

Developing Little Linguists

Final Evaluation of the
Foundation Stage
Primary Languages Pilot:
August 2007



una Señorita

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Acknowledgements

The Primary Languages Pilot commenced in 2005. The pilot has required the efforts of many people and the perseverance of those who believe in the importance of exposing young children to a second language.

Special thanks are extended to all persons involved, who have provided insightful feedback and information on the pilot. CCEA would particularly like to thank the:

- Education and Library Boards (ELB's), principals and teachers who have been critical to the successful introduction of the pilot;
- pupils who have enthusiastically participated in the pilot ;
- parents who have participated in this evaluation; and
- native speakers of Spanish and French who assisted with the project.

1.0 Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the Primary Languages Pilot in Years 1 and 2. The aim of this research was to conduct a thorough evaluation of the pilot that will help inform future decision making on primary language learning and teaching in Northern Ireland. For the research to be as inclusive as possible, information was collected from all participants involved in the pilot.

Key Findings

The findings of the Primary Languages Pilot are overwhelmingly positive. The pilot was rated highly by all participants and was viewed as an effective method of introducing pupils to a second language in a fun and enjoyable way. Results also indicate that the pilot has successfully developed pupils' listening and speaking skills in the target language. Moreover, teachers and parents felt the pilot has encouraged children's enthusiasm for languages at an early age whilst fostering positive attitudes towards other cultures.

Teachers and parents believed the pilot enhanced children's self-esteem and confidence. Furthermore, results also indicate that the language lessons supported the development of the following skills and capabilities:

- Communication
- Managing Information
- Problem-Solving and Decision-Making
- Creative Thinking
- Working with Others

All teachers were able to incorporate the new language into other Areas of Learning. Teachers believed this helped children to develop within other subject areas, such as Numeracy, whilst reinforcing the new language.



There has been strong parental support throughout both years of the pilot. Virtually all parents (99.4%) felt that learning a second language would be useful for their child's future, particularly in post-primary education, travelling and future employment.

Both models (Teacher Capacity Building Model and Peripatetic Model) used within this pilot were successful and neither model was deemed superior to the other. The only anomaly between the two models was regarding the teachers' confidence. Many of the teachers delivering languages through the peripatetic model said they would not feel confident teaching languages without the support of the language tutor. Nevertheless, all teachers continued the language lessons after the tutor had left.

Areas for Development

The majority of teachers said they would like further training. Teachers who received support from a peripatetic tutor were particularly concerned that if they did not receive further training "*Spanish would vanish*" once the tutors left.

A notable number of teachers experienced or anticipated the following challenges with the pilot:

- insufficient preparation time;
- insufficient audio resources to improve pronunciations; and
- the ability to sustain and develop languages across year groups.

Throughout both years of the pilot, many parents said that they would like information on this initiative. Over a third of parents this year also requested language resources so they can support their child's learning.

2.0 Introduction

The need for students to acquire a second language is more evident today than in past times. Research indicates that competency in a second language provides students with a battery of skills, increases their career prospects and broadens their cultural understanding. In essence, proficiency in a second language helps prepare students for life and success in the twenty-first century.

However, despite the growing importance of language learning, more and more pupils throughout the UK are choosing to drop languages in post-primary. In order to reverse this decline, Northern Ireland's Department of Education commenced a review of language learning in schools and colleges in 2006. This opened the possibility of language learning in primary school.

Central to this review is the development of a languages strategy for Northern Ireland, which is currently being developed by The Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (Northern Ireland), jointly set up by Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster. The aim of this strategy will be to encourage the uptake of language learning as a practical competence for all.

The review of language learning also encompasses the Primary Languages Pilot currently being delivered by CCEA and three ELBs. The aim of this pilot project is to cater for the diversity of schools and their ability to include languages in the primary curriculum. This initiative is in keeping with language learning within member states of the European Community, where children are introduced to a second language from an early age. The overall findings in such countries are positive.

Many studies indicate there are many advantages to learning a second language in the early years. At this age not only are children developmentally ready for

acquiring a new language, they are less inhibited and more motivated.

Furthermore, research also suggests that when children immerse themselves in a language through play and exploration they can learn language quickly and easily.

The recent Dearing Report (2007) provides further support for the inclusion of languages within the primary curriculum. This report detailed findings of an extensive UK-wide languages review. The report recommended that languages should become a statutory part of the Key Stage 2 Primary Curriculum and should be in place *“as soon as practicable and if possible in time for languages to become part of the statutory primary curriculum by September 2010”*. The Dearing Report stated that embedding languages in the primary curriculum is a key element in their proposals for a *“renaissance of languages in secondary schools”*.

Primary Languages Pilot

In September 2005 CCEA in conjunction with three ELBs (BELB, NEELB and SEELB) launched a pilot project to introduce languages into the primary curriculum. The overall aim of this project was to cater for the diversity of schools and their ability to include languages into the primary curriculum.

This is the second year of the pilot, which plans to track the implementation of a languages program from Year 1 to Year 8.

21 schools from three ELBs participated in this pilot. The languages selected for the pilot include French, Irish and Spanish. Unfortunately, as a result of unforeseeable circumstances, all teachers (n = 2) who had planned to implement Irish lessons within their class had to withdraw from the pilot.

The pilot was delivered using one of the following two models.

The Teacher Capacity Building Model

This model was adopted in schools within two of the three participating ELBs. Within this model the class teacher delivered the language lessons. All teachers were non-language specialists with varying degrees of linguistic capability.

The Peripatetic Model

Schools within one ELB used a peripatetic model to deliver language lessons. Such schools recruited a Spanish language assistant to work alongside the class teacher who retained responsibility for the teaching and learning that took place.

It is important to note that both models employed similar teaching methodologies. Both adopted a multi-sensory teaching approach to help children learn through more than one of the senses (visual, auditory or kinaesthetic). The aim of this approach was to expose children to the second language in an enjoyable and fun way through a range of activities such as play, art, song, puppetry and story telling.

Aim of the Evaluation

The aim of this research was to conduct a thorough evaluation of the Foundation Stage Primary Languages Pilot which will help inform future decision making on primary language learning and teaching. The research focussed on the following:

- Pupils' experience of the pilot.
- Issues surrounding the integration of language learning at Foundation Stage.
- Support and guidance provided to teachers.
- Anomalies between the two models.

3.0 Method

Design

For the evaluation to be as inclusive as possible, information was collected from all participants involved in the 2006-2007 Primary Languages Pilot. This included teachers, pupils, principals, parents and the Education and Library Board coordinators. The overall aim was to reliably evaluate the pilot using a variety of appropriate data collection techniques.

Participants & Data Collection Techniques

Schools

23 schools from three Education and Library Boards agreed to participate within this pilot. However, due to unforeseeable circumstances two schools had to withdraw at different stages of the pilot. 23 teachers and 15 principals completed a final evaluation questionnaire. 23 teachers also participated within a focus group.

Parents / Guardians

Towards the end of the academic year all parents whose children were participating in the pilot were issued a questionnaire. The questionnaire also invited parents to attend a discussion group on their child's language learning experience. A total of 203 questionnaires were returned with nine parents participating in a discussion group.

Pupils

Consultation with pupils was carried out in six schools across the three participating ELB areas. The aim of the pupil consultation was to make the process of contributing to the research interesting, engaging and fun. Appropriate research methods (in keeping with children's age and ability) were used to effectively observe and collect pupil's views and opinions of the pilot. Although teachers were present throughout the consultation with the children, the researcher was able to collect information freely.

Discussion

Pupils participated within a very short class discussion. The discussion was centred on what they liked and disliked about learning the new language. There was also an opportunity for pupils to talk openly about their language lessons.

Drawings

Children's drawings can provide rich insights into their thoughts and feelings. A number of studies have demonstrated that children's drawings show things that a child is often unable to put into words and that it is a useful alternative for children who have difficulty verbally expressing their thoughts and feelings. A number of studies also indicate that drawing activities are integrally related to the development of thinking and communicating and is a socially meaningful activity.

For the reasons highlighted above, we felt drawings would be a useful way to explore what children liked most about their language lessons. The aim of this method was to enable pupils to reveal and express themselves freely. To assist with the interpretation of children's drawings all pupils were asked to write in their own words what their drawing depicted. Where children had difficulty doing this,

one of the researchers asked them to describe their picture and their comments were written verbatim.

Education and Library Board Officers

All three ELB coordinators participated in one focus group session and two out of the three participated within a second focus group. Each session lasted approximately three hours.

4.0 Results

4.1 Education & Library Board Feedback

This section presents the Education and Library Boards' views and opinions of the Primary Languages Pilot. Results are based on feedback collected from two focus groups.

Training

All ELB coordinators deemed the teacher training within their area to be very successful. The teacher training within all boards:

- informed teachers and peripatetic tutors of the methodological principles of primary languages;
- emphasised the importance of a multi-sensory approach;
- developed teachers' linguistic skills; and
- informed teachers of curriculum review and development.

One ELB provided teachers with the opportunity to attend twilight training sessions. The ELB coordinator highlighted that these sessions were extremely popular. 23 teachers availed of this training and the coordinator emphasised that teachers were extremely eager and enthusiastic throughout the five sessions.

One board also informed teachers of training opportunities offered at their local Institute of Further Education.

The only criticism the coordinators had about the training was that it was insufficient. All coordinators felt that teachers both requested and required further training.

Manageability

All three ELB coordinators found the Primary Languages Pilot relatively easy to manage. However, the pilot was developed in the light of the limited funding provided and coordinators highlighted that it increased demands on ELB staff, resources and time. They highlighted that the implementation of the pilot had to be tailored to fit the roll out of the demands of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum programme.

All coordinators stated that it is imperative that future training for Primary Languages goes through the Partnership Management Board (PMB). They also felt that it would be advantageous for the pilot to have a senior representative from CCEA to be a member of the Primary Languages Steering Group to ensure primary language issues are raised at PMB.

Funding

Funding was insufficient for training in the Teacher Capacity Building Model undertaken in two ELB's. However, funding was adequate for the ELB using the Peripatetic Model, which was delivered over a shorter period of time.

Nevertheless, coordinators highlighted that the limited amount of funding prohibited two boards from participating in the pilot.

Training & Teaching Materials

Training and teaching materials were developed by all ELBs. ELB coordinators also equipped their schools with a range of resources. The main resource in one board was the peripatetic tutor. Other resources used by ELBs included; flash cards, puppets, CDs, DVDs, a large dice, Bee-Bot (mini floor robot designed for teaching directional language) and an interactive whiteboard.

All coordinators agreed that they would be willing to share resources with one another and were prepared to work collaboratively to get resources online.

Support

Coordinators were happy with the support from CCEA. They were particularly appreciative of the support they have received from CCEA's Primary Language Manager.

However, coordinators indicated the need for greater advocacy and support at strategic level within the Department of Education, CCEA and the ELBs. They felt such support is required for both the development of a primary languages strategy and the pilot.

Coordinators emphasised that greater financial support is fundamental to sustain languages within schools. They highlighted that as the pilot progresses through the school, continuous training is vital to teachers that have previously participated in the pilot. ELB coordinators said this would continue to develop and sustain teachers' linguistic skills whilst keeping them up-to-date with teaching methodologies.

Views and Opinions of Schools and Teachers Participation

Coordinators unanimously agreed that both principals and teachers have been exceptionally supportive and enthusiastic about the pilot. The majority of pilot schools have prioritised second language development as part of their school development plan.

They believe teachers have successfully used a multi-sensory approach that has effectively exposed pupils to a second language.

Some teachers have found the linguistic element of the pilot challenging, particularly with pronunciation. However, coordinators believe such teachers have greatly developed in language methodology and are making ongoing progress. In fact a number of such teachers have attended evening classes to improve their linguistic skills which they believe will help them deliver language lessons with confidence.

Coordinators also highlighted that the majority of teachers have contributed greatly to the development of board resources and have successfully integrated languages into their curricular planning. Teachers have also made great progress in developing their understanding of languages methodology. An increasing number of teachers are becoming more confident at delivering the programme in the classroom.

Language Learning in Foundation Years

Based on their experience of the pilot to date, coordinators were asked if they think Foundation Stage is a good starting point for children to learn a second language. All agreed that Year's 1 and 2 are ideal starting points for children to learn a new language. They believe pupils have been very receptive to the new language and said they absorbed the rhymes and interactive activities very easily.

Sustainability of Primary Languages

Coordinators were asked if they think language lessons are sustainable within schools. All believed the sustainability of the pilot was dependent upon strategic support from DENI, CCEA, Senior Management Teams within schools and also from parents.

4.2 Teachers' Feedback

This section presents the results from the teacher questionnaires. Statistics are broken down by response type. The number of times each qualitative issue was made is presented in brackets. Findings from the teacher focus group are also integrated throughout this section of the report.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Responding Teachers by ELB

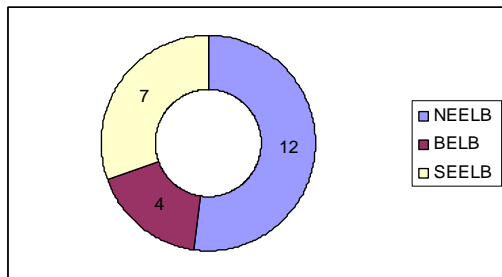


Figure 1 highlights the response rates to the teacher questionnaire by ELB. Of the total number of respondents ($n = 23$), 12 were from the NEELB, seven from the SEELB and four from the BELB.

Linguistic Experience

Approximately half of the teachers (11 out of 23) had some knowledge of the target language prior to commencing this year's pilot. Of these teachers, four could construct conversations, four were able to form short sentences and two were aware of a couple of words. Nine of these teachers possessed a qualification in a second language, these included GCSEs ($n = 6$) and A-Levels ($n = 3$).

A small number of teachers participated in informal training prior to the pilot. This included evening classes ($n = 2$) and a French training course in Salignac, which was funded by the British Council ($n = 1$).

Training

Teacher training was provided by the schools' respective ELB. All teachers deemed their training to be suitable preparation for the pilot. Many teachers highlighted that their ELB provided "*excellent, training, support and resources*". However, 22 of the 23 teachers said they would like further training to further develop their linguistic skills.

Teachers who received support from a peripatetic tutor emphasised this further during the focus group, stating that "*Spanish would vanish*" once the tutor left, if they did not receive further training.

Confidence

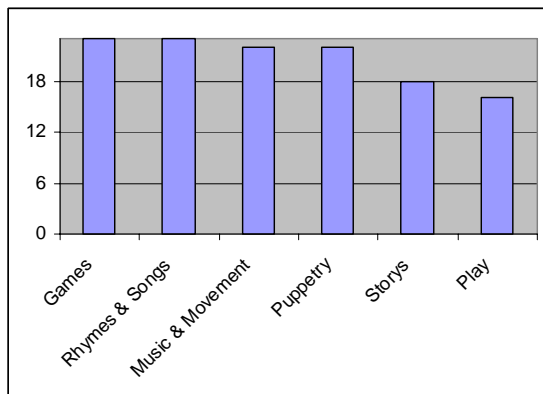
The majority of teachers (19 out of 23) said they felt confident teaching Primary Languages. Teachers that were not confident (n = 4), had no prior knowledge or experience of a second language. Nevertheless, one of these teachers stated that although they were "*anxious of [their] own ability, [they were] enthusiastic to participate*".

Teachers that received support from a peripatetic tutor (n =12) were also asked if they would feel confident taking over the role of the tutor. Although the majority of these teachers (10 out of 12) previously said they were confident teaching Primary Languages, seven said that they would not feel confident without the support of the tutor. However, all teachers continued teaching the pilot without the support of the tutor.

Teaching Methods

All teachers used a multi-sensory approach to teach languages.

Figure 2: Teaching Activities



Within this approach teachers used a range of activities to deliver the language lessons (see Figure 2). All teachers (n =23) used games, and rhymes and songs. A large number of teachers also used music and movement (n = 22) and puppetry (n = 22).

Teachers deemed the teaching methods used to deliver the pilot to be successful and compatible with those used in other areas of the curriculum and described them as *“fun and engaging”*.

Integration into other Areas of Learning

All teachers were able to incorporate the new language into other areas of learning and many were doing so on a daily basis (18 out of 23). A number of teachers highlighted that languages *“has become a natural part of the day”* and is frequently used in other areas of learning and for common classroom instructions, such as lining up. All teachers agreed that languages should be incorporated into other areas of learning and not a stand-alone subject as they felt it is *“intrinsically linked to every aspect of the curriculum”*.

Manageability

Over half of the teachers (n = 12) identified challenges with the pilot. Preparation time was the most common challenge (n = 6), which left such teachers feeling overburdened. A small number of teachers (n = 4) expressed concern about teaching languages to Key Stage 2 pupils.

These findings are consistent to those found in the focus group. Teachers emphasised that much more preparation is required for teachers new to this initiative. Many teachers were also concerned that their school would not have staff with sufficient linguistic ability to teach Key Stage 2 pupils.



Teaching Resources

ELBs were responsible for providing schools with teaching resources. The majority of teachers received guidance resources (n = 20) and teaching materials, such as puppets and audio tapes (n = 17). The main resource unique to one board was a peripatetic tutor.

All teachers indicated they were satisfied with the teaching resources they received. However, a couple of teachers said they would benefit from additional resources, especially audio to help improve their pronunciations.

The majority of teachers said within the focus group that they would like resources in electronic format. They suggested a bank of e-learning resources

for both teachers and pupils would be beneficial. A notable number of teachers also felt that a chat room or internet forum would be a useful way of sharing ideas with other teachers.

Pupils Experience

Teachers said pupils thoroughly enjoyed the language lessons. One teacher highlighted that *“even very quiet children who have difficulty participating in circle time enjoyed the pilot”*. All teachers believed the pilot has had a positive impact on both pupils self-esteem and learning. Furthermore, virtually all teachers felt the pilot improved interaction and communication between pupils (22 out of 23).

Results strongly suggest that pupils have obtained a high level of spoken language skills and understanding in the second language. Teachers indicated that their pupils can successfully compose short sentences (15 out of 23) or one or two words ($n = 8$) in the target language. Furthermore, the majority of teachers believed their pupils understood the second language very well ($n = 17$).

The majority of teachers (21 out of 23) had at least one pupil in their class with learning difficulties. Virtually all of these teachers ($n = 20$) said these pupils were able to engage with the pilot’s activities. Many teachers believed the pilot has developed such pupils’ confidence as they were on a level-footing with their peers. A couple of teachers also said that the pilot benefited pupils with speech and language problems.

Transferable Skills

All teachers were able to incorporate the new language into other areas of learning. Teachers felt that this has enabled pupils to use and develop skills that are transferable to the following areas of learning.

- Language and Literacy (n = 23);
- Numeracy (n = 23);
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (n = 23);
- Physical Education (n = 23);
- The Arts (n = 21); and
- The World Around Us (n = 20).

Teachers also highlighted that the pilot has increased pupils cultural awareness.

Teachers' Experience

Overall teachers were extremely positive about the Primary Languages Pilot. Teachers felt the pilot has improved their relations with both pupils (n = 23) and parents (n = 21). Furthermore, all teachers believed the pilot has had a positive impact on their professional development and job satisfaction. One teacher stated that the pilot has been *“the most enjoyable addition to [their] teaching”*.

All teachers indicated they are going to continue teaching Primary Languages next year. However, many teachers said they will need continued support, in the form of training and resources to ensure the pilot is sustained and progressed. One teacher also highlighted that they would like *“time allocated to allow staff to coordinate and develop more structured lines of progression”*.

4.3 Classroom Observations

The Primary Languages Pilot Project Manager and a member of CCEA's Research & Statistics Unit visited two schools in each of the three participating Education and Library Boards. The purposes of the visits were to:

- observe the teaching process; and
- obtain feedback from pupils.

Teacher Observations

4.3.1 Class teachers delivering the pilot

Throughout all visits teachers were enthusiastic and demonstrated commitment to the pilot project.

There was a wide range of linguistic ability amongst teachers. Observations indicated that teachers' confidence in using the language in the classroom related directly to their linguistic ability.

In all instances the new language was used by the teachers to some degree for classroom instruction. Teachers with greater linguistic ability and confidence in their skills used the new language throughout the lesson while others sometimes reverted to English. The children appeared comfortable with this use of the new language and showed understanding by being able to follow the instructions.

All teachers used a multi-sensory approach within their language classes. Activities included puppetry, games, story telling and drama, songs and rhymes and the use of visual aids. These activities successfully reinforced the new language in a motivating and stimulating way that assisted in building children's confidence.

In most instances teachers made use of the carpet area or hall for their language lesson. This enabled different activities to take place without restraint. Children were also frequently seated in a circle which allowed everyone in the group to see one another and enhanced speaking activities. Some teachers had their pupils seated at their desk which was not as effective, as it restricted the type of activity and pupils tended to be less attentive.

The majority of schools had colourful informative displays about the countries of the language they were learning. Some of these displays included work completed by the pupils. Such displays ensured that children were constantly exposed to the new language. Throughout the visits pupils drew attention to the displays and were keen to talk about them.

4.3.2 Peripatetic tutor delivering the pilot

We observed one language class that was delivered by a peripatetic tutor. This tutor was a Spanish specialist but not a native speaker. Throughout the language lesson the class teacher participated in all activities and it was obvious that they had a good working relationship.

The Spanish language was used throughout the class, for instruction, praise and playing games. Children appeared comfortable with the new language and showed understanding by being able to follow the tutor's instructions. It was noted that children's accent and pronunciation were particularly good within this Primary 2 class. Pupils had also mastered the masculine and feminine endings for feelings adjectives and were using them confidently.

The class took place in a cleared space which enabled the children to move around freely. Children mainly worked as a class group, however there were occasions when they worked in pairs and when they answered individually.

The teacher confirmed that the tutor had tailored the language lessons to complement other learning within the class. The teacher felt her Spanish had greatly improved and highlighted that she was embedding the language within other subject areas. The teacher emphasised that the tutor was a great resource.

In another instance we observed a class teacher who had worked with a tutor during the pilot but felt confident enough to deliver the Spanish lesson on her own. This teacher had degree level French and had taken Spanish classes to improve her level of Spanish. The teacher used Spanish to instruct and praise and the children were engaged in a wide range of activities which involved listening and speaking in both group and individual settings. There was evidence of strong cross-curricular links. The teacher commented that the class normally moved to the hall for their Spanish as she felt this was a more appropriate space.

Although this teacher had developed enough confidence to deliver the lessons independently, she still stressed the importance of the tutor. The teacher did follow-up work during the week to supplement the new work facilitated by the tutor and also introduced her class to some new activities.

Cross-Curricular Links and Skills

Throughout all visits there was evidence that the language lessons reinforced and complemented learning in other curricular areas. This included:

- **Language and Literacy** - active listening activities, speaking chorally and in groups, performing rhymes, joining in story telling and role-play and learning about language and communication;
- **Mathematics and Numeracy** - number recognition, number order, counting and sorting;
- **The Arts** - performing songs, action rhymes and drama, learning about colour, making and decorating hand puppets;
- **The World Around Us** - healthy eating, animals, weather watching and exploring traditions from other countries;
- **Physical Development and Movement** - physical games and dance;
- **Personal Development and Mutual Understanding** – talking about feelings, finding out about and developing positive attitudes towards others.

There was also evidence of the children demonstrating the following cross-curricular skills and capabilities.

Managing Information

- Following instructions, both in relation to playing games, carrying out language activities or general class instructions.

Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making

- Memorising and using phrases and vocabulary for a range of topics.
- Identifying naming and sorting objects, for example sorting animals for size or colour.

Creative Thinking

- Playing a range of language games for pleasure.
- Playing with puppets as a form of creative expression.
- Showing excitement and enjoyment in surprise and learning.
- Performing rhymes, songs and short dramas.

Working with Others

- Taking part in group listening and speaking activities, for example joining in rhymes, story telling and games.
- Playing language games co-operatively and developing the routines of listening, turn-taking, sharing, and co-operating.
- Learning the new language from demonstration and modelling performed by the teachers and others, for example by listening carefully and imitating pronunciation.
- Developing confidence at being with adults and other children in the context of learning and using a new language.

Many teachers also gave general class instructions in the new language and confirmed that they used the new language for instruction at different times of the day. One teacher had also adapted circle time activities to use in her language learning lessons.

4.3.3 Pupil Observations

Throughout all school visits pupils were engaged and showed enjoyment. Children were very attentive throughout the lessons.

Language lessons focussed on developing children's listening and speaking skills and involved both group and individual work. Pupils had to listen carefully, to repeat or respond to the language accurately. A small number of children had progressed further and were starting to speak independently without prompting. Within the majority of schools there was a stress-free atmosphere which allowed the children to engage with confidence in the language learning.

Children with special needs were observed joining in the language learning activities. These children were identified by teachers who were keen to remark that they enjoyed the language learning and that it was one area of their school work that allowed them to take part on a level footing with their more able peers. In one school a child with autism was observed enthusiastically taking part in a language game assisted by the teacher.

In a small number of classes children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) were observed confidently taking part in the language lessons.



Pupils completed a symbolic drawing of what they enjoyed most about their language lessons. Although the majority of drawings captured what each individual pupil enjoyed most about their language class, a small number of pupils experienced difficulty expressing their feelings in a drawing and copied other children's pictures. Thus, the findings from the pictures are not fully representative of all pupils.



Nevertheless, we were impressed by the way children approached their drawings and the pleasure they took in producing them. Pictures reflected the wide range of activities and topics delivered in the classroom. Activities and topics included animals, numbers, colours, games, storytelling, songs and the use of puppets. The pictures also indicate that children have been exposed to a wide range of activities that promote cultural awareness, such as flags of the countries, typical food, dress and sports. There is also evidence that children are beginning to engage with written language. Without prompting they were writing their name and numerical words in the new language.

Pupils were very excited and eager to talk about their language lessons. Throughout all visits many children said they liked “*everything*” they had learned in their language lessons. Children were very proud of the work they had completed and enjoyed showing it to us. Many pupils said languages was their “*favourite*” subject.

4.4 Parental Feedback

This section presents the results from the parents' questionnaire. Statistics are broken down by response type. The number of times each qualitative issue was made is presented in brackets.

Findings from the parent focus group are also integrated throughout this section of the report.

Breakdown of Responding Parents

169 parents whose children were participating in the second year of the pilot responded to the questionnaire. Just over half of these respondents were from the NEELB (53.3%), 27.3% were from the SEELB and 19.4% from the BELB.

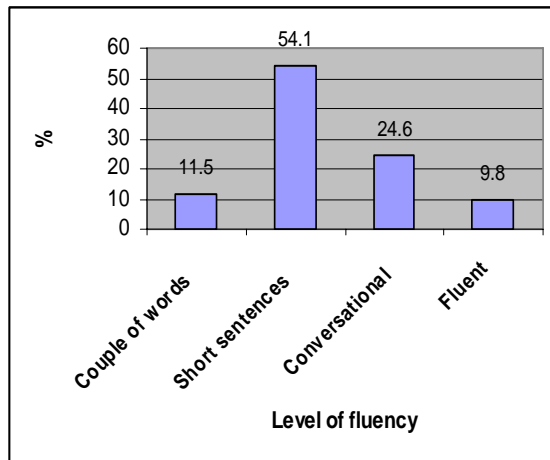
Language Skills and Qualifications

Nearly two thirds of parents (64.5%) indicated that they have knowledge of at least one other language than English. The most common languages include French (91.7%), Spanish (26.6%), German (16.5%), Irish (12.8%) and Italian (6.4%).

Parents possessed a range of formal and informal language training, they include:

- GCSE 57.8%
- A Level 11.9%
- Lived overseas 10.1%
- Degree 5.5%

Figure 3: Level of fluency



Parents were asked to indicate how fluent they were in the second language. Figure 3 illustrates that over half of parents can construct short sentences in the second language.

Parents views of the pilot

Parents have been very supportive throughout both years of the pilot. This year all parents agreed that primary school pupils should have an opportunity to learn a second language. Of these respondents, the majority (98.8%) felt that Primary 1 and 2 were suitable stages to expose children to a second language. One parent highlighted that Foundation Stage *“is the best time to [expose children to a second language] as children are open to learning and accept other cultural differences without prejudice”*. A parent within the focus group stated that learning languages in primary school is more natural and less contrived than in post-primary education.

Virtually all parents (99.4%) believed language learning will be useful to their children’s future. A notable number of these parents highlighted that learning languages in primary school will provide a *“firm stepping stone for languages in secondary school”*. A couple of parents also highlighted that *“we live in a global economy and there is a great need for our kids to help move Northern Ireland forward in this global market”*.

Children's Linguistic Ability

Parents were asked to indicate the level of spoken language skills their child has acquired in the target language. The majority of parents felt their child could form one or two words (52.1%) or short sentences (43.1%).

Parents were also asked to indicate how well their child understands the second language. The majority of parents indicated that they believe their child has a slight understanding (66.3%) and 11.8% felt their child understands the second language quite well.

Children's Experience

Parents believed language lessons have benefited their children in a variety of ways. The majority of parents (95.2%) felt that exposure to a second language has had a positive impact on their child's learning. Many parents said the pilot has developed their child's confidence.

Nearly 90% of parents also believed that learning a second language has increased their child's awareness of other cultures (89%). Many parents said their child is now aware of other countries' customs, such as dress and food. A notable number of parents also indicated that their child has become progressively more inquisitive of other cultures.

A substantial number of parents believed that exposure to a second language has had a positive impact on their child's social development (89%). Many of these parents also felt the pilot has had a positive impact on their child's relationship with their teacher and peers.

The majority of parents (70.5%) felt the pilot has also helped to develop their child's understanding and use of the English language. Many of these parents

said this was achieved by reinforcing their child's understanding of the English language and creating a greater interest in vocabulary.

Over a third of parents (37%) said their children have had an opportunity to utilise the language skills they have learned. Many of such children have done so whilst on holiday and have been encouraged to do so by their parents. A small number of children have had an opportunity to converse in the language they are learning with family and/or friends.

Support

Parents were asked if they felt they had enough support to help their child succeed with languages. Over a third of respondents (39.3%) felt they did not receive sufficient support. Many of these respondents did not know very much about the pilot and said they would like support materials to help reinforce their child's language learning.

These findings were reinforced throughout the parent focus group. Parents stated that they would like their child to receive language homework so they can gauge how their child is progressing. Parents also said that they would like to be able to support their child linguistically. They emphasised at the end of the focus group that they would like to be updated on next year's pilot.

4.5 Principals' Feedback

15 principals from the 21 pilot schools responded to the questionnaire. Of these principals, seven were from the SEELB, six were from the NEELB and one was from the BELB.

Linguistic Experience

Approximately half of all the responding principals (n = 9) have knowledge of French. The most common language qualifications amongst principals include GCSEs (n = 6) and A-levels (n = 3).

The majority of these principals (6 out of 8) indicated that they can compose short sentences in French. Of the remaining teachers, one can speak French conversationally and one can construct a couple of words.

Reasons for Participating Within the Pilot

Principals were asked to indicate factors that encouraged them to participate in the pilot. All principals (n = 15) indicated that the main reason was to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. Other factors include:

- availability of staff with linguistic competence (n = 5);
- changing needs of the school (n = 3); and
- parental expectations (n = 1).

Managerial Decisions

Principals were asked to indicate if any managerial decisions had to be made in order to introduce Primary Languages into their school. Results indicate that the main decisions were regarding timetabling (n = 10) and the deployment of staff

(n = 9). Other decisions included resources (n = 5), reaching agreement among staff (n = 1) and building a business case for the Board of Governors (n = 1).

Ten out of 15 principals explored how the language expertise of their staff could be shared. And, the majority of principals (13 out of 15) have incorporated languages into their schools' development plan.

Challenges with the Pilot

Eight out of 15 principals encountered challenges with the pilot. The main challenges include lack of time to implement the pilot (n = 3), progression from year-to-year (n = 2) and insufficient training (n = 2).

One principal also highlighted that the pilot should run throughout the whole school year and not for block periods of time.

Benefits of the Pilot

Overall principals were very positive about the Primary Languages Pilot. All principals believed their school had benefited from it. They highlighted that the pilot was enthusiastically received by both learners and teachers. A notable number of principals also said that *"parents are delighted with this new initiative"*.

All principals agreed that the pilot has had a positive impact on improving the schools relationship with parents. Furthermore, all principals believe the pilot has helped develop pupils' cultural awareness and the professional development of teachers.

All principals foresee a future for languages within their school and would recommend the introduction of languages to other schools. Furthermore, the

majority of principals (14 out of 15) felt that languages should be a statutory component of the primary curriculum.

5.0 Conclusion

Traditionally learning a second language has been left until secondary school. However, the results from this pilot clearly demonstrate that younger children can benefit and enjoy language learning. Not only has the pilot provided Foundation Stage pupils with an enjoyable and rewarding experience of a second language. The pilot has also encouraged enthusiasm for languages at a very early age whilst fostering positive attitudes towards other cultures. Furthermore, both parents and teachers highlighted that children have shown a natural curiosity towards the new language, which they hope will encourage a positive attitude to language learning in post-primary school.

Results from this pilot strongly suggest that language learning builds new skills that enhance and enrich other aspects of the curriculum, whilst consolidating skills that have been developed in other areas. All teachers took advantage of this opportunity by linking languages to other areas of learning.

Teachers said they have thoroughly enjoyed participating in the pilot and all felt their relationship with pupils had improved as a result. Furthermore, they believed the pilot has had a positive impact on their professional development and job satisfaction. One teacher stated that the pilot has been the *“most enjoyable addition to [their teaching]”*.

Both models (Teacher Capacity Building Model and Peripatetic Model) used within this pilot were successful and neither was deemed superior to the other. The only anomaly between the two models was regarding the teachers' confidence. Many of the teachers within the peripatetic model relied heavily on the language tutor and felt *“Spanish would vanish”* once the tutor left. Thus, to ensure the sustainability of primary languages, it is crucial that the class teacher develops linguistically.

Teachers felt it would be advantageous to receive electronic and audio resources. They believed such resources would enhance their efforts to develop professionally.

There has been strong parental support throughout both years of the pilot. Parents felt that learning a second language would be useful for their child's future, particularly for their career prospects. A large number of parents said they would like more information on the initiative and an opportunity to support their child's learning. It is imperative that future pilots develop an effective communication plan for parents.

In conclusion, this pilot has been embraced by all involved (principals, teachers, pupils and parents). This report has detailed substantial benefits of an early language provision and the overwhelming support behind it.



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