Before the economic boom of the 1990s, Ireland was known as a nation of emigrants. The past fifteen years, however, have seen the transformation of Ireland from a country of net emigration to one of net immigration, on a scale and at a pace unprecedented in comparative context. As a result, Irish society has become more diverse in terms of nationality, language, ethnicity and religious affiliation; and these changes are now clearly reflected in the composition of both primary and secondary schools, presenting these with challenges as well as opportunities. Despite the increased number of ethnically-diverse immigrant children and young people in the Ireland, currently there is a paucity of information about aspects of their lives in Ireland. This book is aimed at contributing to this gap in knowledge.

This edited collection will be of interest to researchers in the fields of migration studies, childhood studies, education studies, human geography, sociology, applied social studies, social work, health studies and psychology. It will also be a useful resource to educators, social workers, youth workers and community members working with (or preparing to work with) children with immigrant and ethnic minority backgrounds in Ireland.
The Changing Faces of Ireland
The Changing Faces of Ireland

Exploring the Lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children

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Merike Darmody, Naomi Tyrrell and Steve Song
October 2010
This is a very timely publication, coming as it does during a period of considerable economic and social challenge in Ireland. It is at such times that the perspectives and voices of those who are most ‘othered’ or at risk of marginalisation need to be heard. This is especially the case with children. We know of course that not all children are the same and there are many different childhoods, influenced by the social, familial and cultural context in which children live their everyday lives. Yet there are also commonalities across children, in terms of the importance of family and friends and the key role of identities and belonging in shaping their well-being. By focusing on the experiences and perspectives of immigrant children and young people, this publication provides rich insights into their lives across a range of social and institutional contexts in Ireland. Migrant children as a group come from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds but have a shared sense of dislocation and unsettling of the ‘known’ that is embedded in the experience of migration itself. This brings with it considerable challenges as they bridge ‘home’ and host society through their activities in school, as well as through their involvement in work and play in the local community. For some the transition is relatively seamless - supported by clear kinship relationships and valued social, material and cultural capital that facilitates entry into Irish life and society. For others, considerable resilience and initiative is required, as they seek to overcome stereotyping, racism and resistance to social and cultural change. These contrasting strands in migrant children’s experiences are eloquently outlined in this book – the struggles over identity formation and meaning making through language acquisition, religious formation and recognition, the significant role of schools and schooling in shaping opportunities and belonging, the experience of racism and discrimination, the particularistic experiences of asylum seeker, trafficked children and unaccompanied minors and the contrasting experiences of health and overall well-being among immigrant children and young people. Key questions are raised about structurally embedded patterns of inequality in Irish society, about social and educational policies, as well as legislative provisions in shaping inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics in the lives of immigrant children and young people. They are underpinned by both quantitative and qualitative accounts that provide a succinct and critical overview of how these dynamics are played out for different groups of immigrant children across different contexts. This comprehensive collection is of relevance to those working with children in Ireland but also internationally to those with an interest in the experiences of first/second generation migrant children and how societies of relatively rapid in-migration have adapted (or not) to the pace of change. It is a wonderful resource for researchers, policy makers and practitioners and a welcome addition to the emerging literature in this important field.

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INTRODUCTION

Exploring the Lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children in Ireland

‘The circumstances and future prospects of children in immigrant families are important not only to the children themselves and to their parents, but also to the nations in which the families have settled, and where the children will live for years and decades to come.’ (UNICEF, 2009: vii).

The Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland) is a country that has undergone rapid economic and population change since the mid-1990s. The period of economic boom between 1995 and 2007 transformed Ireland’s global profile, changing it from a nation in economic hardship, necessitating emigration, to a country of prosperity and immigration. In public discourse, the years of successful economic development attracted the moniker ‘Celtic Tiger’, reflecting Ireland’s place in, and embrace of, the competitive global marketplace. In 2002, the first year that the Census of Population included a question on nationality, just below six per cent of the total population usually resident in Ireland had non-Irish nationality (Ruhs, 2006). By 2006, the Census indicated that share had increased to just over ten per cent, with immigrants originating from more than 188 different countries (CSO, 2008). The sudden increase in immigration to Ireland is mirrored in broader migration trends in Europe, for example net immigration accounted for 81 per cent of the population growth experienced by all EU member states in 2004.

However, Ireland’s experience differs from that of traditional immigration-receiving countries in Europe, such as the UK and France post-World War II, because of its long history of emigration: ‘there are more people who identify themselves as Irish outside the country than within it’ (Castles and Miller, 2009: 290). Added to this, the scale and speed of recent immigration flows to Ireland were unprecedented and this makes the immigration context quite different from other European countries. It is because of these differences that the ways in which Ireland has reacted to rapid immigration, and the government policies that have been put in place, may have more in common with other ‘newer’ immigration countries in Europe such as Italy, Greece and Portugal.

The increased population diversity resulting from increased immigration to Ireland over recent years, in the context of increased global population movement, leads us to consider the ways in which Ireland has dealt with immigration as well as the experiences of immigrants themselves. Until quite recently the majority of the research on the experiences of immigrants and ethnic minorities living in Ireland focused on the adult population. To address this gap in the literature, this book contributes to a steadily growing body of work that explores the ways in
which immigrant and ethnic minority children live their everyday lives in Ireland, as well as the ways in which they are positioned in Irish society (see Bushin and White, 2010; Devine, forthcoming; Devine, Kelly and MacNeela, 2004; Gilligan et al., 2010; Ní Laoire et al., 2009; Ní Laoire et al., in press; Smyth et al., 2009).

Although Ireland was not a mono-ethnic nation prior to the Celtic Tiger era, the diversity of the population has increased substantially in recent years, with immigrants coming from a range of national, social, cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Unlike countries that have a long-standing history of immigration, Ireland does not yet have a substantial second (or subsequent) immigrant generation (Taguma et al., 2009). Therefore the majority of children with an ethnic minority background are also first generation immigrants and have first-hand experience of immigrating to Ireland with parents, other adults or on their own. These are the children whose lives are explored throughout this book.

The book is sectioned into three main parts, focusing on: Immigration, Identities and Language; Immigration, Education and Schooling; Immigration, Well-being and Risk. In this introductory chapter, we first define some key terms used throughout the book. We then describe the profile of the immigrant and ethnic minority population in Ireland, paying particular attention to children and young people. The chapter provides some broad contextual material which we hope will provide a useful background for the chapters that follow. Since national statistical offices seldom calculate the number or share of children in immigrant families, public discourse and policy deliberations do not fully recognise how many of these children live in the countries under study (UNICEF, 2009). Given the scale of immigration to Ireland over the last fifteen years, and the uncertainty over the future of Ireland’s immigrant populations, we feel that it is timely to explore the experiences of immigrant and ethnic minority children from different disciplinary perspectives.

DEFINITIONS

At this point it is important to define some of the terms used throughout the chapters. The book focuses on the experiences and situations of immigrant children in Ireland. The authors use the term ‘child’, ‘children’ or ‘young people’ to refer to those aged below 18 years of age. When authors refer to ‘Ireland’, it is the Republic of Ireland.

We use the term ‘immigrant’ to describe individuals (or a population group) who have moved to Ireland from another country, i.e. they have migrated across the national border of the Republic of Ireland. We recognise that the term ‘immigrant’ is problematic, although it is in common usage in European and national policy documents. We prefer it to other terms that are also in common parlance in Ireland, such as ‘newcomer’ or ‘non-national’. The vast majority of the children whose experiences are included in the book are first generation immigrants, i.e. they themselves migrated to Ireland either with or without family members. However, when children are described as being from an immigrant background or in an immigrant family, this means that they did not necessarily experience immigration themselves and that at least one of their parents does not have Irish citizenship.
Based on Finney and Simpson (2009), throughout this book the term ethnic minority is used to encompass a broad idea of difference and as a self-adopted identity based on a mixture of the following: physical attributes, birthplace, legal status (nationality), family origins, beliefs (including religion) and practices of language and culture. A question on ethnicity appeared in the Census of Ireland for the first time in 2006 (see King-O’Riain, 2007) but its ethnic categories are quite limited. We use the term ethnic minority to refer to individuals whose identity and attributes differ from the majority of the population in Ireland.

RECENT IMMIGRATION TO IRELAND

In the past decade, immigrants of non-European background have entered Ireland in larger and more visible numbers. This has challenged existing frameworks of racial and ethnic understanding (King-O’Riain, 2007). What Mac Gréil (1996) has defined as Ireland’s ‘defensive ethnocentrism’, which is based on resistance to imposition from the ‘outside’, has been challenged by increased immigration. The Census of Ireland conducted in 2006 indicated that there were 420,000 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland – ten per cent of the total population (see Table 1). Although the full range of origin countries of this immigrant and ethnic minority population is diverse, 82 per cent were from just ten countries (CSO, 2008). Countries with over 10,000 nationals living in Ireland were: China, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Nigeria, Poland, the UK and the USA (CSO, 2008). British nationals have been living in Ireland for longer than the other national groups, with large numbers arriving in the 1970s and 1980s. Nationals from EU 15 states5 (excluding Ireland and the UK) mainly migrated to Ireland between 2001 and 2006 but a substantial number had been in Ireland since the early 1990s. The majority of nationals from states that acceded to the EU in 20046 migrated to Ireland between 2002 and 2006, with more than 44 per cent migrating to Ireland in 2005 or later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/Country</th>
<th>Number of immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU12</td>
<td>121,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>113,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A first phase of immigration to Ireland, from the mid-1990s onwards, saw an increase in Irish return migration and also an increase in the number of people claiming asylum. There were several reasons for this including EU migration policy, freedom of movement and labour shortages. Immigration rates increased rapidly after 2004, with the expansion of the EU and the Irish government’s decision not to place restrictions on migrant workers from these countries (a decision replicated by the UK and Sweden). Between 2004 and 2007 inclusive, net inward migration amounted to over 225,000, equivalent to more than five per cent of the resident
An influx of immigrants was expected but such large numbers exceeded all expectations (Barrett, 2009).

In addition to an increase in employment-led or economic-led migration, during the 1990s and into the early 2000s, higher numbers of people were claiming asylum in Ireland, particularly from African countries. It has been considered that this sudden increase in the number of asylum-seekers was the result of children being born in Ireland being entitled to Irish citizenship and thus the right to remain residing in Ireland (along with a parent who could apply for citizenship on the basis of an Irish-born child). However, in 2004, the government initiated a Citizenship Referendum, the result of which ended the right to citizenship on the basis of location of birth – *jus soli* – with citizenship being granted on the basis of bloodline – *jus sanguinis* (MacEínri and White, 2008). The number of people applying for refugee status in Ireland has fallen since the introduction of this policy, which coincided with the expansion of the EU, and is now at similar levels to the late 1990s – 2689 applications in 2009 (ORAC, 2009).

Research from more traditional immigration countries has explored issues of geographical and social segregation (e.g. Ellis, 2001; Finney and Simpson, 2009; Goodwin-White, 2008; Peach, 1996). In Ireland, immigrants’ locations often reflect affordable housing options hence, in general, immigrants are found in areas with a supply of private rented housing close to places of employment. However, there were immigrants living in every town across Ireland at the time of the Census in 2006 (CSO, 2008), and one in seven non-Irish nationals (excluding UK nationals) were living in rural areas. This pattern of settlement likely reflects the policy of dispersing asylum seekers within the Direct Provision system in Ireland and the employment sectors of migrant workers – predominantly in agriculture, construction and hospitality.

The economic decline and rising unemployment in Ireland since 2008 has resulted in a decline in the number of people migrating to Ireland, as well as an increase in out-migration. Between 2008 and 2009, out-migration increased from 45,300 people to 65,100 people and remained at around this level between 2009 and 2010 (CSO, 2009; 2010). Immigration has been decreasing since 2008 and this has resulted in Ireland’s return to net outward migration for the first time since 1995 (CSO, 2009). The highest number of out-migrants between 2008 and 2009 were nationals of new EU accession states (CSO, 2009), however, between 2009 and 2010 the highest number of out-migrants were Irish nationals (CSO, 2010). In-migration of all non-Irish national groups has been declining (CSO, 2009; 2010), although it is important to note that immigration is still occurring (albeit on a much smaller scale). These figures undoubtedly reflect the economic recession and associated unemployment in Ireland. However, as yet, there is little substantial evidence that immigrant families with children are out-migrating in high numbers; their situations are discussed in detail in the following section.

**IMMIGRANT AND ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND**

Child immigrant populations frequently exceed adult immigrant populations because immigrants are often in a family-building stage of life (UNICEF, 2009).
However, there are difficulties in estimating the number of child migrants globally, as well as child movements between and within individual countries or regions (see White et al., in press). Sometimes, children’s migrations are not recorded at the time of migration (as is the case when children move between member states of the EU, for example), and/or data are collated into age group categories that span a large number of years. This has obvious implications for states’ planning and provision for children in areas such as health and education, particularly as migration is a dynamic process which often involves a series of moves rather than a singular move from ‘Place A’ to ‘Place B’ (see Heckmann, 2008). Some recent research illustrates the difficulty in gaining comprehensive immigration data for child age groups: Taguma et al. (2009) estimate that approximately 10 per cent of children in primary schools and 8 per cent of children in secondary schools in Ireland are from immigrant backgrounds; however, Smyth et al. (2009) estimate the secondary school immigrant population to be lower, at 6 per cent. Ni Laoire et al. (2009) have used the information that is available in the most recent population census in Ireland (carried out in 2006) to highlight several relevant points concerning immigrant children in Ireland. For example, just over 10 per cent of the total childhood population of Ireland was born in countries other than Ireland – mainly in European countries; children make up almost 20 per cent of the total immigrant population of Ireland (as defined by country of birth); just over seven per cent of all children living in Ireland do not have Irish nationality; and the most common nationality of immigrant children living in Ireland is British (22,157 children), followed by EU15-25 (13,828 children) and Africa (9,788) (Ni Laoire et al., 2009). However, Census 2006 does not record the nationality of 13,000 children because their nationality was not stated. Again, this exemplifies some of the difficulties associated with collecting and collating accurate data on immigrant children.

Studies of immigrant children tend to focus on ‘child-specific’ aspects of their lives, or their immediate needs, such as education and schooling. Research that has been carried out into immigrant children’s experiences in Ireland often has been focused in these areas, for example: Bryan (2009), Byrne et al. (2010), Deegan, Devine and Lodge (2004), Devine (2005), Devine and Kelly (2006), Devine, Kenny and MacNeela (2004), Keogh and White (2006), McGovern, 1995; McGorman and Sugrue (2007), Nowlan (2008), Smyth et al. (2009) and Taguma et al. (2009). However, for an exception see Ni Laoire et al. (2009; in press). Given the rapid increase in the number of immigrant children in Ireland, and the issues involved in providing education to children whose first language often is not English (or Irish), it is understandable that the majority of research has focused on education and schooling. Studies have shown the difficulties that some immigrant children face when attending school in Ireland and the need for more support for them in school contexts. Early indications suggest that, unlike other countries, the attainment gap between immigrant and Irish-born children is minimal (apart from for children who do not speak English at home) (Taguma et al., 2009). This may be because of the similar socio-economic backgrounds of immigrant and non-immigrant children in Ireland (Taguma et al., 2009), although there is evidence that immigrants to Ireland possess higher levels of human capital than the majority Irish population.
(Barrett, Bergin and Duffy, 2006) but they earn considerably less (Barrett, 2009). Further studies of educational attainment are required, preferably on a longitudinal basis, to address this issue at a more nuanced level. The need for immigrant children to have language and intercultural support in school settings in Ireland is evident from the body of work in this area, and these issues are explored in some of the chapters in this volume.

Overall, in many countries, including Ireland, many aspects of immigrant children’s lives have been largely missing from migration debates (White et al., in press) and from related efforts in data collection and analysis (UNICEF, 2009). Economic perspectives tended to overshadow children and young people’s experiences of migration because, unlike adults, they are not active in the labour market and tend to be ‘tied’ migrants, i.e. they migrate with one or more adults, usually a parent (Bushin, 2009). This neglect of children’s experiences of migration and their lives in their migration destinations is short-sighted and problematic.

As the quotation that we chose to begin this chapter with suggests, the circumstances and future prospects of children in immigrant families are important not only to the children and their families, but also to the wider societies of which they are a part. The ways in which immigrant children may (or may not) feel part of communities, or may (or may not) develop attachments to places in their migration destinations, are important to consider. This is particularly important in a country like Ireland, where it has been argued that state policy on immigration is highly racialised (Loyal, Coulter and Coleman, 2003; Garner, 2004), and where debates about the ‘integration’ of recent immigrants into what has been traditionally been classified as ‘white, sedentary and Roman Catholic’ (Devine, 2005: 50) require further attention.

Recently, increased interest has focused on immigrant children and young people’s broader experiences of living in Ireland, moving beyond studies focused solely on education and schooling. Studies have begun to disaggregate the term ‘immigrant children’, and examine themes such as identity, belonging and friendships (Ni Laoire et al., 2009; Ni Laoire et al., in press), children’s experiences of the asylum system (Charles, 2009; Mooten, 2006; Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Fanning, Veale and O’Connor, 2002; White and Bushin, 2010), the ways in which immigration politics affect young people (Bushin and White, 2010) and social integration (Gilligan et al., 2010). The analyses in this book contribute to furthering this shift from research on the immigrant/non-immigrant boundary, thus exploring the similarities and differences in and across immigrant children’s experiences.

The context for this edited volume on immigrant and ethnic minority children and young people in Ireland is one of economic and social change. Indeed, the situation in Ireland is somewhat different now to what it was to when the editors started working on their ideas for the book! Ireland has been designated as one of the European countries most affected by the economic recession and has suffered significant economic decline, a very different scenario to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom period. In overall terms, the number of immigrants moving to Ireland since 2008 has begun to fall quite substantially and the numbers of emigrants has increased. However, although the economic landscape in Ireland has changed, with a resultant
impact on in-migration and out-migration flows, examining the experiences of immigrant children and young people in Ireland over the last ten years is still highly important. Data from the 2006 Census show that although high numbers of young, single people migrated to Ireland during the economic boom period, the household type ‘couples with children’ was a common household type among non-Irish nationals (Ni Laoire et al., 2009). This was particularly the case for immigrants from EU Accession states (CSO, 2008), who moved to Ireland in high numbers. Arguably, the immigrants who are most likely to remain in Ireland following the economic recession are family groups, particularly those with children of school age because of the disruption that migration means for children’s education. In addition, although emigration now outweighs immigration, it is likely that emigration is highest among migrants who do not have children living with them in Ireland because of the connections that families with children have to their local communities.

The out-migration rate of families has yet to be calculated and perhaps will be revealed more comprehensively in the Census of Population, due to take place in April 2011, than annual statistical snapshots may reveal. Calculating and forecasting migration is not an exact science and it is important to note that although emigration has increased substantially, immigration to Ireland is still occurring. Research has shown that Ireland was (and perhaps still is) perceived as offering a good quality of life for children and their parents, with immigrant parents and children themselves often referring to a healthy and safe living environment for children (Gilligan et al., 2010; Ni Laoire et al., 2009). Although the recent economic downturn has been accompanied by a reduction in immigration and an increase in emigration, including onward migration of some of those who had immigrated during the 2000s, many immigrants have stayed in Ireland and are building their lives here. In this ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 2009), where goods, capital and people are increasingly mobile, Ireland’s history of sustained emigration may not be the best indicator of its future.

AIM OF THE BOOK

Ireland is now a multi-ethnic society, with all of the opportunities and challenges that this presents. The veneer associated with the notion of Ireland as ‘the land of a thousand welcomes’ – of friendliness, community spirit, treating immigrants better than Irish emigrants were treated on their travels – has begun to be unraveled with some incidences of racial abuse and racially-motivated crimes being reported. Equally worrying is the signal that the closure of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) in December 2008 (due to government spending cuts) sends to immigrant and wider populations. The aim of this book is not to provide definitive insights and answers to all of the issues and challenges that immigrant children and young people face in Ireland. However, given the current economic and population context, we feel that it is timely to critique, discuss and begin to learn from the recent experiences of immigrant and ethnic minority children and young people living in Ireland.
The following chapters draw on a range of themes pertinent to immigrant and ethnic minority children’s lives, often including research carried out with children themselves, and/or incorporating the views of parents, teachers and/or community representatives, and/or relevant statistics. We have sectioned the book according to the main themes that the chapters embrace: identity and language (La Morgia; McDaid; Nestor and Regan; Veale), education and schooling (Devine; Kitching; Bryan and Bracken; Smyth and Darmody; McCoy and Darmody), and well-being and risk (Fanning, Haase and O’Boyle; Molcho, Kelly and Nic Gabhainn; Horgan, Martin and O’Riordan; Ni Raghallaigh; Joyce and Quinn). However, these broad themes are not exhaustive and chapters also explore issues such as faith, religion, health, exclusion and inclusion, amongst others. Some chapters provide overviews of the current policies affecting particular groups of immigrant children, such as unaccompanied minors or trafficked children, whilst other chapters offer in-depth exploration of the lives of particular groups of immigrant children in particular contexts. The research presented in the chapters varies in terms methodology and scope, and the authors are from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. It was our intent that this plurality of perspectives would strengthen the book and we hope that you will find this to be the case. All of the chapters retain one central focus: elucidating the experiences of immigrant and ethnic minority children and young people in Ireland.

The research findings that are discussed in the following chapters offer deep insights into the contexts, backgrounds and experiences of immigrant and ethnic minority children and young people who lived in Ireland during the years of the ‘Celtic Tiger’. The chapters are not mere snapshots of immigrant children’s lives, the relevance of which may be diminished due to the changed socio-economic situation. Indeed, as has been discussed, although the rate of immigration has slowed, immigrants are still moving to Ireland, including children, and there is still a sizeable immigrant population. Moreover, the existing population of ethnic minority children may well be added to in the coming years because a high proportion of immigrants were of childbearing age and have contributed to Ireland’s high birth rate – 74,500 births between April 2008 and April 2009, not seen since 1896 (CSO, 2009).

We hope that you will find this book informative and useful in furthering your understanding of the lives of children from immigrant and ethnic minority backgrounds who are living in contemporary Ireland, whether you are a researcher, teacher, practitioner, policymaker, student and/or of course, a child or parent. As is often the case with edited collections, the themes and topics covered are not exhaustive and we do not claim that the findings and discussion presented here represent the lives and experiences of all immigrant and ethnic minority children in Ireland. The book is intended to be a springboard for further discussion, discussion which we hope may be influential in shaping children and young people’s lives for the better in ‘post-Celtic Tiger’ Ireland. In addition, many of the topics explored in this volume are relevant to other ‘new’ immigration countries as well. As Smyth et al. (2009) optimistically suggest, effective support for children in the present may well help to avoid the sorts of social segregation experienced by immigrant and ethnic
minority children and young people in other countries. The socio-economic contexts for children in Ireland and other countries may have changed as a result of the ‘global’ economic recession but as the following chapters demonstrate, the needs of immigrant and ethnic minority children living in the here-and-now are very real, as are their hopes for the future.

NOTES


2 See the early work of Devine and her colleagues in the References.

3 Please note that the experiences of Traveller children and youth are not included in this book because of our simultaneous focus on immigration and citizenship. Travellers have lobbied for ethnic minority status in recent years and although this has not been granted fully, their cultural difference is being acknowledged. The experiences of children in Irish return-migrant families also are not included because of the dual focus on immigration and citizenship.

4 As separated children.

5 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

6 Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

7 Based on figures from Census 2006; Barrett and Bergin, 2009.

8 The Direct Provision system, as it is implemented in Ireland, often involves asylum seekers moving to accommodation centres in different parts of the country.

REFERENCES


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INTRODUCTION


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PART 1: IMMIGRATION, IDENTITIES AND LANGUAGE
1. WHO IS AFRAID OF MULTILINGUALISM?

Evaluating the Linguistic Impact of Migration in Ireland

INTRODUCTION

The face of Europe is constantly changing, as a result of mobility, migration and globalisation. It is estimated that today there are at least 175 nationalities within the EU borders (Eurostat, 2007). Migration and mobility have brought about changes in the linguistic landscape of Europe, making multilingualism an increasingly common reality, and highlighting the need for new policies and projects that take into account linguistic diversity (European Commission, 2004).1

Ireland represents an interesting case of co-existence of bilingual and multilingual realities, which include the autochthonous Irish-English bilingual population and many ethnic minority groups whose first language is not English. Many of these groups have migrated to Ireland during the economic boom of the 1990s and according to the latest Census more than 100 languages are spoken in the country alongside Irish and English (CSO, 2006). Since immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland, issues related to language learning, multilingualism, cultural and linguistic diversity have only recently started to be addressed (Ni Laoire, 2007; 2008; McFayden, 2008; Carson and Extra, 2010).

In recent years, both government policies and independent projects have been implemented for the multilingual population in Ireland: the government has been promoting the revival of the Irish language and has been providing supplementary English language classes for non-native speakers in primary and secondary schools; meanwhile, new projects have emerged with the aim of supporting minority languages, to promote awareness of linguistic diversity and to understand the benefits of multilingualism. These independent initiatives2 are often run by individuals, community groups and non-governmental organisations.

As this chapter shows, many of these projects aim to develop awareness of linguistic diversity among children, and they demonstrate that the new generation plays a significant role in the transmission and maintenance of different languages and cultures. This chapter provides an overview of how multilingualism develops within the family and the educational context and examines some of the policies and projects that have recently been implemented in Ireland in order to promote awareness of linguistic diversity and multilingualism among children.
MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES

In order to understand how multilingualism develops within the family, it is necessary to examine the parents’ and the child’s background, their attitudes towards their own mother tongue and towards the country’s language(s). It is possible to identify many different family contexts in which children acquire two or more languages. In multilingual families in Ireland we can find some of the following situations: both parents are native speakers of a language other than English; the parents are native speakers of two different languages other than English; one parent is a native speaker of English and the other of another language; in single parent families the mother or the father is not a native speaker of English (see Carson and Extra, 2010).

In each of these contexts the parents may have different levels of proficiency in two or more languages, different expectations regarding their child’s linguistic skills and different attitudes towards multilingualism. Moreover, the fact that parents are native speakers of a language does not necessarily imply that they use it to communicate with the child (or to each other) and therefore that the child will speak it. Some parents decide to use the language(s) they are more comfortable with, others select strategies to adopt on the basis of what they think would be the most suitable linguistic upbringing. In addition, linguistic input coupled with the attitude of parents, siblings and family members towards multilingualism and their native language(s) can play an important role in the child’s linguistic development both in the early phases and in the successive stages of language maintenance. It also has to be considered that multilingual families can be autochthonous or they may have migrated to Ireland before or after the child’s birth. We talk of simultaneous plurilingualism when the child is exposed to two or more languages from birth, and of successive plurilingualism when the child acquires one language after the other. Both types of development allow the child to become a native speaker of both languages. However, the later the second language is introduced, the harder it may be to acquire it. For this reason, parents who are native speakers of a minority language are generally advised to use their own mother tongue with their children from birth if they want them to acquire it spontaneously (Baker, 2000b).

Several studies have shown that multilingualism has a positive effect on many aspects of a child’s development. Firstly, plurilingual children have enhanced cognitive functions due to the fact that both languages are active in their brain. The cognitive benefits concern the areas of memory and attention span. It has also been found that plurilingualism can delay the onset of dementia in later life (Bialystok, 2009; Stern et al., 2005; Bialystok, Craik and Freedman, 2007). Moreover, many plurilingual children are precocious readers, they are tolerant and aware of other people’s perspectives, and they have an enhanced ability to learn foreign languages and to multi-task. Other benefits include the expanded opportunities for communication, the development of literacy in two languages, and more possibilities of employment in the future (Baker, 2000b).

Parents who are faced with the reality of raising a multilingual family are often unaware of the short-term and long-term benefits that plurilingualism brings to the child throughout life. In addition, there are widespread myths about multilingualism which might have a negative impact on the choices that parents make for their children.
Parents may also be influenced by the opinion of other people, such as extended family, teachers, neighbours and friends (Baker, 2000a). Some people believe that speaking two or more languages might cause slow linguistic development, as well as difficulties in the achievement of integration and academic success (De Hower, 2009). While multilingualism is becoming increasingly common in Ireland, such beliefs remain quite widespread. For this reason, parents often seek advice on how to raise plurilingual children. The issues raised by parents are different depending on their experience, beliefs and expectations and on the age of the child. The three stages described below represent an overview of different factors affecting the linguistic development of a plurilingual child. In the first stage, which generally starts before or soon after the child is born, parents are responsible for the decision of the strategy to adopt; in the second stage the parents and their child establish the languages spoken at home; the third stage starts when the child enters the education system and begins to interact more regularly with peers and adults.

In the first stage, parents decide on the linguistic strategy to use. Initially, the most common issues concern the selection of languages spoken at home. Parents often have expectations about their child’s linguistic attainment, and they are eager to find the best strategy to achieve the expected outcome. In Ireland, some parents may worry that their child is not exposed to enough English at home, others may fear that since English is the dominant language in the external environment, the child will start forgetting the minority language and will ultimately lose it. It is also common for parents to wonder whether it is better to introduce the other language(s) at a later stage rather than raising a child with two languages from the start. Unfortunately, there is no single formula that can ensure success. Every family context has its unique characteristics, and there are so many linguistic, emotional, social and environmental factors which come into play that each case should be examined individually to gain a full understanding of what strategies could be applied. In Ireland, as in other migratory contexts, there is a wide variety of families coming from many different countries, with their own cultural background, beliefs and expectations for their children’s linguistic attainment. The situations described below show some of the choices made by families where at least one parent is a native speaker of Italian. Even though they don’t cover the whole range of contexts, they can help to understand some of the reasons behind parents’ decisions.

*Family I – Italian-Irish couple.* The Italian parent speaks English to his spouse and has decided not to use his mother tongue on a daily basis with the child. The couple made their decision based on their view that Italian would not be useful to the child, they have few links with Italy, and they don’t have time to teach Italian to the child. These parents are not completely against their child being exposed to Italian, but they believe that if the he visits his grandparents once a year and watches some cartoons in the language, he will learn enough Italian to “get by”.

*Family II – Italian-Irish couple.* The couple decided to adopt the “one-parent-one-language” strategy, consisting of each parent addressing the child in their own mother tongue. The parents made their choice after reading books that suggested that this strategy is quite effective in early bilingual development.
Family III – Italian couple. The Italian couple speak only Italian to the child because they feel it is the most natural approach. They also believe that the child should acquire English only by interacting with native speakers.

Family IV – Italian couple. The parents speak Italian to each other but one of them decided to use English when addressing the child. The purpose of this strategy was to expose the child to both English and Italian in the early stages of linguistic development, when he was mostly spending time at home with his parents and getting little interaction with people outside the family environment.

Family V – Italian-French couple. When the couple met, English was their lingua franca. Since then, they have always been speaking English to each other, but they decided to speak their own mother tongue when addressing the child, so he would be exposed daily to three languages.

Family VI – One parent family – Italian mother. When the child was 3 months old, the mother decided to leave Italy and move to Ireland. She speaks only Italian to her child, but she wants her to attend a crèche so that she is exposed to English on a daily basis.

These examples are only a small range of possible linguistic situations that can be found in multilingual families and they refer only to contexts in which the child is raised in Ireland from birth or from a very young age. The scenarios outlined show that parents’ linguistic choice can vary according to what they believe to be the most appropriate or the most natural strategy to use. Parents’ choices are often determined by their own experiences and their attitude and feelings towards the language(s). In addition, parents who are uncertain about what strategy to adopt might look for information by talking to other families, contacting experts or seeking advice from books and online resources. This phase is very important, because the choice made by the parents will influence the child’s own linguistic attitudes and future linguistic attainment.

Many multilingual families in Ireland have started to express the need for information and support in raising plurilingual children. The first organisations providing this service were Cuidiú, Comhluadar and the Health Service Executive (HSE), which have been involved in projects to help parents make an informed choice on how to raise plurilingual children by providing talks and publication of materials that parents could freely access. The success of these initiatives highlighted the need for more information on raising plurilingual children. In an effort to fill this gap, a group of researchers, community workers, speech and language therapists and teachers founded Bilingual Forum Ireland (BFI) in 2007 with the aim of providing information on multilingualism. BFI volunteers have been working with families and teachers to develop awareness of the benefits of multilingualism and also to support local projects and initiatives which promote minority languages, as well as the understanding of the value of linguistic diversity. The events run by BFI aim to provide parents with the information they need to make an informed choice on the basis of research findings and also through interaction with other families. Through a website, parents can access different resources and use a forum to interact with
families in similar situations. This online forum represents an opportunity for parents from different parts of Ireland to share experiences on raising plurilingual children and to ask for the help of experts. The examples below show some of the experiences parents have shared on the forum, which are a window into the different realities of multilingual families in Ireland.

[...] me - Polish, my husband Irish - we met in Germany and [German] remains our language. We have two children (4 and 2 years) and they have three languages on a daily basis, as I would speak to them Polish, my husband and his relatives plus the whole outer world (as we are living in Ireland) English but they listen to us speaking German to each other all the time. I have noticed recently - while visiting my friends in Germany - that my kids do understand a lot German and after only few days were able to pick some new words. I don’t see any confusion, delays in speech development or other negative aspects of this situation.

[...] I am originally from Flanders (Belgium), so my mother tongue is Flemish (Dutch). My now 3-year old daughter was born in Ireland and has been going to crèche and pre-school in English. From when she was born, I have made a conscious effort to speak to her in Flemish only, even in the presence of people who don’t understand Flemish. At the beginning I used to worry about whether or not this was appropriate or polite, but I don’t really care anymore at this stage, as it’s become entirely natural to me and my daughter. Her dad is Polish, so she has a good understanding of that language as well. It’s a pity that he hasn’t been more consistent in speaking only Polish to her, as her Polish is significantly less developed than her English and Flemish. 1 parent, 1 language is the best strategy, in my opinion!

[...] I have a child of 4 who is just starting school this week. I am French and speak French to him, and his father is Irish and speaks English. He understands both languages, but he mixes his speech and does not have the fluency other children seem to have. Should I worry? He has been assessed by a speech therapist who thinks he is speech delayed, but at the same time admits not having experience with bilingual/multilingual children. Is there any way to find someone who can help?

These extracts show the type of linguistic experience shared by parents on the online forum. As well as providing detailed information on the family’s linguistic behaviour, they can be useful for finding out what strategies are being used among different families and what results they have achieved. A resource such as the forum can be exceptionally valuable because it allows parents to be aware of how other people deal with similar issues and to interact with other families as well as experts in different areas of multilingualism. The increase in the demand for information sessions on multilingualism reflects the growing interest in child language development and in the different ways of raising a multilingual family.

The second stage in the building of a multilingual family begins when the child starts to talk. In the first year of life, a normally developing child learns to distinguish the sounds of different languages and to produce the first sounds or words; in the
second year, they start producing short sentences, often made of two or three words; between the age of 3 and 4 they construct more complex sentences and the vocabulary rapidly expands (Guasti, 2004). These milestones are common to the vast majority of monolingual and plurilingual children. Plurilingual children are also able to switch from one language to the other within the same sentence or between sentences. This is sometimes regarded by parents as a sign of confusion. However, as many studies have shown, code-switching is a communicative strategy used by many plurilingual children (and adults), and it is more common among those who are immersed in an environment where code-switching is used frequently (Cantone, 2007; De Houwer, 2009). Another important element that characterises bilingual speech is the possibility to choose which language to speak depending on the situation, the interlocutors and the topic. It is important to consider that the more children are exposed to a language and have the opportunity to use it, the more chances they have of developing the necessary lexical, grammatical and phonological skills in that language. In addition, the change of circumstances in a child’s life, such as moving to a new country, separating from the extended family, losing a parent, or starting school may have an impact on the child’s linguistic behaviour, which may result in the rejection (and sometimes the loss) of one of the languages. Language loss can happen at different stages during childhood, but it is not necessarily a permanent condition. Just as there are many factors which may cause it, there are also many ways to avoid it (Priven, 2008; Park, 2008). As much research has shown, bilingualism is not hereditary, but it needs to be transmitted from the parents to the child. This process may require time and effort from parents both at the initial stages and throughout the child’s development.

Many parents in Ireland have a positive attitude towards the transmission of their native language to their children. They also seem to find it easy to expose them to the family language(s) before they start school. This is mostly due to the fact that in the first years of life children interact mostly with their parents, and they can easily engage in language games and activities. The following extracts from McFadyn (2008: 139) show that at this stage parents’ choices, attitudes and beliefs can strongly affect the experience of children.

I try to talk to her in English but she won’t answer in English; maybe wait.
I want her to learn culture but see what she wants. I’m not forcing her. If she wants to know, I’m not going to push her.

[The children] speak English because I think they can handle English better but, if I insist, they will speak Cantonese.

About three years ago, I invited somebody to do special lessons for my kids to learn how to speak Mandarin. I think it’s important to know the official language of China.

The second stage is characterised by the interaction between the parents’ strategies and expectations and the child’s behaviour. Children start to understand what languages are spoken around them, which language to choose according to the interlocutor, the situation and the topic, and which is the majority language of the environment external to the family.
In Ireland, the need for accessing information and for interaction among multilingual families has resulted in initiatives such as Multilingual Family Support Groups. The aim of these groups is for parents to discuss issues concerning multilingualism, share experiences, create links and form friendship among multilingual families and children. This type of experience can be very beneficial for parents who can meet other families in similar situations, as well as for children, who start to encounter realities that are similar to their own and therefore grow up seeing multilingualism as the norm. At the moment, there are groups that offer multilingual family support in Cork, Dublin and Belfast. These meetings also provide the opportunity for children to hear stories in different languages, play and interact in a multilingual environment, and learn about other languages and cultures.

Reflecting on her own experience, Natalia Kublova, the organiser of the Multilingual Family Support Group in Dublin, says:

Only when I became a parent myself, I started questioning myself how to give him another language, what is the best strategy, when to start, which language to support. [...] It became clear that in Ireland there is not enough support for bilinguals.

Talking about the group’s activities, she adds:

We [...] also have meetings where parents could come with their children, to show them that we are different but it’s great. Unfortunately some kids become embarrassed with their mother tongue at some stage in their life. Especially if they go to monolingual schools. Meeting other international children can really help to be proud of being Chinese, Spanish, German, Norwegian, Russian.

The experience of Natalia Kublova shows the difficulty parents start encountering when they raise a plurilingual child, and it highlights the benefits of these support groups for the whole family.

Another initiative which has become very popular in Ireland in recent years is the language playgroup. The aim of language playgroups is to allow children to be exposed to a language (other than English) by being in contact with their peers. These meetings take place in libraries, community centres or other public or private premises. At the moment, there are playgroups organised by ethnic minority community groups including German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Latvian, Spanish, Czech, Slovak, Estonian and French. The long-term purpose of language playgroups is to preserve languages across generations. The success of these initiatives lies in the fact that there are more and more families interested in transmitting their mother tongue to their children, which shows an increasing awareness and acceptance of child plurilingualism. The activities run during playgroups also help children to be in touch with their heritage and aware of the fact that there are other children who speak the same minority language. Some of the benefits of language playgroups are highlighted by Alessandra Di Claudio, the coordinator of Playgroup Italiano:

By meeting other children and their families in the same situation, I think the kids realise that they are not the only ones who speak “the funny language” and that helps to accept Italian as a language alongside English. They also
gradually understand the notion that language is very much linked to the culture of a country. 

As Alessandra Di Claudio points out, it is important for children to be aware that the “funny language” is not only spoken by their parents but also by other adults and children. Language playgroups often represent the only opportunity for children to interact in a minority language outside their home.

Language playgroups constitute an initial step towards the establishment of community activities that promote the use of minority languages among children. As much as playgroups help children acquire and maintain the minority language, the school plays a very important role in the child’s linguistic development and evolving language preference.

The third stage in the establishment of multilingualism in the family starts when the child begins to attend pre-school and school. Parents may find this stage the most complex to deal with because the child is immersed in a new environment and starts communicating with peers. In the first and second stage parents play a major role in decision making and in the child’s attitude towards the language(s) spoken at home. However, in the third stage the child’s linguistic behaviour may shift, and parents often report sudden changes, such as increase in the use of English, refusal to speak one language, or loss of interest in activities in the minority language.

While there are many sources of information about the first stages of language acquisition, the role of the school environment in the development of two (or more) languages has not yet been extensively researched. As in the second stage, the support of other families and the sharing of experiences is a good way to understand what behaviours are common and to find out about the ways for further supporting the language through new activities that are suitable for the developing child. In this phase, the school also plays a major role in developing children’s awareness and acceptance of linguistic diversity.

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

The pre-school and school environment has a great impact on the child’s awareness of linguistic diversity and on the perception of the status of the majority language and of the language(s) spoken at home. Childcare workers and teachers are responsible for the transition into this new phase in the child’s life and they can play a major role in the development of awareness of linguistic diversity in the classroom environment.

In 2006 the Office of the Minister for Children published guidelines for childcare providers, which included recommendations for the support of children’s identity and sense of belonging by encouraging pedagogical strategies that would take account of linguistic diversity, as the following extract shows.

Be aware of the cultural and educational significance of the child’s first language. For example, while assisting the children in acquiring English/Irish as a second language, encourage parents to use their family language with children. Also encourage parents to support the child in the learning of the second language. [...] Display tapes of children’s songs in a variety of
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languages, including the Irish and English language. Play tapes with music from different cultures to the children (p. 10 and 36).

Other important recommendations concern the benefits of having bilingual staff:

Fluency in a child’s home language can facilitate communication with children and families. A bilingual staff member can help to foster a child’s home language. [...] Find out if there are any bilingual staff or families willing to help to develop materials in different home languages e.g. a recording of a story, song or rhyme in a different language so children can listen to the tape while looking at the book, or words in other languages pasted into scrapbooks (p. 35).

These guidelines are an important step towards the development of awareness of linguistic diversity in the childcare environment, and their implementation should allow children to learn about diversity from a very young age.

While there is not yet an indication on how these guidelines are being used in pre-school settings around the country, more data is available on the situation of primary schools. Many primary schools have a high number of children who speak languages other than English and Irish at home. In a recent study, Carson and Extra (2010) collected data from two primary schools in Dublin and found that the most widely spoken languages other than English and Irish in these schools were Tagalog and Yoruba. This study showed that 1 in 3 children was born outside Ireland, and that 63% of their fathers and the 60% of their mothers were also born outside Ireland, mostly in the Philippines, Nigeria and Poland. It emerged from this study that there were 33 different languages being spoken among the families of the 191 children who participated in the study.

Linguistic diversity is a relatively new reality in schools, and teachers and policy makers are facing new challenges posed by multilingualism in the classroom. The two main challenges concern the English proficiency of non-native speakers and the introduction of activities that promote the awareness of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The first issue has been addressed by the Irish Department of Education and Science since 1999, when English language support teaching was introduced. This system is mostly based on the withdrawal of children from their class to participate in a language support class. Some schools have also put in place independent support initiatives for pupils who need to learn English as a second language, based on activities run by their staff on a voluntary basis (Smyth et al., 2009). As Smyth et al. (2009) argue, the system put in place by the Department of Education could be improved by combining withdrawal and within-class support and by providing more training and more specific materials for support and also mainstream teachers17.

While provisions are in place for English language support, there are no policies that concern the maintenance of minority languages within the school context. As O’Rourke (2010) points out, many teachers understand the importance of including language awareness activities in the curriculum, but they are uncertain on how to run them. She also reports the case of a principal in a Dublin school who was concerned that newcomers, while learning English, were losing their mother tongue. It is therefore clear that minority language support within the classroom environment is becoming a necessity. An initial step towards the introduction of minority
language activities in the curriculum can be achieved by running language awareness activities in the classroom. These activities are relatively new to the Irish education system, and most of the projects are run independently by the teachers. Language awareness projects are beneficial for the whole classroom because they allow all children to be proud of their linguistic identity, to get to know more about each other’s background and to develop awareness of linguistic diversity. Examples of good practice in this area are emerging in schools with high percentages of students who speak languages other than English at home. One example is a language awareness project which offered multilingual activities in one class in Lane Street Primary school in Dublin (O’Rourke, 2010). The class had 13 children, of which 3 were of Irish origin, while the others were of Bulgarian, Polish, Indian, Philippine, Vietnamese and Albanian origin. The project started as a weekly stand-alone activity, but it was later integrated in a science project that was part of the curriculum. The students found out more about the different languages spoken by their classmates and they learned new words and phrases. The activities also required the contribution of parents, who helped with the pronunciation and spelling of words, and became part of their children’s learning experience.

Availing of linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource in the classroom presents a positive message to children, showing them that all languages are valuable. In cases where parents are also involved, both the children and the parents benefit from feeling that their home language is being recognised and valued. The main problem in running these activities is the deficit of specific teacher training, of appropriate materials and of economic resources. However, the emergence of a number of initiatives that support both the learning of English and the awareness of linguistic diversity represents a positive trend in education and show that teachers and principals are increasingly sensitive to language related issues.

Just as linguistic diversity is starting to be acknowledged and celebrated in the classroom, many immigrant communities have started to provide independent minority language courses for children. In the last few years, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of language classes and Saturday schools, with the purpose of transmitting the linguistic and cultural heritage to the new generations. Now children can attend classes through Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Edo, as well as other languages. These classes take place in different premises, including schools, libraries and community centres, and provide the opportunity to study the language and the culture, learn to read and write, and in some cases to follow the curriculum of the country where the language is spoken. These independent initiatives constitute a first important step towards the promotion and maintenance of minority languages, the creation of links among multilingual families and the transmission of a sense of belonging to a culture that should not be left behind. The presence of minority language classes shows that several communities are interested in encouraging their children to integrate in Ireland while learning about their own cultural and linguistic heritage. At the same time, language awareness activities run in schools have two major benefits: firstly, they make children aware of the importance of their own heritage within the classroom; secondly they show children who speak other languages at home that their language is
not only confined to the home or to weekend activities, but also has a place in the school they attend and in the society they live in.

MULTILINGUAL IRELAND

A few important steps have been made towards the promotion and awareness of linguistic diversity in Irish society, and some of them have been extremely beneficial to both families and children alike.

A recent report of the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) encourages the understanding of multilingualism and the promotion of linguistic diversity. It also emerges from this report that while the knowledge of English is considered a basic requirement for living in Ireland, it is also important to support minority languages:

It is time to initiate a debate on linguistic diversity and on the positive effects of such diversity if it is well managed. Language is a core element in the expression and preservation of cultural identity. The ICI welcomes and supports a policy of encouraging migrants to learn English as the lingua franca and second official language of the country, provided the means for acquiring an adequate knowledge of the language are made available. However, there also needs to be a recognition and positive validation of multilingualism, including the special place of the Irish language, in all sectors of life including the workplace and the community.

(McFadyen, 2008: 37)

The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (2006) also highlight the influence society has on children’s perception of diversity:

Children are growing up in a diverse society. Research reveals they are aware, at three and four years and sometimes earlier, of ethnic, ‘racial’, gender, language and physical differences. They notice differences and similarities as part of their natural developmental process and assimilate positive and negative, spoken and unspoken messages about difference. These influences are part of the child’s development of self-identity and self-esteem. Children learn and have their views reinforced by attitudes they experience primarily through relationships with adults and the broader community.

(Office of the Minister for Children, 2006: 2)

According to this statement, the experience of children is affected by the adults and also by the community they live in. Therefore, the process of awareness of linguistic diversity should start from the child’s home, develop in the school, and be acknowledged in the society. In recent years, different projects and events have contributed to the development of the awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in Ireland. Kids’ Own Publishing recently started promoting the introduction of books in different languages, by getting children and teachers involved in the creation of books that celebrate linguistic diversity in schools and in the community. In February 2010, Bilingual Forum Ireland, the Dodder Valley Partnership, the CPLN Partnership...
and South Dublin County Council joined together in the organisation of International Mother Language Day, a family event that celebrated linguistic diversity and multilingualism. In 2008 the Metro Éireann Media and Multicultural Awards (MAMA) recognised a number of initiatives that promoted cultural diversity. One of these projects was Many Faces Many Places, organised by Dublin City Libraries, which offered an intercultural programme including over 90 events aimed to inform children about ethnic diversity and to allow them to learn about other cultures and languages. Also in 2008, on the occasion of the EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue, several events were organised to promote interaction between different communities and to celebrate diversity by involving children in activities such as storytelling, drama, music, and different types of workshops.

These initiatives show that there is a growing awareness of the importance of supporting and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity within society with the involvement and joint efforts of families, educators, community workers and policy makers.

Although some progress has been made towards the acknowledgment of the importance of linguistic diversity in Ireland, more effort is needed in order to start developing innovative projects that meet the growing need for specific activities for children, more specialised training for educators, and more accessible information and support for multilingual families. These improvements will bring about benefits for monolingual and plurilingual children and for the communities they live in. The acceptance and appreciation of multilingualism, which can start from learning to say a few words in the language spoken by a neighbour or a classmate, can help the development of children’s sense of identity, tolerance, and openness towards diversity in all its forms. The joint efforts of families, educators and policy makers in nurturing linguistic diversity among children will allow the future generations to grow up in a country where multilingualism is not feared, but respected, valued and celebrated.

NOTES

1 More information can be found in a recent publication of the European Commission entitled Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment - SEC(2008) 2443-2444-2445.
2 These initiatives include language playgroups, meet-ups, courses for children and adults, language awareness activities and intercultural events.
3 Following the terminology established by the EU, the term multilingual is used to refer to a group of people, while plurilingual refers to an individual.
4 Throughout this chapter, the term parent refers to any carer or guardian.
5 A minority language is a language spoken by a minority of the population in the country.
6 Data on attitudes towards multilingualism have been obtained by Bilingual Forum Ireland.
7 This is mostly the case of families where both parents speak other languages (other than Irish or English).
8 For more details on strategies of linguistic upbringing see De Houwer (2009).
9 These families were interviewed as part of a research on Italian-English bilingual children (La Morgia 2010).
10 In 2001 Máiréad Ní Chinnéide published Ag Tógáil Clainne Le Gaeilge - Speaking Irish at home, a bilingual guide for parents published by Foras na Gaeilge for Comhlathar. Although it focuses on Irish, most of the information contained in the booklet can be applied to any bilingual context. In 2008 the
Speech and Language Therapy Department, Community Services Dublin West published a leaflet entitled Do you speak more than one language at home? A guide for parents/carers of multilingual children. This leaflet is a very useful and reader-friendly resource for parents.

Information on raising plurilingual children will also be included in a toolkit that will be compiled by the Immigrant Council of Ireland and distributed in schools from September 2011.


The answers given by the experts on the forum, as well as the other resources can be accessed by visiting www.bilingualforumireland.com. The quotes are in verbatim.

The full interview with Alessandra Di Claudio can be found in The BFI Bulletin, Issue 1, 2009.

See Baker (2000a) for a discussion of these issues.

These guidelines refer also to the “promotion of awareness of cultures and languages indigenous to Ireland as part of Irish cultural identity”.

The English Language Support Teacher Association (ELSTA) have recently started running Saturday morning sessions for teachers, some of which explore different issues related to multilingualism, including the use of different languages in the classroom.

Information on international and ethnic minority schools and educational centres can be found in Find Your Way. A guide to key services in Dublin City Centre. Published in 2009 by Dublin City Centre Citizens Information Service, in association with Dublin City Public Libraries and North West Inner City Network. More information can be found by contacting the relevant ethnic minority organisations, which are listed in the guide or the Immigrant Council of Ireland.

Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan and Newcastle Partnership.

REFERENCES


LA MORGIA


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MINORITY LANGUAGE CHILDREN REFLECT ON THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR FIRST LANGUAGES IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

“My grandmother would kill me!” announced Laima, a Lithuanian student, one day during an English language support class. We had just been discussing some vocabulary. I asked her for a certain word in English and she did not know the answer. I asked her for the word in Lithuanian and noticed immediately the look of shock as she realised that the word, previously well-known to her, had disappeared from her repertoire. Earlier, at the start of the lesson, she had told me about how happy she felt that her grandmother had come to visit from Lithuania. It was this previous conversation which now prompted the revelation of a murderous matriarch! Laima’s comment, while made in half-jest, suggested a deeper issue with regard to her language, identity and family relations. It was this comment, this interaction, which drove me to examine further this area of first languages and minority language students in Irish schools.

At the time, I was employed as an English Language Support teacher in a Dublin primary school with a high proportion of minority language students. My job was to work with these children to improve their English language proficiency with the aim of helping them to fully participate in their mainstream class. The importance of a child’s first language was of secondary concern to their development of a good level of English, quickly. As I read myself deeper into this literature I began to realise how fundamentally vital the issue of first language could be to minority language students. Wong Fillmore (1991; 2000) enlightened me as to the implications on family relations of losing a child’s first language, Cummins (1981; 1986; 2001a) highlighted the positive implications of maintaining and developing first language in terms of learning a second and subsequent languages (contradicting the common-sense approach that it actually works as a barrier), while Ruiz (1984) outlined the benefits of multilingualism, that it was something to encourage rather than frustrate and block.

In addition to the teaching position, I was also enrolled on a taught Ed.D programme at the time of this interaction with Laima, and decided to avail of the opportunity to further investigate this issue from the perspective of some minority language children. More specifically, I set out to investigate what the feelings, experiences and understandings were of a selection of minority language children in some Irish primary schools with regard to the non-recognition of their first languages in those schools. This chapter outlines some of the answers that I unearthed.

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Moving forward from this introduction, I will outline some of the most important theoretical, pedagogical and policy literature of interest to the study. Following this, I will briefly outline the methodological approach that I undertook in order to obtain fruitfully those feelings, experiences and understandings of the minority language children involved. The main body of the chapter makes judicious use of the children’s words to elucidate those feelings, experiences and understandings. I conclude the chapter by recommending some developments which would arrest many of the more negative experiences of the children who worked with me during this study.

MULTILINGUAL IRELAND: SOCIETY AND SCHOOLS

Ireland’s ethnic profile has altered dramatically over the last fifteen years. This is predominantly as a result of significant inward migration following overwhelmingly increased economic prosperity, European Union developments – namely expansion and freedom to travel – and the positioning of Ireland as one of the most globalised countries in the world. These changing demographics have resulted in a substantial increase in the number of languages being spoken in Ireland (Cronin, 2004), although there are no definitive data on the number of languages being spoken in Ireland at present. The Valeur Report identified 158 languages, placing Ireland third behind the United Kingdom (288) and Spain (198) in the number of additional language spoken in their survey of 21 European states (Mc Pake and Tinsley, 2007). Research carried out by the Language Centre at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, which found that there were 167 languages being spoken in Ireland, confirms this increase (O’Brien, 2006).

In the context of the expansion discussed above, it must be understood that the ethnic and linguistic profile of many Irish schools has altered quite dramatically over this period also. While there are limited comprehensive national data available, some research evidence is emerging as to the nature and extent of this ethnic expansion and concomitant linguistic explosion. Certain individual studies on the area have extrapolated relevant numbers from Census data (Smyth et al., 2009; Wallen and Kelly-Holmes, 2006; Mc Daid, 2007; Quinn et al., 2007; Nowlan, 2008). Other studies have also included more focused examination on the particular geographical area concerned in their work (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007; Mc Daid, 2008). On a national level, Smyth et al. (2009) estimate that in spring 2007, there were approximately 18,000 “newcomer” students in Irish post-primary schools, or six per cent of the total post-primary population of 327,000. This compares with around 10 per cent of the primary school population, or 45,700 out of 476,600 students. Not all of these “newcomer” children can accurately be classified as minority language students, in that they may speak a version of English as a first language. Furthermore, these figures are in constant flux with children and their families moving from school to school, or in and out of the country. Hence, ascertaining the precise number of minority language students in Irish schools is a fraught exercise. This confusion notwithstanding, it is clear that linguistic diversity is a key feature of many Irish primary and post-primary classrooms.
The multifarious potential contained within this linguistic diversity on a personal, pedagogical and social level, is well understood (Cummins, 2000; Kharkhurin, 2007; Ruiz, 1984). Yet this change also poses significant challenges for the Irish school system, one which was, itself, already, a dual language system, in that both Irish and English are compulsory subjects at primary and post-primary level. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has reacted to these linguistic challenges by providing a system of English language support, based on the allocation of English language support teachers, and through funding the development of resource materials (DES, 2005; 2007; 2009). This model of provision is in keeping with OECD (2006) findings that the most widely used approach to supporting minority language students was through immersion education supplemented with systematic language support. This approach in Ireland has been described previously as a monolingual English-only system of language support (Mc Daid, 2007) in that there is no systematic provision for the teaching of the minority language child’s first language. It is rooted in a wider public discourse that identifies lack of English proficiency as the premier barrier to social integration (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), 2008). This discourse has permeated the scholastic arena with one public commentator arguing that “[t]here is good reason to outlaw foreign languages being spoken in the playground because the playground is the primary vector for children to learn about the culture of the school and the society they are in” (Meyers, 2007). Such discourse echoes those in other jurisdictions which have cited the use of languages other than English with lack of integration and even civil disorder (Blackledge, 2005).

The literature is clear about the importance of learning the majority language with regard to pedagogical success and social integration (Ip et al., 1998; Ip et al., 2007; Lidgard et al., 1998; Smyth et al., 2009; Valdés, 1998; Winkleman and Winkleman, 1998). However, the literature also highlights that this focus becomes problematic when it is enacted without recognising the importance of those other languages spoken as first languages by these minority language children (Wong-Filmore, 1991; 2000). This approach is rightly understood as linguistic assimilation. Yet, there is plenty of international evidence to refute this course of action. Data from the United States, for instance, illustrate that Cuban-Americans have attained significant economic success without linguistic assimilation (García, 1995). Furthermore we understand from pronouncements by African migrants themselves that it is their ethnic background or perceived racial identity that is their biggest obstacle when trying to secure employment, not their linguistic proficiency (Dunbar, 2008: 58). The ongoing marginalization and ghettoisation of Irish Travellers speaks further to the complicated and multifactorial aspect of integration issues in Ireland.

**First Languages in Irish Schools**

There are limited empirical data on the topic of first language recognition in schools in Ireland. No previous studies have focused specifically on the issue of recognition of first languages, or indeed, the linguistic patterns of Irish multilingual classrooms. There are some studies, however, which highlight the issue of recognition as a component of wider research findings: Post-primary teachers’ and principals’
perceptions of English language support in 11 schools in an urban centre (Nowlan, 2008); policy and practice of teaching English as an additional language in ten primary schools in Galway (Wallen and Kelly-Holmes, 2006); and teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in eight primary and post-primary schools (Devine, 2005). These research data are unambiguous about the absence of any positive focus on children’s first languages. While Nowlan (2008) identifies one example of a school hiring a part-time bilingual teacher who taught both Romanian and Russian, she outlines that this type of initiative was absent in the vast majority of schools within her study. Devine (2005) asserts that at no point in any of the interviews conducted in her research did the teachers mention the multilingual capacities which many of the children had, while Wallen and Kelly-Holmes (2006) failed to observe any similar activities in their study and argued for this as an area requiring further study in the Irish educational context.

Yet we must also be aware this is not a completely new field in Irish educational discourse. Fifteen years have passed since McGovern, writing in the context of the support provided for Vietnamese refugee children in Irish schools, called for a policy based on the principles of equality and anti-racism (McGovern, 1995). Such a policy would involve language support for children from linguistic and cultural minority backgrounds. She cautioned, however, that this support should not be viewed in the assimilationist perspective but should ensure affirmation and status for their first languages. Thus, this important issue of recognition of first languages has been brought to our attention in the past. This present study intended to address, in some way, the research gap in this area as articulated by Wallen and Kelly-Holmes (2006).

FIRST LANGUAGE RECOGNITION AS AN ISSUE OF EQUALITY

Recognition has been established as one of the five dimensions of equality which underpin the theoretical construct of ‘Equality of Condition’ (Baker et al., 2004 Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lynch and Baker, 2005). Equality of Condition has been described as being about “enabling and empowering people to exercise what might be called real choices among real options” (Baker et al., 2004: 34). It is a far more radical egalitarian approach than liberal egalitarianism which can promote the toleration of difference, while still retaining a position of superiority. Hence, liberal egalitarians often leave dominant views unquestioned. Taylor (1994) bases his critique of procedural liberalism on the point that it is unable to accommodate people of different cultural backgrounds. As an alternative, Taylor (ibid.) proposes a politics of recognition, which will promote the recognition and survival of minority cultures within majority culture societies. Such recognition must originate in respect for difference rather than emerge from an obligatory act of recognition. This approach necessitates a politics of equal respect – an approach rooted in a presumption of cultural equality. Such an understanding of cultural equality promotes the concept that all cultures have something important to impart to all human beings.

Recognition is understood as important for the development of positive self-image. As humans, we internalise the messages we receive from those around us regarding our identity. When these messages render as illegitimate those aspects of our identity,
which we view as foundational, these messages can work to injure our perception of our own worth. Thus, according to Taylor:

> [T]he thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (Taylor, 1994: 25).

Hence, positive self-image is constructed through the receipt of positive messages about foundational aspects of our identity. Honneth (1992: 188) explains that “[w]e owe our integrity, in a subliminal way, to the receipt of approval or recognition from other persons”. According to Taylor (op cit.), the crucial feature of human life is that it is fundamentally dialogical in character; humans self-define through interaction with others who matter to us. This is an enduring process so that even after we outgrow some of these others or they disappear from our lives in that “the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live” (Taylor, 1994: 33). When one of the interlocutors within this conversation experiences the “subtle humiliation that accompanies public statements as to the failings of a given person” (Honneth, 1992: 189) the results can be quite deleterious. Honneth (1992: 191) argues that “[t]he individual who experiences this type of social devaluation typically falls prey to a loss of self-esteem … [and may] no longer [be] in a position to conceive of himself as a being whose characteristic traits and abilities are worthy of esteem.” Fraser (2000: 113–114) conceptualises recognition as a matter of status and contends that to be misrecognised is “to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect of esteem.”

*Misrecognition, Inequality and Schooling*

Highlighting that misrecognition or “inequality of recognition” runs deeply in many familiar settings, Lynch et al. (2004: 6) outline that “it is an everyday practice to describe some students as ‘smart’ or ‘brainy’ and others as ‘slow’, ‘weak’, ‘stupid’ or ‘duds’” and contend that this is a “pervasive inequality of recognition in the educational system.” It is well-established that schools very often reproduce inequalities rather than challenge them (Baker and Lynch, 2005; Bourdieu, 1990; and Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Lynch and Lodge (2002) reveal that assumptions of homogeneity tended to prevail among both teachers and students within the schools in their study. Concomitant domination and misrecognition of diversity with respect to race, gender, ability, sexuality and social class, for instance, are thus fundamental to the identity and lived experience of children in Irish schools. The suppression of different identities becomes problematic for the children involved in that these differences often become devalued and condemned (Baker and Lynch, 2005).

According to Bourdieu (1990) struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and that what is at stake in these struggles is the accumulation of a particular form of capital. Giroux (1983) articulates that Bourdieu’s theory of
cultural reproduction highlights that dominant groups orchestrate symbolic violence to mediate and reproduce class-divided societies. In the context of education, this is achieved through the transmission of a selection of meanings which objectively defines a group’s or a class’s culture as a symbolic system. This selection of meanings is not neutral, however, rather it is:

arbitrary insofar as the structure and functions of that culture cannot be deduced from any universal principle, whether physical, biological or spiritual, not being linked by any sort of internal relation to ‘the nature of things’ or any ‘human nature’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 8).

As pedagogic agents, teachers engage in pedagogic work based on pedagogic authority, which is given institutional legitimacy as school authority. The status authority conveyed upon the teacher by the school by virtue of the teacher’s appointment tends “to rule out the question of the informative efficiency of the communication” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 108). Teachers can impose the reception of the selection of meanings by virtue of this status authority. This pedagogical work produces a legitimacy of what it transmits “by designating what it transmits – by mere fact of transmitting it legitimately – as worthy of transmission, as opposed to what it does not transmit” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 22). In so doing, it also seeks to impose on the dominated groups “recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 41). With regard to minority language children, there is misrecognition of the “arbitrary nature of the legitimacy of the dominant language” (Blackledge, 2002: 68). This then “tends to reproduce, both in the dominant and in the dominated classes, misrecognition of the truth of the legitimate culture as the dominant cultural arbitrary, whose reproduction contributes towards reproducing the power relations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Misrecognition, Self-identity and Family Relations

When this selection of meanings imposed by teachers excludes first languages it can have significant long-term effects for minority language children. Messages which exclude a child’s first language can hurt deeply, as Anzaldúa (1987: 59) eloquently elaborates when she declares “[s]o, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language”. This pain emerges beautifully from the pen of John Montague (1982: 110) when he writes:

[T]o stray sadly home
And find
the turf-cured width
of your parent’s hearth
Growing slowly alien:
… To grow
a second tongue, as
harsh a humiliation
as twice to be born.
In addition to the impact on self-identity, failure to recognise and provide support for first languages within the education system can have significant implications for relations within minority language families and communities. Minority language children who experience language loss can no longer communicate freely with members of their family and communities. In losing this social and cultural capital, there exists the potential for rifts to develop and families to lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings. As Wong-Fillmore points out “[w]hat is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children” (Wong-Fillmore, 1991: 343 as cited in Kouritzin, 1999: 16). Similar findings have been outlined elsewhere. Tseng and Fuligni (2000) found that adolescents that spoke the home language with their parents had emotionally closer relations with their parents than those who spoke English with their parents. These adolescents also indicated that they had less conflict with their parents than those who spoke English. Problems with parent-adolescent relationships can be a precursor to problematic behaviour. In this context then, it is important to understand the advice of Mouw and Xie (1999) who, while recognising the importance of developing second language proficiency in English for academic success, asserted that we must remain aware of the social and interpersonal dangers of rapid linguistic assimilation in order to ensure effective communication between parents and children.

Pedagogical Importance of First Languages

There is clear pedagogical evidence for the importance of recognition of first languages in education. Students who feel that their language is important in school feel that they belong in the school. According to Cummins (1997), the message is not just about bilingualism and language learning as linguistic and educational phenomena; more fundamentally it is a message about what kinds of identity are acceptable in the classroom and society. The literature also highlights the importance to first languages to the development of proficiency in second and subsequent languages. Of most immediate relevance here is the work of Cummins (1986; 2000; 2001a; 2001b) which offers a framework for empowering minority students through preventing school failure. This framework is underpinned by a commitment to transformative pedagogy based on the creation of collaborative rather than coercive relations of power. A central tenet of this theoretical framework is that students from ‘dominated’ societal groups are ‘empowered’ or ‘disabled’ as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools. Cummins explains that these “interactions are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to four institutional characteristics of schools” (Cummins, 1986: 22). One of these characteristics is the extent to which minority students’ languages and cultures are incorporated into the school program.

Within Cummins’ framework, teachers empower their students by adding to their linguistic and cultural repertoire. This is achieved through incorporation of first language and culture within their pedagogy rather than pursuing a pedagogy that seeks to replace first languages and culture with that which is dominant in the society. Teachers who positively recognise the importance of children’s first languages,
and thus infuse their pedagogy with such understanding, convey a message to their minority language children that their language is important, and hence that what they bring with them to school is valued within the school setting. In this way they show respect for the student’s language (Lucas et al., 1990). These teachers advocate for such students to feel proud of their linguistic identity and help to empower them to sculpt a society that appreciates multilingualism as a resource and opportunity rather than treat it as a problem in need of solution.

Linguistic Interdependence Principle

In order to substantiate the above framework, from a pedagogical perspective a consideration of the interaction between first and second languages is necessary. Cummins (1981) has theorised this as the Linguistic Interdependence Principle. Cummins’ articulation of the importance of incorporation of the first language of minority language students emerges from analysis of research data into the effectiveness of bilingual education. The Stanford Working Group (1993), Ramirez (1992) and Thomas and Collier (1997) all argue that first language use is one of the most important indicators of educational success for minority language children. Genesse et al. (2005) point out that bilingual proficiency and biliteracy are positively related to academic achievement in both languages. They highlight that bilingual Hispanic students had higher educational expectations and achievement scores than their monolingual English-speaking Hispanic peers and conclude that educational programs for English Language Learners should seek to develop their full bilingual competencies. Moll and Diaz (1985) illustrate that Spanish speaking English Language Learners who read a story in English, discussed the story in Spanish and delivered their answers to set comprehension questions in English, demonstrated higher levels of comprehension than a control group which discussed the story in English. Research has shown that language recognition and use is of importance for those students who Suárez-Orozco (2001) identify as tending to achieve below their native born peers. In this instance it is more important that socio-economic background.

To explain the success of this counter-intuitive approach to teaching minority language children, Cummins (1981) has advanced a theory of “interdependence”. This theory holds that:

To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly (Cummins, 1981: 20).³

In essence, Cummins (ibid.) argues that given adequate exposure to a second language, and adequate motivation to learn that language, learning in the first language will transfer to the second language. Thus if a child is taught the processes involved with multiplication or an explanation of the water cycle in their first language, they can transfer this learning into their second language given adequate motivation and exposure. Cummins (ibid.) clarifies the Interdependence Principle by highlighting the difference between two alternative conceptualisations of bilingual proficiency,
which he refers to as the Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP) and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). The SUP Model of Bilingual Education implies that the proficiency of the minority language child in their first language is separate from their proficiency in English, thus content and skills learned through L1 cannot be transferred to L2 or vice versa. The research evidence would argue that this is not the case, however, finding that content and skills can be transferred from one language to the other.

Thus I have established that the issue of minority language recognition is fundamentally an issue of inequality within the Irish education system. I have further outlined the potential deleterious impact of misrecognition for minority language children with regard to self-identity and family and community relations. In addition to this, I have provided clear evidence that first languages do not act as a barrier to pedagogical success, rather, when seized on as a resource, can actually facilitate second language learning. I proceed from this point to provide a brief outline of the methodology used in the study upon which this chapter is based and go on to examine the data which emerged from the research study.

**METHODOLOGY**

The data upon which this chapter is based were gathered during a Trilingual Literacy Camp (TLC), with 13 Polish and Romanian speaking children, a lead researcher, two interpreters and a teaching assistant held during the school Easter holidays in 2008. The central purpose of the TLC was to answer the question, “what are the feelings, experiences and understandings of minority language children in the Irish primary education system with regard to the non-recognition of their first languages in school?”. During the TLC, the participants wrote a dual language text to the broad title of “Me, My School and My Languages”. This text was used as a child-developed codification for further exploration of issues pertaining to the children's experience of language learning. In addition to the dual language books, I also facilitated a number of language specific focus groups, with the aid of an interpreter, while ongoing conversations were held with the children throughout the duration of the TLC. Return visits to some of the children were used to verify the accuracy of assertions being made, while a showcase event was held a number of months following the TLC where the children launched their dual language texts and watched short videos of their texts in a cinema-like setting.

**LINGUISTIC OUTSIDERS**

Drawing on the children’s feelings, understandings and experiences as enunciated through the focus groups, and in reaction to their dual language texts, the argument is made that the minority language children who participated in the TLC have been constructed as linguistic outsiders within their schools. None of the children involved in this research project had ever been asked directly by any of their teachers to talk with them about their languages. In addition to this, detailed evidence emerged of cases of actual repression of these languages. Many of the children have been
explicitly told to desist from using their first languages in school. According to one child, Irenka, who is her friend Celina’s teacher, “always tells me to talk to her in English, not in Polish”. This occurs both in the classroom and at break times. Adrianna reveals that “we are not allowed to speak Romanian in class”. This message is conveyed to the children new to the class, and the teachers expect their peers to help to enforce it, with Adrianna again revealing “when I first got here the teacher told the other kids not to speak to me in Romanian because I had to learn English very quickly”. This message has also been conveyed into the children’s social practices in the school, for example Gheorghe and Adrianna, have been instructed to speak only in English in the schoolyard.

Some of the children are afraid to use their own language in front of their teachers. Klaudia declared that her teachers “don’t even know that I speak Polish”. She has decided not to speak Polish in front of them as she “thought that they would be angry that I speak Polish”. Some of the children resist the messages that they receive from their teachers with Stefan telling me “when the teacher cannot hear me and I want to say something to Gheorghe I say it in Romanian”. If his teacher hears this use of Romanian “he shouts at me”. Similarly Irenka outlined how “we still talk in Polish … [because] it is our language so …”.

In this respect, these minority language children are given a clear message that their own first language is a barrier to succeeding in the Irish education system. Misrecognition of their linguistic capabilities by teachers is articulated through a pedagogical commitment to the acquisition of English, based on an approach rooted in the time-on-task argument (Imhoff, 1990). Other studies in Ireland reveal similar findings (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007; Nowlan, 2008; Wallen and Kelly-Holmes, 2006). Devine (2005) argues that this originates in a construction of children in deficit terms, and asserts that it is underpinned by a concern that the children could not integrate socially without the requisite proficiency in English. It is important to further understand this approach in the context of wider public discourse that establishes multilingualism as a barrier to integration, and an associated focus by the DES on the provision of monolingual English language support to minority language children to access the curriculum.

Minority language children’s lack of proficiency in English is constructed as problematic. Messages to this effect amount to public statements of failings (Honneth, 1992) and constitute an institutionalised pattern (Fraser, 2000) that presents English language speakers as normative and minority language speakers as deficient or inferior. Proficiency in first languages is devalued and condemned (Lynch and Baker, 2005). Many of the children experience the message that the solution to these “failings” lies in successful acquisition of English. This is often pursued through quite detrimental pedagogical practices, including the repression of their own first language. Moreover, some of the children’s classmates echo and enforce this prioritisation of English within the school.

According to the data, a number of the children experienced injury as a result. Stefan’s displeasure resulting from his teacher shouting at him for speaking Romanian is important in this context, as is Adrianna’s experience of her Romanian-speaking peer speaking with her only in Romanian, and Klaudia’s account of feeling “stupid
because I have to talk in English and I can’t talk in my own language”. The language
that Klaudia uses echoes Baker et al. (2004: 6), and points to what they refer to as
the “pervasive inequality of recognition in the education system”. The link between
self-image and identity emerges quite strongly at this point. In this context, then,
it is insightful to reflect again on the words of Anzaldúa (1987: 59), “I am my
language”. While the effect of Klaudia’s interaction might not exactly constitute
what Honneth (1992: 189) characterises as “an injury that can cause the identity of
the entire person to collapse”, in that Klaudia did not seem decimated by the inter-
action, it is important to reflect on Taylor’s (1994) caution that the conversations
with those who matter to us continues within us as long as we live. In this regard,
then, it is difficult to foretell the longer-term consequences of the experiences of
Klaudia, Adrianna and Stefan, though the potential for damage is quite significant.

When the children spoke of how their multilingualism was recognised in their
schools, it was either quite instrumentalist or in an extremely peripheral fashion. The
use of dictionaries is a very good pedagogical method for scaffolding learning. The
children themselves see the merit in their usage in this regard and it is obvious that
some teachers have grasped this potential. Nevertheless, such activity is similarly
rooted in the need to learn English rather than any recognition of the importance
of the children’s linguistic capabilities. There is no sense in which the children’s
linguistic capabilities are showcased as something to be proud of (Cummins et al.,
2005). Rather, a cultural arbitrary which aims at first language replacement in favour
of English language proficiency is imposed by the teachers (Bourdieu and Passeron,
1977). Proficiency in English is legitimised while multilingualism is problematised
and rendered illegitimate.

On other occasions when the children’s linguistic capabilities are recognised,
these once more emerge from the overall context of addressing the problematics of
lack of English language proficiency on the part of minority language speakers within
the school. The use of children as interpreters in school can be understood in this
context. The literature highlights the difficulties teachers face in communicating
with minority language parents (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007). In the absence of
an available translation and interpretation service they are often faced with asking
children to work as language brokers within their school. In many cases, this is
seemingly unavoidable. While the literature is inconclusive as to the overall effect on
parent/child relations, there is evidence that it can, for instance, challenge traditional
intergenerational authority relationships within families (De Ment et al., 2005: 260).
This emerged as an issue within the present study, with Sylwia reflecting that
she felt like a teacher when she had to interpret for her mother. There is a very
clear sense in which Sylwia has attained greater linguistic capital than her mother.
Gheorghe’s account of interpreting for his mother highlights the feelings of embarrass-
ment which can emerge as a result of language brokering. He has had to do this in
school because “she doesn’t really speak any English, but she knows some English”.
He doesn’t like doing this work for his mother because “she has four years here
and she don’t speak English”. Importantly, he believes that his mother speaks “like
a baby” when she tries to speak English and he feels “ashamed to do that” for her.
This feeling of shame has also been found in other studies (Hall and Sham, 2007;
McQuillan and Tse, 1995). Gheorghe’s mother’s linguistic capital has no purchase within the institution. In this context, her proficiency in Romanian is problematic. In addition to the negative consequences for Gheorghe’s mother in experiencing such infantilisation, this is also a potentially injurious activity for Gheorghe himself, the longer-term consequences of which might only be revealed well into the future (Taylor, 1994).

Some of the children have been asked to translate particular high profile phrases or words, for instance, ‘Hello’, ‘Easter’ or ‘Happy Christmas’. Such activities reflect recommendations made in the Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools (NCCA, 2005a) that the children should be encouraged to take pride in using words from their own language. It is an important first step on the recognition ladder but it remains quite peripheral recognition, more fixed in the “Steel Bands, Saris and Samosas” (Troyna, 1983) approach to multicultural education, than one rooted in respect for, and recognition of, diversity. Such peripheral activity will not adequately address the fundamental issues of inequality of recognition that remain embedded within these children’s schools.

There were some examples of the children experiencing more positive recognition of their linguistic status. Two teachers emerged as having grasped some of the significance of positive recognition of the linguistic identities of the minority language children in their schools. Elisabeta, Petru and Adrian revealed how their English language support teacher, Miss O’Reilly, used their first language to scaffold their learning in both oral language work and literacy activities. Adrian also revealed that his mainstream class teacher has made dual language books available to him. These teachers clearly understand the pedagogical implication of first language recognition, at the very least, and, perhaps, are in some way appreciative of the importance of the intersection between recognition of linguistic identity and self-image (Churchill, 2003). These two examples notwithstanding, however, the dominant experience has been misrecognition of the children’s linguistic identity. There is very little evidence that their linguistic identity is either accepted or appreciated. Rather, it is seen as a barrier to be overcome or, at best, as a difference to be merely tolerated (Lynch and Baker, 2005).

It should also be noted that teacher influence is not confined within the school; rather it also extends into both family education and diffuse education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This is most clearly indicated through the experience of Adrianna. Not only has her teacher excluded her language within the institutionalised education setting of school, but also in the diffuse educational setting and the family educational setting. Adrianna’s mother clearly accepted the status authority of the teacher who told her not to speak with Adrianna in Romanian at home. She proceeded to try to speak with her in English, and also to remove other vestiges of linguistic diversity, most obviously the access to Romanian television through the satellite dish. While she found that she could not sustain speaking only in English with Adrianna, the television situation remained unaltered. Adrianna, herself, has also now come to understand that the best way to learn English is through using it as much as possible. In addition to the family space, the teacher also influenced the social space, wherein one of Adrianna’s Romanian speaking friends stopped speaking with her in Romanian
after the teacher instructed her to so do. This introduced an unnecessary tension into the relationship between these two children, with Adrianna recalling that “I was upset with her at first but then I apologised when I knew what the situation was”.

PEDAGOGUES, POWER AND PERPETUATION

It is evident that teachers exercise considerable power over the life experiences of the minority language children in this study. This can be understood through the ideas of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who argue that teachers are endowed with status authority by the school by virtue of their very appointment to the position of teacher. This status authority then empowers them to perpetuate a cultural arbitrary within the school system. Devine (2003a) highlights that children understand that power is exercised by teachers through this authority and that the teachers in her study regard their authority as sacrosanct. The cultural arbitrary transmitted to the children in this study legitimises monolingual English and renders the children’s multilingualism as illegitimate.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that pedagogic action may constitute a form of symbolic violence when the cultural values of the dominant are imposed on the less dominant group. The deligitimisation of the first languages of the children in this study constitutes a form of symbolic violence within the institutionalised educational setting of their schools. In the absence of evidence as to the motivation of the teacher in this regard it is possible to interpret the teacher’s actions in light of Devine’s (2005) findings that teachers are concerned with social integration. In not having had access to adequate pre-service or in-service training on this issue (McGorman and Sugrue, 2007; Smyth et al., 2008), it is probable that some of the teachers simply fail to understand the positive links between first language proficiency, self-identity and English language learning.

The origin of this perspective notwithstanding, as articulated quite eloquently by the children in this study, the result is in no doubt. There is clear misrecognition of them as multilingual children. There is very little evidence that these children’s teachers understand the purpose of education as the empowerment of minority language children to challenge the status quo within wider Irish society (Cummins, 2001a). The data reveal that these children’s teachers hold quite conservative identity options for their students and for the society that they hope their students will help to form. There is little respect for the students’ language (Lucas et al., 1990). There is a very clear message that a public multilingual identity is not acceptable in the classroom and society (Cummins, 1997). To retain a public multilingual identity is to remain as a linguistic outsider. The perpetuation of the English language, to the exclusion of minority languages within the classroom replicates and reinforces the problematisation of multilingualism in wider Irish society. These pedagogues have failed to create “interpersonal spaces where students identities are validated” (Cummins, 2001b: 48) and in so doing miss the opportunity to challenge the understanding of multilingualism as a problem (Ruiz, 1984).

The data reveal that some of the children’s majority language peers are interested in multilingualism, substantiating the findings of McGorman and Sugrue (2007) that
the Irish children in their study regretted that they only spoke English at home. This is a fertile base upon which to build a challenge to the wider societal problematisation of multilingualism. In neglecting to do so, however, these teachers legitimise interactions such as Gheorghe being subjected to jeering in the context of “blah, blah, blah” or Klaudia being told to not to speak Polish by some of her majority language friends.

I understand, as Lynch (1999) highlights, that teachers may have little control over the forms of knowledge that they teach. Lynch (1999) holds out the possibility of concerted action on the part of teachers to realise or resist change in Irish education. It must be also realised, however, that teachers do make choices within their classrooms as to their pedagogical practices. They can choose to recognise the importance of first languages through a whole range of pedagogical practices, what Cummins (2000) articulates as collaborative micro-level interactions. Such activities can include the use of dual language texts, the creation of dual language texts, organisation of multilingual projects and multilingual group work, all of which are rooted in solid pedagogical theory and are entirely consistent with the aims of the Revised Primary School Curriculum (Ireland, 1999). Support for teachers by way of informed in-service training, the development of dual language texts and the publication of a DES circular on the importance of first languages in education would help arrest the misrecognition of first languages as highlighted in this chapter. The provision of bilingual teaching assistants would greatly help with further highlighting the importance of children’s first languages in the educational setting, as would the provision of optional first language lessons during the school day.

NOTES

1 According to the ATKearney Globalisation index (2006), Ireland was the fourth most globalised country in the world in 2006, a slight fall from the premier position in 2001 and 2002.
2 The term “post-primary” is used to denote the full range of second level school sector in Ireland. It includes community schools, comprehensive schools, voluntary secondary schools and vocational schools.
3 Lx refers to Language “x”. Ly refers to Language “y”.

REFERENCES


GLOS, VOCE, VOICE


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