

Introducing Irish to pre-school children in English-medium settings

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking

Guidelines for good practice: Supporting learning and development through interactions (pp. 27-51)

Síolta Standards

1: *Rights of the Child*, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

2: *Identity and Belonging*, C14.2, 14.3
Research Digests linked to the above
Standards

Aistear's theme of *Communicating* highlights the importance of children having opportunities to become proficient users of at least one language and to have an awareness and appreciation of other languages. As one of our two official languages, it is important that children in English-medium settings have opportunities to learn Irish from an early age. Listening to and speaking Irish words supports children's sense of identity as Irish citizens, as well as contributing to their language development. Practitioners can use routines, activities and interactions to introduce and use Irish with young children in fun and natural ways throughout the day.

Practice make perfect!

Not feeling confident about using Irish? Take time to learn a few Irish words and phrases and use these with the children and with your colleagues. *Bain triail as!* (Try it out.)

Children need to **hear spoken Irish words on a regular basis** for them to understand the language. In time, children will use these Irish words in their own interactions and conversations.

Suggestions for introducing Irish words

- Choose a **new word**.
- Use the **word in context**. For example, link it to the English version or use a sign or gesture to help children make sense of it. This might involve pointing to a toy, area of the room, food item, action or body part while using the word.
- In a playful manner, encourage the children to **repeat the word**.
- **Integrate new words** in daily interactions and use them **regularly in playful ways**.

Greetings at arrival and departure times

As children arrive and leave the setting, they can be introduced to useful phrases that they can then use to greet others in the setting and at home. Examples include:

- *Dia dhuit ar maidin.* (Good morning.)
- *Tar isteach, tá fáilte romhat anseo.* (Come on in. You are welcome here this morning.)
- *Bain díot agus croth suas do chóta, más é do thoil é.* (Take off and hang up your coat, please.)
- *Slán leat.* (Good-bye).

Action songs and rhymes

Action songs and rhymes are a fun way for children to learn Irish. They provide great opportunities for connecting words with their meaning as the following example shows. The song *Rólaí Pólaí* has hand actions that encourage children to stretch *suas* (upwards), *síos* (downwards), *amach* (outwards) and finally, *isteach* (inwards). These actions along with their words, can in time, be used naturally by children in other activities and experiences such as in their play. For example, children can put the shopping *isteach sa trolaí* (into the trolley) or take the play dough *amach as an mbosca* (out of the box) and so on.

Picture books

Enjoying books and reading together provides opportunities for repeating words, and connecting words and phrases to pictures in the book—characters, colours, shapes, animals and so on. Books are an effective way to learn new words and phrases at a pace that suits individual children. New words learned from sharing the joy of reading, can then be used naturally by children in their interactions and during learning opportunities throughout the day.

Everyday routines

Using Irish informally during daily routines, provides opportunities to practise and use words in a way that is meaningful for children. Setting a good example is a key part of this. Hearing practitioners use Irish words and phrases, can encourage children to follow their lead. For example, after introducing *dearg* (red) in a story, you could use the same word in a different context during snack-time or meal-time: *Is maith liom úll dearg a ithe.* (I like eating a red apple.)

Children quickly learn phrases that are useful during snack- and meal-times.

- *Cé leis an mála scoile/bosca lón seo?* (Who owns this school bag/lunch-box?)
- *Is liomsa é.* (I own it.)
- *Cad atá agat don lón inniu?* (What do you have for lunch today?)
- *Tá ceapairí agam.* (I have sandwiches.)
- *Tá úll glas/oráiste/banana buí agam.* (I have a green apple/an orange/a yellow banana.)
- *Cén deoch atá agat?* (What drink do you have?)
- *Tá deoch bainne/uisce/sú agam.* (I have a drink of milk/water/juice.)
- *Táim críochnaithe.* (I'm finished.)
- *Tá go leor agam.* (I have enough.)
- *Glanfaimid suas an seomra.* (Let's tidy up the room.)
- *An bhfuil do chóta/mhála scoile/bhosca lón agat?* (Do you have your coat/bag/lunch-box with you?)
- *Tá mo chóta agam, tá mo mhála agam, tá mo bhosca lón agam.* (I have my coat/bag/lunch-box with me.)
- *Is maith liom ...* (I like...)
Ní maith liom... (I don't like...)
- *Más é do thoil é.* (Please)

- *Go raibh maith agat.* (Thank you)
- *An bhfuil cead agam...?* (May I have...?)
- *Tá cead agat...* (Yes, you can have...)
- *Tá brón orm.* (I'm sorry.)

Uimhreacha (numbers) and *am* (time) can be introduced during snack- and meal-times.

1. A haon	6. A sé
2. A dó	7. A seacht
3. A trí	8. A hocht
4. A ceathar	9. A naoi
5. A cúig	10. A deich

Just add *a chlog* to change the number to time, for example, *a haon a chlog* (one o'clock). You can also introduce other times – *am lón*, (lunch-time), *am súgradh*, (play-time) *am bhaile* (home-time).

Play

Irish words and phrases can also be introduced as children play. Some examples include when they are playing pretend *sa chistin* (in the kitchen), when they are outside *ag tógáil na bloicíní* (building with the blocks) and when they are *ag péinteáil* (painting). Guessing games and pronunciation games are also a fun way to learn Irish, for example, repeating words and encouraging children to find items in the setting that match the word or colour.

Some parents may be very competent in speaking Irish and may be happy and available to offer help or advice on using Irish in the setting.

Working in partnership with parents

Gently encourage parents to use the *cúpla focal* (a few words) in Irish at home too. To help with this, share handouts with lists of relevant words and phrases (in both English and Irish), for example, related to a topic the children are interested in such as *an doctiúr* (the doctor) or a seasonal event like *Samhain* (Halloween). This gives parents the opportunity to gain confidence in learning and using Irish words and to have fun practising with their children.

Joining the library is also a useful way for families to access and enjoy popular picture books available in Irish and English. Give parents the loan of CDs with songs and rhymes in Irish so they can learn them too. Encourage children to play games with their parents by asking them other words for food, numbers, colours. In this way, the children are leading the learning and encouraging their parents to get involved.

These suggestions provide opportunities for good communication between parents and practitioners. They can help to give parents confidence to practise Irish at home and to learn with their children.

Useful websites

If you are interested in promoting Irish further or if you want to provide parents with additional information and resources, the following websites might be useful:

www.gaeilge.ie

www.snag.ie

www.glornangael.ie