants considered that that conference was Good or Excellent under all headings.

Among suggestions made for future actions were continued cross-border exchange and cooperation; more opportunities to share practice and practical approaches; and more opportunities to draw on the experiences and expertise of others.



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